

Afghanistan in Perspective

An Orientation Guide



Defense Language Institute
Foreign Language Center
Curriculum Development Division
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A Brief Profile of Afghanistan

Introduction



© Luke Powell
Afghan girl

Afghanistan—the land of the Afghan—is a land-locked country in Southern Asia, east of Iran and northwest of Pakistan. To the north, it borders Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China. With an area close to the size of Texas, and with a population of nearly 30 million, Afghanistan represents a nation of many ethnic groups and languages. The inhabitants, as heterogeneous as they may seem, are still closely connected by the predominant religion, Islam, representing about 99 percent of the population. Sikhs, Hindus, and Jews make up the remaining one percent. The official languages are Dari (Afghan Persian) and Pashto.

Afghanistan’s past reaches back thousands of years. Its rich history demonstrates the resilience of a nation that has been occupied by the Persians, Greeks, Huns, Tatars, Turks, and Arabs, to mention a few. The wars of the last 25 years, however, have left a wake of destruction that has left little evidence of the country’s past fame and history. While Afghanistan is now on the road to recovery, the millions of land mines left behind make this country a nightmarishly dangerous place for the local inhabitants, international troops, and aid workers trying to help Afghanistan get back on its feet.

Today Afghanistan is a country of controversy. Rich in natural resources, it is also the world’s largest supplier of opium and heroin. The following chapters will examine Afghanistan and attempt to put it in “perspective.”

Facts and Figures¹

Location

South Central Asia, between Pakistan and Iran, bordering Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China.

Area

Total: 647,500 sq km

Water: 0 sq km

Land: 647,500 sq km



© Luke Powell
Rugged landscape in Paktia Province

¹ Information in this section is compiled from the CIA World Factbook, (<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/af.html>), U.S. Department of State Country Guide on Afghanistan (<http://www.state.gov/countries>), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (<http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/oa/climate/afghan>).

Border

5,529 km (China 76 km, Iran 936 km, Pakistan 2,430 km, Tajikistan 1,206 km, Turkmenistan 744 km, Uzbekistan 137 km)

Climate

Extremes of climate and weather. Desert or desert steppe climate; arid to semiarid. Winters are cold and snowy (in the mountains), summers are hot and dry.

Terrain

Mostly rugged mountains; plains in the north and southwest.

Elevation extremes

Lowest point: Amu Darya 258 m

Highest point: Mt. Nowshak 7,485 m

Natural resources

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

Natural hazards

Strong earthquakes occur in the Hindu Kush mountains; floods; drought.

Environment - Current issues

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

Environment - International agreements

Party to: Biodiversity, Desertification, Endangered Species, Environmental Modification, Marine Dumping

Signed, but not ratified: Climate Change, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Life Conservation

Population

Population: 29,928,987 (July 2005 est.)

Population growth rate: 4.77% (2005 est.)

Gender ratio: same, but now 2005 est.

Infant mortality rate: 163.07 deaths/1,000 live births (2005 est.)

Life expectancy: 42.9 years (2005 est.)

Demographic distribution

0 – 14 years: 44.7% (male 6,525,929; female 6,222,487)

15 – 64 years: 52.9% (male 7,733,707; female 7,346,226)

65 years and over: 2.4% (male 334,427; female 350,891) (2004 est.)

Population growth rate

4.92% (2004 est.)

Note: This rate does not take into consideration the recent war and its continuing impact

Gender ratio

1.05 male(s)/female (2004 est.)

Infant mortality rate

165.96 deaths/1,000 live births (2004 est.)

Life expectancy

42.46 years (2004 est.)

Ethnic groups

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

Religions

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

Languages

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

Literacy

Female: 21%

Male: 51%

Total population: 36% (1999 est.)

Country Name

Conventional long form: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Local long form: Dowlat-e Eslami-ye Afghanistan

Government type: Islamic republic

Capital: Kabul

Administrative Divisions

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

Independence Day (national holiday)

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



© Luke Powell

Elderly Pashtun man



© Luke Powell

View of the rooftops in Kabul

Constitution

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

Legal system

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

Suffrage

18 years of age; universal

Executive branch

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



DoD image
President Hamid Karzai

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

Elections: The president and two vice presidents are elected by direct vote for a five-year term. If no candidate receives 50% or more of the vote in the first round of voting, the two candidates with the most votes will participate in a second round. A president can only be elected for two terms. The last election was held 9 October 2004 (next to be held in 2009).

Legislative branch

The legislative branch is non-functioning as of January 2004. Elections are scheduled for September 2005.

Judicial branch

The new constitution establishes a nine-member *Stera Mahkama* or Supreme Court (its nine justices are appointed for 10-year terms by the president with approval of the *Wolesi Jirga* and subordinate High Courts and Appeals Courts. There is also a Minister of Justice. A separate Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission established by the Bonn Agreement is charged with investigating human rights abuses and war crimes.

Political pressure groups and leaders

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

International organization participation

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

Diplomatic representation in the U.S.

Chancery: 2118 Kalorama Road NW, Washington, D.C. 20008

Tel: [1] 202-483-6410

Fax: [1] 202-483-6488

Consulate General: New York

Diplomatic representation from the U.S.

Embassy: The Great Masood Road, Kabul

Mailing address: 6180 Kabul Place, Dulles, VA 20189-6180

Tel: [00] (2) 230-0436

Fax: [0093] (2) 230-1364

Agricultural products

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

Industries

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



DoD image

Young shepherd near Kabul

Exports

\$446 million (not including illicit exports or re-exports) (FY03-04)

Imports

\$3.759 billion (FY03-04)

Import partners

Pakistan 25.2%, US 8.7%, South Korea 7.7%, India 7.6%, Germany 6.5%, Turkmenistan 4.5%, Turkey 4.1% (2004)

Currency

Afghani (AFA)

Debt

\$8 billion in bilateral debt, mostly to Russia; Afghanistan has \$500 million in debt to Multilateral Development Banks (2004)

Airports (paved): 10 (3 are over 3,047 m) (2004 est.)

Geography

Afghanistan's Neighborhood

Afghanistan's landscape, marked by rugged terrain and a harsh climate, has certainly played a role in shaping the Afghan people. Completely landlocked, the nearest coast lies along the Arabian Sea, about 300 miles (482 km) to the south, beyond Pakistan. Shaped like an irregular leaf with the Wakhan Corridor being the stem,² Afghanistan is about 250,000 square miles (647,500 sq km), or about the size of Texas. Extending approximately 770 miles (1,240 km) from west to east, and 630 miles (1,000 km) from north to south, the country contains desert plains, rocky ranges, and snow-covered peaks that are a continuation of the western Himalayas.



© Luke Powell

Landscape in Barniyan Province

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

Geographic Regions

Afghanistan can be divided into three distinct geographic regions: the Central Highlands, the Southern Plateau, and the Northern Plains.⁴ The Central Highlands, part of the Himalayan mountain system, include the Hindu Kush mountain range. It is the most mountainous area in Afghanistan, with deep narrow valleys, deserts, and some meadows. Of great strategic



DoD Image

View from the Central Highlands

² Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, Country Studies/Area Handbook Program, [Afghanistan Country Study](http://www.country-studies.com/afghanistan/geography.html), <http://www.country-studies.com/afghanistan/geography.html>

³ Illinois Institute of Technology, Paul V Galvin Library's Government Documents Depository Website, [Afghanistan Country Study](http://www.gl.iit.edu/govdocs/afghanistan/TheNaturalEnvironment.html): <http://www.gl.iit.edu/govdocs/afghanistan/TheNaturalEnvironment.html>

⁴ AfghanSite Network: <http://www.afghansite.com/>

importance in this area are the high mountain passes. They include the Shebar Pass, which is northwest of the capital, Kabul, and the Khyber Pass, which leads to the Indian subcontinent.⁵

The Southern Plateau contains a variety of deserts: salt flats and steppe, stony deserts, and the sandy Rigistan Desert bordering Pakistan. The southwestern low-lying plateau is known as the Sistan Depression or Basin. In general, the soil in the Southern Plateau region is infertile, except for the river deltas of the Sistan Basin. The Northern Plains are mostly flat, but there are some fertile foothills, where most of the country's food is grown. Vast amounts of mineral deposits and natural gas deposits⁶ are also found here.

Rivers

There are five major rivers in Afghanistan: the Amu Darya, Kabul, Helmand, Hari Rud, and Farah. Most of them end in inland seas, swamps, or salt flats, with the exception of the Kabul River, which flows into the Indus River in Pakistan. Afghanistan's lakes are small in size and number.⁷

Climate

Afghanistan experiences extremes of climate and weather. Typical of a semi-arid steppe climate, winters are bitterly cold, with heavy snow in the mountains, and summers are hot and dry. In July, temperatures can reach 124°F (51°C) in exposed areas of the southwest. January temperatures may drop to as low as -51°F (-46°C) in the highest mountain areas.⁸ Nevertheless, there are some regional variations.⁹ The northeast mountain regions claim a sub-arctic climate with dry, cold winters. In contrast, the mountainous regions on the Pakistani border may bring maritime tropical air masses along with humidity and rain into the central and southern regions.



© Luke Powell
Nomad tents in the desert near Herat

Environmental Concerns

The country's already fragile environment is now threatened by widespread deforestation. Trees, found primarily in the east and on the southern slopes of the Hindu Kush, are felled for fuel and building material.¹⁰ Estimates in 2002 indicate that less than 2 percent (3.3 million acres) of the land is now forested,¹¹ contributing to erosion and flash floods.¹²

⁵ Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, [Afghanistan](http://www.britannica.com): <http://www.britannica.com>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ MSN Encarta Encyclopedia: [Afghanistan](http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761569370/Afghanistan.html#p3), Rivers and Lakes: http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761569370/Afghanistan.html#p3

⁸ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Climate Monitoring, [Climate of Afghanistan](http://lwf.ncdc.noaa.gov/oa/climate/research/afghan/overview.html): <http://lwf.ncdc.noaa.gov/oa/climate/research/afghan/overview.html>

⁹ Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, [Afghanistan](http://www.britannica.com): www.britannica.com

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, Country Profile: [Afghanistan](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf), February 2005: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Afghanistan.pdf>

¹² Michigan State University's Asian Studies Center: Windows on Asia, [Geography of Afghanistan](http://www.asia.msu.edu/centralasia/Afghanistan/geography.html): <http://www.asia.msu.edu/centralasia/Afghanistan/geography.html>

In Afghanistan's arid landscape, gaining access to fresh water has always been a challenge. Centuries ago, Afghans developed an ingenious system of underground tunnels to transport water from the mountains to the dryer basins. These aqueducts, called *karez*s, supplied the population with fresh water.¹³ The wars of this century destroyed many of these aqueducts. Today, less than 24 percent of the population has access to fresh drinking water. As a result, the mortality rate due to water-borne disease is one of the highest in the world.¹⁴

Natural Hazards

Forceful winds blow almost daily in the southwest during the summer. Known as the "wind of 120 days," it is usually accompanied by intense heat, drought, and sandstorms.¹⁵ These winds bring much hardship to the people of the desert and steppe lands. In 2003, dust and sand buried villages, filled waterways, destroyed crops and killed livestock.¹⁶ Whirlwinds of dust also frequently occur during the summer months on the flats in the southern part of the country. Rising at midday or in the early afternoon, they advance at velocities of up to 110 miles per hour (177 km/h).¹⁷

In addition to environmental hazards such as flood and drought, earthquakes are common, averaging about 50 a year. Particularly damaging earthquakes occur in the Hindu Kush Mountains, which lie near a major fault line. In this region, about four earthquakes, measuring on average 5.0 or more on the Richter scale, occur each year.¹⁸ One of the largest in recent years, in 2002, measured 7.3 on the Richter scale.¹⁹

¹³ UC Berkeley, [Traditional Aqueducts, Afghanistan:](http://geoimages.berkeley.edu/GeoImages/Powell/Afghan/092.html)

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

¹⁴ World Health Organization Country Profiles, Afghanistan, Press Release 14 March 2001: "[Unsafe water is a breeding ground of disease and poverty](#)"

<http://www.emro.who.int/emrinfo/countrynews/Afg/WWDPressRelease.htm>

¹⁵ Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, Country Studies/Area Handbook, [Afghanistan:](#)

<http://www.country-studies.com/afghanistan/climate.html>

¹⁶ NASA Earth Observatory, Natural Hazards, Dust & Smoke, [Dust Storm over Afghanistan and Pakistan:](#)

http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/NaturalHazards/natural_hazards_v2.php3?img_id=11719

¹⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, Country Studies/Area Handbook Program, [Afghanistan:](#)

<http://www.country-studies.com/afghanistan/climate.html>

¹⁸ BBC News: "[Hindu Kush: High-risk quake zone](#)" by Simon Fraser, March 26, 2002:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/1894867.stm>

¹⁹ US Geological Survey Earthquake Hazards Program: [Phase Data: Hindu Kush Region, Afghanistan:](#)

http://neic.usgs.gov/neis/eq_depot/2002/eq_020303/P0203031208.html

History

Introduction

Afghanistan is often called the crossroads of Central Asia. Its strategically important geographic position has made it an ideal trade and invasion route for centuries. As a result, its history has always been a turbulent one. Conquerors from the West passed through this region to reach the Indian subcontinent, and Hindu empires extended their territories from the



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Camel driver in Tashkurgan

East through the same routes. The armies of King Darius, Alexander the Great, Kushan King Kanishka, Genghis Khan, the Shahi rulers of India, Muslim rulers, and the British all marched through the area to reach their goals of colonizing these lands and those beyond.

One of the first references to the name Afghanistan, or “*Abgan*” comes from the 3rd century C.E. and was found in documents dating from the period of the Sassanid Empire in Persia. Muslim references to the name “*Afghan*” date back to 982 C.E.²⁰

Early History

Early humans are believed to have lived in Afghanistan over 100,000 years ago, but some archeological evidence indicates more recent dates. Scientists discovered skull bones and some primitive tools in Darra-i-Kur in Badakhshan in the Pamirs, which point to 30,000 B.C.E. Caves near Aq Kupruk, close to the Balkh River, provide evidence that an early Neolithic culture existed there which was based on domesticated animals and dates back to 8,000 B.C.E.²¹

The Vedic Aryans

The earliest written reference to the region can be found in the Rig Veda from around 2,000 B.C.E. These sacred Sanskrit verses tell us about the Vedic Aryans, who crossed the Kubha (Kabul) river coming from the southeast and settled in the area of present-day Afghanistan. The Aryans raised sheep and goats and settled in the Northern Plains, but local nomads forced them to pay to live there and have their animals graze on their fields.²²

²⁰ Afghanistan Online, History, <http://www.afghan-web.com/history>

²¹ Encyclopedia Britannica, Afghanistan, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?tocId=21380>

²² Afghanistan Online, Chronological History of Afghanistan, <http://www.afghan-web.com/history/chron/index.html>

Eventually, around the 6th century B.C.E., the Aryans formed a stronger unity and prevailed over the nomads. Agriculture became their means of power and existence. The Aryans established the Achaemenid Empire, which extended from the Indus River in the east to Greece in the west. Zoroaster, a prophet living in Bactria (Balkh) at that time, may have influenced the rise of the Achaemenids. His religion, Zoroastrianism, was one of the first monotheistic religions in the world. Its three main tenets are Good Words, Good Thoughts, and Good Deeds.²³ It still has followers in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the world today.

The Persian Invaders

Darius I of the Achaemenid Dynasty (522 B.C.E. to 486 B.C.E.), was well known for his administrative genius. His famous palaces in Susa and Persepolis are great examples of his creativity. He expanded trade towards the East, along what is now referred to as the Imperial Highway, and conquered the area of today's Afghanistan. His heirs extended the borders of the Achaemenid Empire even further, but soon they were faced with a new enemy from Macedonia.²⁴



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org

Bust of Alexander the Great

Alexander the Great

At the age of 22, Alexander, King of Macedonia, peacefully acquired Egypt and built his plans for further invasions towards the East. The Persian soldiers were no match for his superbly trained and organized army, which conquered Afghanistan and marched undefeated towards the Indus River. Alexander reached India and defeated the Hindu armies as well. He returned to Babylon and made it the capital of his huge empire. Alexander encouraged his soldiers to marry women from the conquered territories in order to solidify his hold on the newly acquired lands. Leading by example, Alexander married a Persian princess. His rule, over one of the largest empires in history, was cut short by his early death at the age of 33. Alexander the Great died in Babylon in 323 B.C.E.,

probably of malaria, although some historians suspect that he may have died of poisoning.²⁵

Waves of Invaders

After Alexander's death, the Maurya Dynasty of India not only defeated the Macedonian ruler in northwest India, who had been appointed by Alexander, but also seized new territories in southern Afghanistan. At the same time, Bactria in the North managed to become independent. Bactrians represented Greek culture, although they had their own language. The Tajiks of present-day Afghanistan are considered their descendants. The Bactrian Empire lasted until 150 B.C.E., when a new force from China took over and established the foundations for the upcoming Kushan Kingdom. Kushan tribes from the

²³ Wikipedia, Zoroastrianism, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoroastrianism>

²⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica, Darius I., <http://www.britannica.com/ebi/article?tocId=9273917>

²⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica, Alexander the Great, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?tocId=59256>

north brought Buddhism to the region. The Kushan Dynasty thrived for over 300 years, making Peshawar its capital and ruling over vast lands from the Aral Sea to northern India, including most of Afghanistan. In the 3rd century C.E., the Sassanids of Persia overpowered the Kushan Empire.

In the centuries that followed, the Ephthalites, or White Huns, conquered Afghanistan. Tribal independence and paganism characterized their rule, which lasted until the beginning of the 6th century. They destroyed Buddhist monasteries and killed many monks, although some White Hun tribes did embrace Buddhism. Their empire ended when the revitalized Sassanids defeated them

with the help of the Western Turks.²⁶ In the following centuries, Hinduism and Buddhism regained popularity until Islamic conquerors from the West arrived with a new religion. The Muslim era of Afghanistan was about to begin.



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Ruins of a Buddhist shrine near Haddad



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The Muslim conquest was a prolonged struggle

The Muslim Conquest

In the year 637, a mere five years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, Arab Muslims crushed the Persian Sassanids in the Battles of Qadisiya and Nahawand. Thus began the Islamic expansion into the lands east of Persia. The Muslim conquest was a prolonged struggle in the area of today's Afghanistan. Herat was captured in the year 651. The first raid into Kandahar took place almost 50 years later, in 700. In the following years, the

Umayyad caliphs gained more and more power in the region and even managed to get local Afghan rulers to serve them.²⁷ By the middle of the 8th century, the Abbasids defeated the Umayyads, took full control of the Arab-Islamic Empire and moved the seat of the Caliphate from Damascus to Baghdad. From there a more structured expansion began towards the whole area of Afghanistan.

Over the period until the 9th century, most inhabitants in what is now Afghanistan, Pakistan, the southern areas in and around Russia, and parts of northern India converted to Sunni Islam, which replaced Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and the indigenous religions of previous empires.

More Muslim rulers settled in the newly acquired territories and established their power there. By the 10th century, Mahmud, the son of a slave, managed to create his own sultanate in the city of Ghazni and soon became known as a military genius. Mahmud of Ghazni conquered the entire Hindu Kush and reached the Punjab area of India, extending his power to territories even north of the Amu Darya River.²⁸ With the

²⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica, Sasanian dynasty
<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?tocId=9065824&query=Sassanids&ct=eb>

²⁷ Encyclopedia Britannica, Umayyad Dynasty
<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?tocId=9074193&query=umayyad&ct=eb>

²⁸ Afghanistan Online, Mahmud of Ghazni, <http://www.afghan-network.net/Rulers/mahmud-ghazni.html>

priceless items he plundered from India, Mahmud transformed Ghazni into a cultural center rivaling Baghdad.

The Mongol Invasion

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



© Luke Powell
Hazara people believe they are descendants of Genghis Khan's soldiers

From the death of Genghis Khan in 1227 until the rise of Timur (Tamerlane), descendants of the Mongol rulers were unable to hold on to all of their territories.⁴ Nevertheless, Tamerlane, from his capital in Samarqand, managed to restore control over an area that extended from India to Turkey by the late 14th century. By the turn of the 16th century, Tamerlane descendants, the Timurids, were forced to move east establishing Herat as their western outpost

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

The Safavids

The Safavids of Persia had their origins in a Sufi²⁹ order which had flourished in the region of present-day Azerbaijan since the 14th century. They first conquered Herat in 1510, then Kandahar in 1545, but the Uzbeks, the Moghuls, and the Ghilzai Afghans³⁰ also fought for control of those cities. The Safavid hegemony lasted for over 200 years, but their power in the area was never stabilized. In 1716, Herat rebelled against the Safavids and, with the help of the Ghilzai Afghans, forced their retreat. The Afghan fighters pursued the Safavid troops all the way to Isfahan, where the last of them were defeated, thus ending the Safavid Dynasty.

The Beginnings of Afghan Independence

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

In 1732, Nadir Beg, who later became Nadir Shah of Persia, took Herat, Ghazni, and Kabul. By 1739, his empire extended into India, occupying Delhi. Nadir's troops pillaged Hindu palaces, and his war trophies included the Koh-i-Noor (Mountain of

²⁹Sufism is a type of Islamic esoteric mysticism, the central concept of which is "love."

³⁰The Ghilzai are one of the two largest Pashtun tribes.

Light) diamond and the Peacock Throne. Nadir Shah was assassinated in 1747, and his death triggered the collapse of his empire.

The next ruler from the area emerged shortly thereafter in the person of Ahmad Khan, the commander of Nadir Shah's bodyguards. He named himself Ahmad Shah Durrani and succeeded in controlling vast areas from the Arabian Sea to Delhi. The Durrani Dynasty lasted into the 19th century, by which time the British also showed interest in expanding their territories beyond what they had acquired through the East India Company.



Contemporary British sketch

Contemporary British sketch of fighting in the First Afghan War

The Anglo-Afghan Wars

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

Shah Shoja, who ruled Afghanistan from 1803 until 1809, lost the throne to internal struggles that weakened the Afghan state. The goal of the British during the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839–1842) was to establish a pro-British government in Afghanistan through Shah Shoja in order to keep the Russians from expanding toward India. The British were successful in putting Shah Shoja back on the throne, but were soon forced to withdraw as they were under constant attack. Afghan fighters, with better knowledge of the terrain and hardened to the harsh weather conditions, annihilated the retreating British troops. Shah Shoja was subsequently assassinated.

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



Contemporary etching of Yakub Khan

To withstand the encroaching Russian influence in Afghanistan, the British started the Second Anglo-Afghan War in 1879. In an agreement to end the war and prevent further advancement of British troops, King Ya'qub Khan handed over control of Afghan foreign policy to the British. The British presence was not welcome in Afghanistan and the occupation soon ended. Ya'qub Khan abdicated the throne in 1880, and Abdur Rahman Khan took power. He established a centralized government by persuading the different tribes and ethnic groups to unite as one and accept him as ruler. For that, Abdur Rahman Khan is considered to be the founder of modern Afghanistan. In 1893, a buffer zone between British India and Tsarist Russia was created by establishing the Durand Line.³¹

³¹ Nationmaster Encyclopedia, The Durand Line, <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Durand-Line>

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

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

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



Amanullah during a visit to London, 1928

Turbulent Years Post-WWI

In the following 10 years, King Amanullah introduced modern ideas, but eventually he had to give in to the mainstream fundamentalists who had challenged him all along. He was forced to abdicate the throne in 1929. Power struggles followed, but in the end, Amanullah's cousin, Nadir Shah, took the throne. He introduced changes in the political makeup and, in 1931, implemented a new constitution. While it could not be praised as a true constitutional monarchy, Nadir Shah's government did manage to reunite Afghanistan. Opponents of his new policies assassinated him in 1933. Eventually his son, the 19-year-old Zahir, took over power in Afghanistan. Zahir Shah began a 40-year reign, one of the longest in Afghanistan's modern history.

Zahir Shah

During Zahir Shah's rule, Afghanistan went through a slow process of change toward increasing freedom. Shortly after WWII, during which it stayed neutral, Afghanistan established free elections. The Pashtun Question became the center of international focus as policymakers in Kabul dealt with the relatively large Pashtun population in the British-controlled area of Pakistan, a result of the division created by the Durand Line.

The political climate went through more changes in the coming years. From 1946 to 1952, the "liberal parliament" under Prime Minister Shah Mahmud sanctioned greater political tolerance and liberalization. Free elections were introduced, and newspapers were able to write more freely about politics. The reforms put Zahir Shah at odds with religious leaders and conservatives. In 1953, these forces backed Lieutenant General Daoud Khan's successful efforts to become Prime Minister.

In a surprising move, Daoud approached the Soviet Union for support after becoming prime minister. The Soviets, looking to extend their influence toward the southeast, became a major trading partner in the following years. Social and educational changes were introduced, but the political climate stayed rigid and allowed no opposition.

Mohammed Daoud – The Afghan Republic

Further problems developed along the Pakistani border in subsequent years, leading to Daoud's resignation in 1963. While the position of prime minister changed hands repeatedly over the next 10 years, the establishment of a new constitution in 1964 is worth noting. It championed individual rights, secular law, and brought elections.³² However, between 1969 and 1973, instability seeped back into Afghan politics and the economic situation worsened.

Mohammed Daoud seized the opportunity in 1973, and regained control of power in a bloodless coup. He established the Afghanistan Republic and named himself prime minister. Daoud sought support from the Soviets, consulting Moscow until it became evident that Soviet help came with concessions. In 1977, a visit to Moscow ended abruptly after he told Brezhnev: "...we will never allow you to dictate to us how to run our country and whom to employ in Afghanistan. ... Afghanistan shall remain poor, if necessary, but free in its acts and decisions."³³ Daoud's life and Afghanistan's freedom, as such, did not last long. Afghan communist factions, which had begun to emerge 10 years earlier, were opposed to Daoud and his policies. In 1978, Daoud was assassinated in a communist coup, and the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) took control of the country. The Afghan communist era had begun.

The Communist Era in Afghanistan

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



DoD image
Soviet tanks in Kabul, 1979

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

³² Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, Afghanistan: A Country Study: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/afghanistan/afghanistan.html>

³³ The Fall of Afghanistan by Samad Ghaus, 1988, pp. 178–180

The Soviets grossly underestimated the cost of invasion and occupation, both economically and politically at home. There was also strong international opposition to Soviet occupation. Those factors, coupled with the Pakistani support of both U.S. interests and the Afghan rebel fighters, the Mujahideen, ultimately brought the Soviets to the bargaining table. In 1989, Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan.



DoD image
Mujahideen fighters
planting a landmine

The Taliban Movement

The Islamic movement grew in strength and number during the Soviet occupation. The U.S. and other western governments, hoping to weaken Soviet influence from the east, supported the movement's Mujahideen³⁴ rebel fighters. From Pakistan, the Mujahideen recruited large numbers of fighters from the refugee camps and acquired better weapons.

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

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

Al-Qaeda and the Taliban

Out of the Afghan resistance movement of the 1980s evolved an Islamic terrorist organization that would eventually come to be known as "al Qaeda" (Arabic: "the base"). Its founder, Osama bin Laden, had come to Afghanistan to join the Mujahideen's fight against the Soviets. Backed by his family's fortune, bin Laden soon became a principal fundraiser³⁵ for the Maktab al Khidmat (MAK), or "Afghan bureau"³⁶ resistance organization. MAK channeled funds and equipment from a variety of sources into training Mujahideen across the Middle East and transporting them to Afghanistan.

Toward the end of Soviet occupation, bin Laden formed an independent group – al Qaeda – with the intent of expanding resistance operations from an anti-Soviet *jihad*³⁷ to a

³⁴ The word mujahideen is Arabic for "those who engage in jihad," these are Muslim guerilla fighters.

³⁵ CBC News Indepth, "Who is Osama bin Laden?": <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/osamabinladen/>
Also, Australian Broadcasting Corp. "Tentacles of Terror: Al Qaeda's Southeast Asian Network"

³⁶ Al-Qaeda, Jane's Intelligence Review, August 1, 2001. See US Naval Academy summary: <http://www.usna.com/classes/1942/ClassHPTText11.html>.

³⁷ Jihad is a term used in Islam to refer to "struggle," be it the inner struggle of attaining a perfect faith or the outer struggle of a "holy war."

global Muslim crusade. In 1989, MAK's support of pro-Western Northern Alliance leader Massoud prompted bin Laden to break off from the organization³⁸ completely.

In 1996, bin Laden established ties with the Taliban, which shared his anti-western view. To strengthen his influence in Afghanistan, bin Laden provided the Taliban with \$100 million and some of al Qaeda's most committed assault forces.³⁹ In return, the Taliban provided shelter for al Qaeda and refused later U.S. requests for bin Laden's extradition.

Al Qaeda strengthened its ties to other radical Islamic organizations, including the Egyptian Islamic Jihad. In 1998, they issued a joint *fatwa* (an edict issued by an Islamic jurist, *Mufti*) against the United States. In essence it said that every Muslim had the duty to kill Americans and their allies.⁴⁰ Al Qaeda opposed "infidel" regimes and even Muslim regimes, including Saudi Arabia, which is perceived as oppressing Muslims or compromising Islamic ideals.⁴¹



Courtesy of Wikipedia.org

Ahmed Shah Massoud

Ahmed Shah Massoud, the Lion of Panjshir

One of the most outstanding political figures in modern Afghan history, Ahmed Shah Massoud, led the Northern Alliance in its fight against the Taliban. Massoud, a Mujahideen commander who fought successfully against the Soviets, was appointed Defense Minister from 1992 until the collapse of the government. He summarized the focus of the Northern Alliance struggle in the following statement: "We consider this our duty – to defend humanity against the scourge of intolerance, violence, and fanaticism."⁴²

On September 9, 2001, two al-Qaeda members posing as Algerian journalists managed to get permission to meet Massoud face-to-face for an interview. Their camera hid the bomb that ended Massoud's life.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ "Bin Laden Said to 'Own' The Taliban," Washington Post, October 11, 2001: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&contentId=A40211-2001Oct10¬Found=true>

⁴⁰ Wikipedia, Al-Qaeda <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda>

⁴¹ Congressional testimony of J.T. Caruso, Acting Assistant Director, Counterterrorism Division, FBI, before the Subcommittee on International Operations and Terrorism, Committee on Foreign Relations, US Senate, December 18, 2001: <http://www.fbi.gov/congress/congress01/caruso121801.htm>

⁴² CBC News Indepth, "Who is Osama bin Laden?": <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/osamabinladen/>

September 11, 2001

By 2001, al Qaeda had 5,000 trained militants and cells in 50 countries.⁴³ The organization functioned much like a corporation or a combination of strategic partnerships.⁴⁴ Al Qaeda was suspected of carrying out the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon (2001), the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania (1998), and the attack on the USS Cole. It is believed that the target selection, preparation, and planning was confined to bin Laden (the “contractor”) and a handful of al Qaeda leaders.⁴⁵

After the September 11th, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center, the U.S. government focused their attention on Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaeda. In October 2001, the Allied Forces invaded Afghanistan as part of their “War on Terror” campaign. The aim was to target Osama bin Laden and the al Qaeda network, as well as the Taliban government. In November of that year, with the help of allied troops, the Northern Alliance marched into Kabul and ended the Taliban’s rule there. By December, the coordinated attack of the western allies caused the rapid collapse of the Taliban regime. Bin Laden and the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, escaped.



A soldier distributes supplies to villagers during Operation Enduring Freedom

Democratic Elections and the Future

Since then, the presence of Allied Forces has supported the continued evolution of a self-governing Afghan society. In late 2004, Hamid Karzai was elected President in Afghanistan’s first democratic elections. Within a few months, he had appointed his cabinet, and the 502-member Loya Jirga (Grand Council) had passed the 160-article Afghan Constitution. These milestones have set a solid foundation for success, as the Afghan people face the many challenges ahead, working to rebuild a nation that has suffered under almost 25 years of continuous war.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ CNN “Al Qaeda has complex terrorist networks”:
<http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/10/02/inv.binladen.friends/>

⁴⁵ Jane’s Intelligence Review, August 1, 2001. See US Naval Academy summary:
<http://www.usna.com/classes/1942/ClassHPTxt11.html>. See also the informative Asia Times book review, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, by Rohan Guntera, Columbia University Press:
http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/DJ12Ak03.html

Economy

Introduction

Emerging from more than two decades of war, Afghanistan faces a complex set of challenges to rebuilding its economy. Basic facilities, services, and installations have all suffered, leaving the country among the ranks of the world's poorest countries. Since the overthrow of the Taliban regime, foreign aid agencies have renewed their work to help Afghanistan build a stable economy. During the past two years, over \$2 billion in international aid has been invested in Afghanistan, and with the end of a four-year-drought, the revitalized agriculture has also had a chance to rebound.

Until the Soviet invasion, farming had sustained the Afghan population, and agriculture was the foundation of its economy. Afghanistan was a major producer of grain, barley, almonds, grapes, and melons. It was the world's largest exporter of raisins,⁴⁶ which together with other dried fruit made up 30 percent of exports. War laid waste to farmland, and the once widespread



Farmers winnow their crop of wheat

irrigation systems collapsed, thus providing little relief from the droughts that battered the country from 1999 to 2003. Since then, rains have revived the farming industry. Once again, more than half of the country's economy (aside from opium) is based on the production of wheat, raisins, citrus fruits, mulberries, and pomegranates.

Light industry makes up 20 percent of GDP. This includes leather processing, precious and semiprecious stones and marble. Some small-scale manufacturers produce cotton and other fabrics, fertilizer, cement, and processed agricultural goods. Herding also plays an important role in the economy. Karakul sheep are a staple of Afghan life, supplying fur and wool for clothing as well as meat and fat for food.⁴⁷

These days, transportation and power are Afghanistan's main growth sectors. With the support of the international community, the Afghan government under President Hamid Karzai is working to facilitate investment in these areas while struggling to eliminate the illicit drug trade that threatens to undermine all efforts at rebuilding the country.

Opium and Afghan Farmers

The largest obstacle to Afghanistan's development is the country's dependence on opium. In 2004, narcotics accounted for nearly 60 percent of the Afghan GDP of \$4.7 billion, according to United Nations estimates.⁴⁸ Cultivation of the opium poppy—a traditional crop in parts of Afghanistan since the 18th century—has rapidly increased since the fall of

⁴⁶ Asian Development Bank, "Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors on a Proposed Loan and Technical Assistance Grant to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the Agriculture Sector Program", April 2004, http://www.adb.org/Documents/RRPs/AFG/rrp_afg_37046.pdf

⁴⁷ Encyclopedia Britannica Online, <http://www.britannica.com>

⁴⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2004, http://www.unodc.org/pdf/afg/afghanistan_opium_survey_2004.pdf



© Aramco Public Affairs Digital Image Archive
Farmers working in opium poppy fields

the Taliban in 2001.⁴⁹ Record-high levels of opium gum reached 5,000 metric tons in 2004, making Afghanistan the largest narcotics producer in the world today.⁵⁰ Outpacing foreign aid, drug profits have become the main source of funds for reconstruction and have fueled corruption at the highest levels of the government. “The fight against drugs is the fight for Afghanistan,” says Karzai.

Afghanistan is the source of nearly 90 percent of the world’s supply of opium and its derivative, heroin. While some of the heroin travels to Russia (nearly all heroin in Russia originates in Afghanistan), most of it travels through Iran, Turkey, and the Balkans⁵¹ to land in Western Europe, accounting for three-quarters of the heroin sold there.⁵² “Afghan heroin presents a sobering domestic issue for our European allies,” says Robert Charles, Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs.⁵³

Without a viable alternative agricultural product, it will be very difficult to persuade farmers to stop cultivating opium poppies.⁵⁴ It is a lucrative business. According to the UN, a hectare (approx. 2.5 acres) of poppies yielded \$4,600 in 2004 (67 percent less than in 2003 because of excess supply). A hectare of wheat, in comparison, yielded about \$390. Most of the illegal profits flow into the pockets of powerful warlords and traffickers. Still, the average annual income for opium farmers is three times the national average.

Britain has been the designated G-8 lead in efforts to wipe out opium production in Afghanistan since 2002, though counter-narcotics efforts only began in earnest in 2004. Working with the Afghan government, the approach has been to crack down on traffickers, destroying drug labs and opium crops while encouraging farmers to abandon poppies. The local population does not necessarily welcome efforts to make them switch to alternative crops. In April 2005, a



DoD image
Boys sit in a field of opium poppies in northern Afghanistan

⁴⁹ U.S. Department of State, Narcotics Control Report, Afghanistan, March 2001, <http://www.state.gov/g/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2000/940.htm>

⁵⁰ United Nations Information Service, “Record Opium Cultivation in Afghanistan is a Threat to Central Asia and CIS Countries”, 25 November 2004, <http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/pressrels/2004/unisnar869.html>

⁵¹ Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD) Reports, Smuggling of Illicit Drugs: <http://www.csd.bg/publications/book10/2.3.pdf>

⁵² United Nations Information Service, “Summary on International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) Press Briefing: Drug Control in Afghanistan,” 12 February 2005: <http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/en/pressconf/2004/pb20040212.html>

⁵³ U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs Release: “Afghanistan: Are the British Counternarcotics Efforts Going Wobbly?”, April 2004, <http://www.state.gov/g/inl/rls/rm/31039.htm>

⁵⁴ International Relations and Security Network, “Opium production compounds Karzai’s woes”, 31 March 2005, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/news/sw/details.cfm?ID=11023>

British worker, Steven MacQueen, was murdered in Kabul. He was in charge of allocating money to farmers who switched to producing alternative crops.⁵⁵

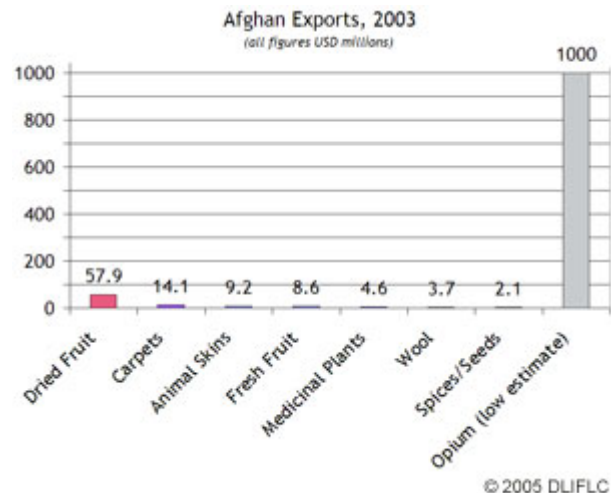
“In 2005, we are going to have probably all over the country at least 30 percent poppies reduced,” said Hamid Karzai. “So the Afghan people have done their job. Now the international community must come and provide alternative livelihood to the Afghan people, which they have not done so far.” That remains to be seen. While a 2005 British survey of farmers indicated a 40 percent reduction in poppy farming compared to the previous year, the study also pointed out that the farmers expected the government to reward them with aid for giving up the crop. Given that there’s not enough money to go around, the study concluded that cultivation will likely resurge in 2006.

Economic Indicators

International Monetary Fund figures⁵⁶ indicate that the gross domestic product (GDP) was relatively strong in 2004 (\$4.6 billion), up 16 percent from 2003. But bad weather has had a negative impact on agriculture and the growth projection for 2005 is expected to be 8 percent. However, inflation is holding steady at about 10 percent. Since the new Afghani was introduced in 2003, it has remained remarkably stable, averaging about 49 Afghanis per USD.⁵⁷ But, these figures don’t mean much to the average Afghani. The general collapse of industry has led to 50 percent unemployment in Kabul and in other major cities. The jobless rate is even higher in rural areas. For those who find a job in Kabul, the average monthly salary is about \$10 per month, with wages much lower outside the capital.

Trade

Informal trade conducted by people traveling back and forth to Iran and Pakistan is still a large part of the Afghan economy. Exports—dried fruits and nuts, hand-woven carpets, lambskins, textiles, fresh fruit, and gemstones—have dwindled to a bare minimum, except for the illegal trade in opium and hashish. Petroleum products, manufactured goods, construction materials, and foodstuffs are the main imports.



Pakistan is Afghanistan’s largest trading partner. According to President Karzai, the value of trade with the neighboring country stands at \$1 billion. Other principal trading partners are the U.S., India, South Korea, Germany, the United Arab Emirates, and Japan.

⁵⁵ BBC News, Kabul killing unnerves foreigners, 9 March 2005, http://newswww.bbc.net.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4333321.stm

⁵⁶ International Monetary Fund, Public Information Notice, “IMF Executive Board Concludes 2004 Article IV Consultation with the Islamic State of Afghanistan,” 27 January 2005, <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pn/2005/pn0509.htm>

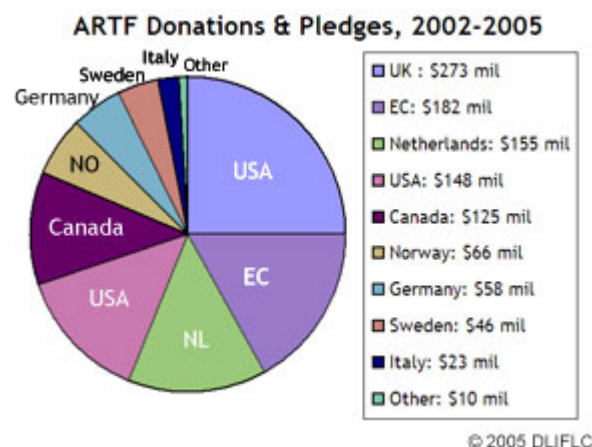
⁵⁷ For the most current exchange rate, go to www.xe.com.

The U.S., the European Union, Japan, and India all extended Generalized System of Preference-type trade privileges to Afghanistan in 2003. In addition, Afghanistan concluded two trilateral transit and trade agreements (Afghanistan-Iran-India and Afghanistan-Iran-Tajikistan) and four bilateral transit and trade agreements (with Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and India). Trade with other neighbors, including Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and China, is growing slowly. U.S.-Afghan bilateral trade was estimated at \$117 million in 2003. With the extension of the Generalized System of Preferences⁵⁸ duty-free privileges in 2004 and further investment and development of the Afghan private sector, this figure can be expected to continue rising.

Foreign Investment

The United States is spearheading Afghanistan’s reconstruction effort and is the largest donor of humanitarian and development assistance to the country . Since October 2001, the United States has provided over \$1.8 billion in mostly humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The agency is working to breathe new life into the Afghan economy through programs that aim to expand and improve economic infrastructure, business support services, technology resources, and improve private sector growth.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank have also been key players in Afghanistan’s reconstruction. Each have extended over \$700 million in assistance to Afghanistan since 2002 and administer grants from various donors. The World Bank also manages the multi-donor Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF).⁵⁹ The World Bank also manages a number of funds, including the Japan Social Development Fund and the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF). The ARTF has pulled together nearly \$1.2 billion in donations and pledges over the last few years to aid in the reconstruction effort. Donor countries include Britain, the European Union, the Netherlands, the U.S., Canada, and another 19 countries. Funds have gone toward development and reconstruction needs: grants to communities for local government projects, reducing poverty and vulnerability of the displaced and disabled, rehabilitation of the Naghlu hydropower plant, and urban water supply and sanitation.



Private investment in Afghanistan is still weak. After two decades of conflict, the perception of risk by investors has been a major obstacle. “The scale of foreign

⁵⁸ The U.S. Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) provides preferential duty-free entry for thousands of products from designated beneficiary countries.

⁵⁹ Asian Development Bank News Release. \$600 Million in Assistance Earmarked for Afghanistan in Updated ADB Country Program, 1 September 2004, <http://www.adb.org/Documents/News/2004/nr2004097.asp>

investment has remained very small, largely hampered by the absence of infrastructure, such as roads and electricity, and a lingering legacy of corruption and red-tape,” says Karzai. Those who have put their faith and money into the country include Voith Siemens, the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development, The Overseas Private Investment Corp. (OPIC), Emaar/InterContinental Hotels, Coca Cola, GroupSat Inc., Alcatel SA, and Hyatt Hotels.

Spearheaded by the multinational Roshan and Afghan Wireless, a U.S.-Afghan joint venture, telecommunications now represents the largest source of direct foreign investment in Afghanistan. With limited landline phone service—about 34,000 phone lines for the whole country at last count—wireless communication has become a hot market. Over the last three years, the two mobile providers have built an industry from the ground up and now deliver service to approximately 800,000 subscribers. Telecom services drew more than \$145 million of foreign direct investment into Afghanistan between 2003 and 2004.⁶⁰

Banking

Most of the Afghan financial system is still in the hands of traditional *hawala*⁶¹ networks. *Hawala* (Arabic for “transfer”⁶²) is an ancient, informal system of money transfer that existed in South Asia long before Western banking arrived. Typically, *hawala* brokers (*hawaladars*) take a client's money and then contact a counterpart in the area where the client wants the money delivered. The counterpart then pays out the sum (minus a small percentage). *Hawala*, also called *hundi* (“trust”), is based on mutual trust: Brokers are often members of the same family, village, clan, or ethnic group. This reliable system is less expensive than formal bank transfers, and requires little paperwork. As a result, *hawala* is widely used throughout the region by ordinary individuals, traders, small businesses, and government agencies.



© Luke Powell
Taking care of business in a teahouse

An important aspect of *hawala* is that transfers are virtually untraceable. When a transaction is complete, records are either encoded or destroyed. Additionally, brokers often use gold to balance books, and routinely have gold, rather than currency, placed around the world. Because of this, *hawala* has also been linked to the movement of narcotics funds and has also been associated with smuggling, human trafficking, and terrorism, including al-Qaeda funding. Dubai, India, and

Pakistan form a "*hawala* triangle," and are responsible for the heaviest traffic in worldwide financial transfers.

⁶⁰ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs Release, “Remarks to the German Chamber of Commerce and VATM”, 19 November 2004, <http://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/rm/38680.htm>

⁶¹ For a definition of “hawala” go to <http://www.answers.com/topic/hawala>. See also “Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering, Report on Money Laundering Typologies”: http://www1.oecd.org/fatf/pdf/ty2000_en.pdf

⁶² Other translations are: “exchange,” “trust [Hindi],” “reference.” The Arabic root is “change” or “transform.” The system is sometimes referred to as Hawala/hundi. Hundi means “bill of exchange” or “promissory note.”

However, brokers now operate globally and can be found in Europe and the United States.⁶³

Afghanistan's banking system has made advances since 2002. The Central Banking and Commercial Banking laws passed in September 2003 cleared the way for new commercial banks to be licensed. In addition to the Central Bank (DAB, Da Afghanistan Bank), there are now three commercial banks: Standard Chartered (UK), which runs the country's two ATM machines in addition managing savings accounts; the First Microfinance Bank of Afghanistan (an Aga Kahn/IFC joint venture), which is also the National Bank of Pakistan; and Afghanistan International Bank. That said, mortgages aren't possible (there's no land registry), and there is still no base interest rate, preventing banks from paying interest on accounts held in Afghanistan.

Energy

During the years of war, at least 40 percent of Afghanistan's power lines were destroyed. Today, only about 6 percent of Afghanistan's population has access to electricity, and even then for only a few hours each day. Power generation, transmission and distribution are critical problems. According to USAID, hydropower provides 80 percent of the country's energy. Serving mainly Kabul, and to a lesser degree Jalalabad and Kandahar, these outdated and war-damaged facilities collectively generate only about 420 MW⁶⁴. A joint German-ARTF, \$16.0-million project to rehabilitate Kabul's Mahi Par and Sarobi dams by 2006 is underway. In the meantime, Afghanistan is importing increasingly larger volumes of electric power from Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Plans to string additional and higher-voltage transmission lines between these countries and Afghanistan eventually could lead to the basis for the creation of a regional power grid.



© Luke Powell

Mountain road in Kapisa Province

While Afghanistan has no considerable amount of petroleum resources (approx. 95 million barrels), it holds about five trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves. All significant oil and gas exploration and development has occurred in the northern area near Sheberghan and Sar-e-Pol. The industry was still only in its beginning stages at the end of the 1970s, but since then it has suffered substantial damage. Afghan natural gas fields include Khowaja Gogerdak, Djarquduk, and Yatimtaq, all of which are located within 20 miles of Sherberghan. While natural gas holds huge potential for additional power generation in Afghanistan, it is currently only being used on a small scale. A 30-MW power plant near Mazar-e Sharif receives natural gas from a pipeline repaired in 1999, and there is discussion of exporting a small amount of natural gas into Uzbekistan through another existing pipeline.

⁶³ Washington Post Foreign Service, "Al Qaeda's Road Paved with Gold", 17 February 2002, <http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/qdagold.htm>

and Interpol, "The hawala alternative remittance system and its role in money laundering", January 2000, <http://www.interpol.int/Public/FinancialCrime/MoneyLaundering/hawala/default.asp>

⁶⁴ MW = megawatts

In the past, coal was a primary fuel for industrial processes, along with heating and cooking. Coal reserves are substantial—by some estimates 400 million tons—and well-distributed throughout Afghanistan. Today coalmines are still a local resource for home heating and cooking, but the mines are in disrepair and dangerous. Other sources of energy include wood, which has led to serious deforestation, and diesel imported from Pakistan. While USAID has installed diesel generators in smaller provincial cities to meet electricity demands, it admits that diesel “is providing a costly bridge to provide light [and] electric heat and is restricting the overall economic growth potential of the country.”⁶⁵

Energy Transit Corridor

Due to its location between the oil and natural gas reserves of the Caspian Basin and the Indian Ocean, Afghanistan has long been at the center of discussion as a potential pipeline route. Karzai has been working hard to promote a plan for a Trans-Afghan Pipeline, a three-way, \$3.2-billion gas pipeline project to carry Turkmenistan's natural gas to Pakistan via Afghanistan. Security remains a problem, and so far no major Western companies have stepped forward to take on the project. Completion of the pipeline, which the ADB says could generate \$200 million a year in transit fees, would take almost three years.



© Luke Powell

Weaving a carpet in Balkh Province

Other Potential Resources

Mineral wealth is virtually undeveloped. According to Mohammad Sediq, the Afghan Minister for Mines and Industry, “one of the biggest lures for foreign investors is Afghanistan’s 300 types of mineral deposits, including coal, copper, marble, emeralds,” as well as iron ore, talc, sulfur, and lapis lazuli. The blue lapis lazuli stone used to decorate the death masks of Egypt’s pharaohs and to make the blue paint Michelangelo used on the Sistine Chapel came from Afghanistan. The World Bank estimates that the annual value of solid minerals produced in the country will rise to \$253 million by 2008.

Afghan carpets, world famous for their quality and craftsmanship, represent a major opportunity for export earnings. Other light industries include leather and leather processing, precious and semi-precious stones, and marble. These sectors present opportunities for investors.

Transportation

For Afghanistan to develop its natural resources and boost trade with its neighbors, it will need to be able to transport goods. Transportation is a major obstacle to increased commerce in this landlocked country and is a major element of the reconstruction effort. Roads throughout the country are in poor shape. Pack animals—camels, donkeys, and horses—are still the primary means of transport in most parts of the country. Foreign aid agencies bring their own means of transportation. A road and tunnel under the Salang

⁶⁵ USAID, “Afghanistan”, http://www.usaid.gov/locations/asia_near_east/afghanistan/



© Luke Powell

Pack animals are still the main means of transportation in rural Afghanistan

pass, built in 1964 by the Russians, provides a short, all-weather route between north and south Afghanistan. Barges travel along the Amu Darya River, which forms part of Afghanistan's border with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The few existing railway lines, which were constructed by the Soviets during their occupation of Afghanistan, need improvement as well.

At the beginning of reconstruction efforts, there were less than 2,000 miles (3,219 km) of paved road in Afghanistan. Work to improve roadways has progressed, albeit with delays caused by militant attacks, especially in the south. Construction of the national or “ring” road, as well as border crossings with neighboring countries, are the main focus of rehabilitation efforts.

There are six domestic and foreign airlines operating in Afghanistan, including Azerbaijan Airlines, Pakistan International, Kam Air, and Ariana, the Afghan national carrier. Repairs to Kabul International Airport have allowed limited commercial flights to operate. Its International Terminal, funded in major part by Japan, is slated for completion in 2007. But air travel is unreliable at best. Delays and re-routing are not uncommon. Moreover, the U.S discourages its nationals from flying on Ariana due to its poor safety record.

Society and Culture

Introduction

Afghanistan lost many of its cultural artifacts in nearly three decades of war and conflict. After the Soviets withdrew in 1989, the Mujahideen plundered museums, galleries, and theaters. Nearly 70 percent of the Kabul Museum's holdings—a collection spanning 50,000 years—was sold on the international market.⁶⁶

Countless treasures, including statues, paintings, and other priceless works of art, were systematically destroyed during the Taliban regime. The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha statues was one of the most visible and most devastating losses during this time, not only to the Afghan people, but also to the world heritage of arts and culture.



© Luke Powell

The ruins of the Afghan National Museum in Kabul

At the height of the destruction, Afghans and foreigners alike rescued and hid as much as they could. Since then, many artifacts have been returned to the country, or are being safeguarded by museums and organizations outside of Afghanistan.⁶⁷

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

Pashtunwali

Pashtunwali, or the code of the Pashtun, is a set of traditional rules Pashto tribes have lived by for a thousand years. *Pashtunwali* is significant in that nearly 40 percent of the Afghan population is Pashtun, and their code of conduct continues to have influence on legal and social decisions throughout Afghanistan today. The four basic tenets the Pashtun code of honor are 1) hospitality, 2) justice, 3) protection of women, family, and property, and 4) personal independence. The value of personal independence in particular is very much an Afghan trait.



DoD image

Pastun village elder

When there is a dispute, the local *jirga*, or group of elected elders, will use the customary *Pashtunwali* codes of conduct as its guide in passing judgment, and its decisions are widely respected.⁶⁸ ⁶⁹ Local rulers, who oversee *Pashtunwali* in their area, consider it more important than rules set up by any central

⁶⁶ See the Pulitzer-prize winning *N.Y. Times* article, "Kabul's Museum: The Past Ruined by the Present," by John F. Burns: <http://www.pulitzer.org/year/1997/international-reporting/works/9/>

⁶⁷ Visiting Arts Cultural Profiles Project, "Afghanistan",

http://www.culturalprofiles.org.uk/Afghanistan/Directories/Afghanistan_Cultural_Profile/-675.html

⁶⁸ Afghanland.com, "Pashtunwali", <http://www.afghanland.com/culture/pashtunwali.html>

⁶⁹ KhyberGateway Pashto Resources, "Pashtoonwali", <http://www.khyber.org/culture/pashtunwali.shtml>

government. Moreover, the development of a centralized Afghan state may have been hindered throughout the centuries by the traditional power held by local *jirgas* who were not interested in supporting a central power that would interfere with their way of living. *Pashtunwali* will continue to be a significant factor as the Afghan state works to define a judicial system.

The rules listed below have guided Pashtun tribesmen for centuries.

Badal refers to the right to retaliate if insulted.

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

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

Baramta is the holding of hostages until claimed property is returned; service industry workers (tailors, barbers, etc.) are excluded from being taken hostage.

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

Ghundi is an alliance created against a common enemy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gender Issues

Since the fall of the Taliban, the international community has worked to support Afghan women's rights. This has proven difficult, however. Gender equity is a controversial issue in Afghanistan, and politicians avoid taking a firm position on women's issues for fear of backlash among conservative groups.⁷⁰ While some progress has been made in recent years at the policy level, the emphasis has been on urban and educated women, who were most affected by the Taliban's practices. For uneducated and rural Afghan women, little has changed.

Fathers, husbands, village elders, and local *jirgas* have absolute authority over women's lives in Afghanistan. And while Afghan men increasingly use the language of democracy when talking with outsiders, this generally does not apply to women. For centuries, the

⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch, "Afghanistan: Women Under Attack for Asserting Rights," 5 October 2004: <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2004/10/04/afghan9436.htm>

conduct of women (and men) has been strictly governed by the traditional *Pashtunwali* codes of behavior, as much as Islamic law. In particular, *purdah* (Urdu for “veil”) establishes the physical boundaries between men and women. In Afghanistan, female seclusion is considered necessary for the protection of family honor. The most visible display of *purdah* is the *burqa*, which women are still required to wear when going out in public.



© Luke Powell
A group of women wearing burqas

At its most extreme, *purdah* bars women from education, health care, and more.⁷¹ Seventy percent of tuberculosis cases in the country occur in women, who spend much of their lives sequestered in their homes with no access to health care. Moreover, violence is used to make women adhere to *purdah* norms.⁷² Spousal abuse, forced marriage, and honor killings are not uncommon. Since the fall of the Taliban, hundreds of women have resorted to burning themselves to death to draw attention to their plight.⁷³

Others are relying on political change. The Afghan constitution, ratified in early 2004, established equal rights for women and equal protection before the law. Twenty-five percent of the current Afghan National Assembly is made up of women, and three of President Karzai’s 30 cabinet members are women. Most recently, Karzai appointed the former Minister of Women’s Affairs, Habiba Sorabi, Governor of Bamiyan Province. As Afghanistan’s first female governor, her appointment has been controversial within traditional Afghan society. But Sorabi has become a role model for women around the country who are defying tradition and joining the growing number of women’s rights organizations and running in local elections in hopes of ending the climate of oppression. Time will tell. A month after Sorabi took her post, a 29-year-old woman accused of adultery was stoned to death in the northeastern province of Badakhshan.⁷⁴

Health Care

While there are signs of general economic improvement in Afghanistan—new construction, increased commerce, food in markets—the standard of health care remains among the worst in the developing world. The country’s historically poor health indicators worsened after the Soviets withdrew in 1989. During the years of conflict and Taliban rule, an estimated 75 percent of trained doctors fled the war-ravaged country. While exact figures are difficult to determine, today there is only about one physician for every 10,000 people.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Harvard Law School’s Islamic Legal Studies Program (ILSP), “Tribal Law of Pashtunwali and Women’s Legislative Authority,” by Palwasha Kakar: <http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/ilsp/kakar.pdf>

⁷² BBC News, “Silence over Afghan Women’s Rights”, 7 October 2004:

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

⁷³ “Afghanistan: Self-Immolation of Women on the Rise in Western Provinces”:

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/03/ea74ad8e-9b91-4cbd-b7f7-f13b521dce2b.html>

⁷⁴ Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), “Afghan woman stoned to death for adultery”,

<http://www.rawa.org/stoning.htm>

⁷⁵ UN Development Program, Afghanistan National Human Development Report 2004:

http://www.undp.org.af/nhdr_04/NHDR04.htm; Physicians per 10,000, 1.9 (2001) EMRO

It's no wonder then, that according to the World Health Organization, Afghans have among the shortest life expectancies in the entire world: 43 years on average, with the healthy life expectancy⁷⁶ being as low as 35 years.

Afghanistan has only about 12 percent of the health facilities it needs⁷⁷ for its population of nearly 30 million. Rural areas have little to no access to medical care, and the handful of hospitals, health centers, and clinics that exist are located primarily in urban centers. These, with very few exceptions, are poorly equipped and understaffed. Most have no electricity or running water (only about 9 percent of the country has access to electricity). Sanitation is also a luxury. In 2002, about two-thirds of health facilities had toilets—but a majority of those were pit latrines. Even in areas where there are services, critically ill people often die before they can get help.⁷⁸ Countrywide, there are only a handful of ambulances to transport patients. Conditions have forced desperate Afghans to travel across the border into Pakistan to seek reliable health care.⁷⁹



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Immunizations in a clinic in Kabul

International Aid

International aid agencies still organize or operate the majority of clinics in Afghanistan, and the country relies heavily on them. But as war continues in the south, insurgents target aid workers as a military strategy against the U.S.-led coalition forces and the government of President Hamid Karzai. The effect is felt not only in the south, where millions have no access to health care, but across the country. Following the deaths of 5 of its aid workers in June 2004, *Medecins sans Frontieres* (Doctors without Borders) pulled out of Afghanistan after 24 years.⁸⁰

Diseases

Today, less than 24 percent of the population has access to fresh drinking water. Raw sewage flows in the streets of most cities. Access to clean water is such a luxury that many women in the capital do laundry in the filthy Kabul River. As a result, the mortality rate due to water-borne disease is one of the highest in the world.⁸¹ Estimates indicate that 85,000 children under five,⁸² or one in eight,⁸³ die each year from diarrhea alone.

Typhoid, cholera, polio, malaria, and tuberculosis are endemic to Afghanistan. Over the last few years, international aid organizations and the U.S. have made progress in

⁷⁶ The healthy life expectancy indicates the years of life a person can expect to be free of disease and is generally lower than the average life expectancy.

⁷⁷ U.S. Department of State, "Healthcare in Afghanistan", <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/obs/vid/12427.htm>

⁷⁸ Pakistan recently provided Afghanistan with 10 ambulances: Pakistan's Dawn Newspaper, 10 April 2005, <http://www.dawn.com/2005/04/10/top12.htm>

⁷⁹ Inter Press Service News Agency, "Many Still Seeking Medical Help Across Border," May 2005: http://www.ipsnews.net/new_notas.asp?idnews=27903

⁸⁰ Doctors Without Borders, "Afghanistan Photos", <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/afghanphotos/sec4/>

⁸¹ World Health Organization (WHO), <http://www.who.int>

⁸² United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) National Human Development Report 2004:

http://undp.org.af/nhdr_04/pdfs/B_chapter2.pdf

⁸³ UNDP Press Release, February 2005, <http://www.undp.org/dpa/pressrelease/releases/2005/february/pr21feb05.html>

combating the spread of some of these diseases. Distribution of the polio vaccine, for instance, has reduced the number of children contracting the crippling disease from 20 four years ago to four cases in 2004.⁸⁴ According to UNICEF, reported cases of measles among children have fallen from more than 8,700 in 2001 to less than 500 in 2004. These agencies continue to work to immunize thousands of Afghan children against childhood diseases.

Tuberculosis, however, remains a deadly threat—particularly for Afghan women. Of the estimated 15,000 Afghans who die from the disease annually, nearly two-thirds are women.⁸⁵ While there is no clear explanation for the phenomenon, the World Health Organization believes that the confinement of women to the house, frequent child births, undernourishment, and living in close quarters are factors. For those women living with tuberculosis, the deep stigma associated with the disease often results in their being shut out of families and communities. This, in turn, has an impact on the well-being of their children and families.

For some diseases, such as malaria, there are no vaccines. Anti-malarial drugs are hard to come by, and relief agencies have resorted to distributing bed nets. Despite these efforts, malaria is on the rise in more than 60 percent of the country and affects millions of Afghans yearly. Children under 5, especially those that suffer from malnutrition, are least able to fight the debilitating illness. Pregnant women with malaria often become anemic, endangering their unborn babies' lives.⁸⁶ The incidence of malaria in Afghanistan began to increase, by some reports, after the Soviet invasion. The bombing of irrigation systems created stagnant pools of water in which mosquitoes thrive.



© Luke Powell
A little girl with leishmaniasis

The prevalence of desert sandflies causes further hardship for the Afghan people. Leishmaniasis, caused by the infected bite of a sandfly, produces lesions on exposed areas of the skin, most often the face. Women are particularly susceptible. WHO reports up to 200,000 cases a year in Kabul, the highest incidence in the world.⁸⁷ Untreated, the lesions will eventually heal, but they often leave behind disfiguring scars. Many misinformed Afghans believe the disease is communicable. They exclude victims of the disease from communal life and restrict them to the home. The social and emotional impact is greatest on women and children. Many children can't share plates of food or touch other family members. Some afflicted mothers are even afraid to nurse their babies.

⁸⁴ UNICEF, Afghanistan: "Building up immunization one dose at a time in southern Afghanistan", 22 February 2005, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_25260.html

⁸⁵ IRIN News, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Afghanistan World TB Day Marked", http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=33048&SelectRegion=Central_Asia&SelectCountry=AFGHANISTAN

⁸⁶ World Vision: http://meero.worldvision.org/news_article.php?newsID=229

⁸⁷ Center for Disease Control, "Social Impact of Leishmaniasis, Afghanistan": <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/EID/vol11no04/04-0945.htm>

Women's Health Care

When the Taliban took over in 1996, the majority of doctors—including women professionals and midwives—fled Afghanistan. Women's health care was neglected, and women were banned from education and training. This was a serious blow to the sustained health of Afghan women. When the regime fell in 2001, there were less than 500 trained midwives and only a handful of female doctors in the entire country.

This shortage of female health care workers in Afghanistan has brought about the worst health crisis for Afghan women. Social and cultural taboos prevent women from being treated by male doctors. (Moreover, most Afghan women (93 percent) need authorization from their husbands or a male relative before seeking any kind of professional health care.⁸⁸) According to Afghan Public Health Minister Mohammed Amin Fatimi, there are only about 500 female doctors in the entire country at this time.⁸⁹



© Luke Powell

Women wait to be seen in a UN clinic in Kabul

The statistics speak for themselves. Ninety percent of deaths among women of childbearing age in Afghanistan are caused by preventable complications related to childbirth. Only 12 percent of women have access to any type of medical care during pregnancy. And while most Afghan women give birth at home, only 8 percent of those receive the assistance of a skilled professional during delivery.⁹⁰ Additionally, most of Afghanistan's primary health care clinics cannot provide even basic maternal and child services. A vast majority of hospitals lack equipment to perform Caesarian sections. This, combined with war, poverty, and many other factors, has led Afghanistan to have the world's highest maternal mortality rate. In rural areas, especially in regions of the southeast, over 50 percent of expectant mothers die.⁹¹

In response to the need, U.S. civilian and military aid programs have been upgrading the Rabia Balkhi and Malalai hospitals for women in Kabul. Additionally, the Afghan government, with funds from USAID, began training new midwives two years ago. While the target is 830 trained midwives by 2006,⁹² Fatimi estimates the country needs 10,000 midwives and another 10,000 health care workers.⁹³

⁸⁸ National Center for Biotechnology Information, "Reproductive Health in Afghanistan: Results...of survey in Kabul": http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=15344941&dopt=Abstract

⁸⁹ Afgha.com, "Country facing health disaster worse than the Tsunami—minister," April 2005: http://afgha.com/?af=pr&new_topic=10&catid=&order=

⁹⁰ World Health Organization, Reproductive Health Care, http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/publications/MSM_96_28/msm_96_28_table4.html

⁹¹ IRIN Interview with governor of Paktika, October 2003:

http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=37253&SelectRegion=Central_Asia&SelectCountry=AFGHANISTAN

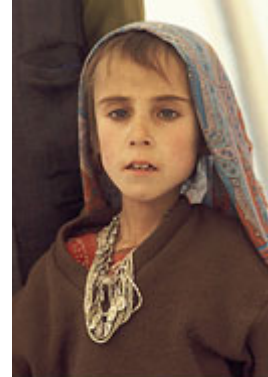
⁹² U.S. Department of State, "New Cadre of Afghan Midwives Completes Training", <http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/Archive/2005/Apr/14-908677.html>

⁹³ Afgha.com, "Afghan Clergy Concerned about their Security", http://afgha.com/?af=pr&new_topic=10&catid=&order=

Children

According to UNICEF, Afghanistan ranks as the fourth worst country in terms of under-five mortality. Roughly a quarter of young children die before they reach their fifth birthday. The causes are preventable and treatable: malnutrition, diarrhea, malaria, measles, and respiratory infections. Infant mortality is the highest in the world, second only to Sierra Leone: 163 deaths per 1000 live births in 2004⁹⁴ (as compared to the United States rate of 7.5 deaths per 100,000).

Chronic malnutrition afflicts nearly 60 percent of Afghan children under five. More than half suffer from stunted growth. According to UNICEF, iodine deficiencies in pregnant women result in 500,000 babies born each year with mental impairment.



Malnourished girl in Kunduz Province

Landmines and Unexploded Ordnance

As of just a few years ago, Afghanistan had the highest number of casualties due to landmines and unexploded ordnance in the world.⁹⁵ It is primarily the Afghans in rural areas that are the innocent victims of these remainders of war. Injuries occur on agricultural land, around irrigation systems, residential areas, roads, and grazing grounds. Over half of landmine accidents involve children under the age of 18. The few who survive are maimed for life.⁹⁶ In 2000, there were an estimated 2,400 casualties.⁹⁷ In recent years, these figures have dropped significantly. The demining and awareness-raising efforts of the international community (UN, ICRC, with funds and training from the US and others), have reduced these figures to 508 accidents, with 54 fatalities, in 2004.

Mental Health

Twenty-three years of war and strife have also left more than physical scars on the people of Afghanistan. There are deep psychological wounds. Afghans from all walks of life, especially children, are suffering some level of stress disorder. Almost all children had witnessed acts of violence during the fighting. Two-thirds had seen dead bodies, and nearly half saw many people killed.⁹⁸ In 2001, the World Health Organization considered mental illness to be the biggest health problem in the country. But mental health issues continue to take a backseat to physical health care needs. Depression and schizophrenia are often unrecognized and almost always untreated. The victims find themselves

⁹⁴ CIA World Factbook, Infant Mortality Rate Rank Order,

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/rankorder/2091rank.html>

⁹⁵ International Campaign to Ban Landmines. Landmine monitor report 2003. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002. See article "Injuries and Death Caused by Unexploded Ordnance in Afghanistan: Review of Surveillance Data, 1977-2002": <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/ierh/Research&Survey/bmj3833736178282v1.pdf>

⁹⁶ BBC "Healing the wounds of Afghan war": <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/3946245.stm>

⁹⁷ U.S. Department of State Fact Sheet, Landmines in Afghanistan, Aug 2002:

<http://www.state.gov/coalition/cr/fs/12852.htm> ; See also UN Mine Action Center for Afghanistan

⁹⁸ UN Development Programme, "Afghanistan Human Development Report 2004", http://www.undp.org.af/nhdr_04/NHDR04.htm

stigmatized by society.⁹⁹ At the moment, only few mental health professionals in Afghanistan have the proper experience and tools to deal with this phenomenon.¹⁰⁰

The Arts

Literature

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



Medieval miniature illustration

A medieval illustration for the Rubaiyat

form, a two-line verse with 9 and 13 syllables, respectively, using internal rhymes.

Dari literature can be traced back to the ancient Persian poets, of whom Omar Khayyam is the most famous. His quatrains of four-line rhyming verses created the basis of poetical works in the Dari language for most Afghani poets. The 17th century warrior-poet Kushal Khan Khattak is regarded as the national poet of modern Afghanistan. His poems, written in Pashto, are full of

energy and power. He established the Pashto *landay* form, a two-line verse with 9 and 13 syllables, respectively, using internal rhymes.

Modern Dari and Pashto writings have thrived since the fall of the Taliban and they represent all literary forms. Poems, short stories, novels, and dramas have emerged as many repressed poets and writers have come to express their feelings through their literary creations.¹⁰¹

Music

Afghanistan's musical traditions, as well as its traditional instruments, share similarities with those of neighboring countries.¹⁰² (The *rebab*, for example, sometimes considered the national instrument of Afghanistan, is the forerunner of the Indian *sarod*.) Afghan classical music, like that of much of Central Asia, has a tradition of sung poetry (*ghazals*) as well as instrumental music (*ragas*, *naghmehs*). Although similar to Indian *ragas*,

⁹⁹ Dr. Amin Azimi, "The Mental Health Crisis in Afghanistan", March 2004, <http://www.afgha.com/?af=article&sid=41671>

¹⁰⁰ The Mental Health Crisis in Afghanistan, Dr. Amin Azimi, Lemar-Aftaab (Afghan Magazine) ReliefWeb (UN): <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/AllDocsByUNID/9faa7bffb62b0585256e4a0075780b>

¹⁰¹ VisitingArts.org, Afghanistan Cultural Profile, Early Afghan Literature, http://www.culturalprofiles.org.uk/Afghanistan/Directories/Afghanistan_Cultural_Profile/-770.html

¹⁰² Afghan Network, Afghan Musical Instruments, <http://www.afghan-network.net/Culture/instruments.html>

Afghan *ragas* are more rhythmic and are played with percussion instruments like the *daira*, *dohl* or *zerbaghali*.¹⁰³ What follows is a rundown of the most common instruments used in traditional Afghan music today.

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



© Luke Powell
Instrument maker
building a rebab

One of the most famous Afghan contemporary musicians is Farhad Darya. Born in Kabul, he left Afghanistan at the age of 28, about the time the Taliban came to power. After living in Prague, Hamburg, and Paris, Darya moved to the United States, but he has never stopped writing and performing music from and about his native country. His compositions are well known in Afghanistan, and his song entitled, “*Kabul Jaan*” (“Beloved Kabul”) was the first song played on Kabul Radio after the Taliban’s defeat.

Darya sings in Dari, Pashto, Panjshiri, Hazaragi, and Uzbek. His music uses many of the traditional instruments as well as modern ones. Many other Afghan musicians have also found their way to fame since the fall of the Taliban. Today, hundreds of songs, including those of Farhad Darya, are available on the internet for people all over the world to download and enjoy. Below are the lyrics of one of his songs.

Afghanistan

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

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

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

¹⁰³ Nationmaster Online Encyclopeda, “Music of Afghanistan” <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Music-of-Afghanistan>

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

Buzkashi

Buzkashi is the Afghan national sport. “*Buzkashi*” literally means “goat-grabbing” in Dari. It is said that its origins go back to the times of Mongol conquest, when the Mongols riders would hunt, kill and pick up goats without dismounting from their horses. Purportedly, Afghan horseman learned to fight back and took back their animals from the Mongolians who wanted to ride away with their prey.



© Luke Powell

Playing a game of buzkashi

Today *buzkashi* is an organized field sport of 10 to 12 players per team. The teams must transport the headless carcass of a calf or goat (weighing up to 60 kilos, or 130 lbs) the length of a football field and back, and over a goal line, without dropping it or allowing someone from the other team to wrestle it from them. In bigger cities, tournaments are played in stadiums, and the rules do not allow knives to be used or any direct physical attack of the person carrying the carcass. It is a rough sport that requires exceptional riding skills and well-trained horses. Many riders leave the game with broken ribs and other injuries. *Buzkashi* is typically played on special occasions, such as the Afghan New Year (Nowruz), Eid, and weddings, though typically women are not allowed to watch. The game of polo developed from the *buzkashi* competitions 19th century British soldiers saw in India.¹⁰⁴

Gudiparan Bazi—Kite Fighting

Kite fighting is a national pastime in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁵ It was very popular before the Taliban movement stopped all activities deemed anti-Islamic, including kite fighting, which Afghans liked to wager on. With the new freedom, old customs like kite fighting are back with a vengeance.

The beautifully colored kites, called *gudiparan* or “flying dolls,” take different shapes and forms. They may be as small as 10 inches in diameter or as long as 6 or 7 feet. These kites are built by stretching thin paper over a light bamboo frame.

The *gudiparan* are unique, not just because of their colors and shapes, but also because of the string they are held by. The preparation of these special kite strings may take hours. The goal is to have a string that is light, but strong, and that has an outside surface which can cut like a razor blade. To achieve this, a special coating of ground glass is applied to the surface of the string with adhesive. Leather gloves or finger protectors are



© Luke Powell

Boys in Kabul watch a kite fight

¹⁰⁴ The Silk Road Project, “Nomads”, <http://www.silkroadproject.org/smithsonian/nomads.html>

¹⁰⁵ Kites for Peace Project, <http://subvision.net/sky/planetkite/sub/afghanistan/>

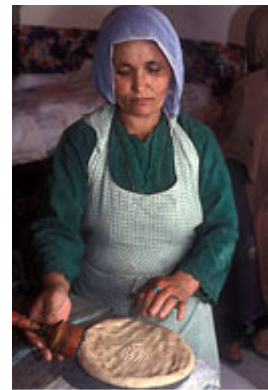
worn to protect the flyers' hands from getting injured when working with these "cutter" strings.

The kite fight itself starts with flying two kites in close proximity. The goal is to cut the string of the other kite. The kite that remains on a string is the winner. Usually the winner gets the loser's kite and whatever else is at stake. If the losing kite is carried away by the wind, it will belong to whoever finds it when it falls to the ground.

Cooking

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

The everyday diet of Afghans is partially determined by the wide variety of crops in the region, chief among them wheat, corn, barley, and rice. Other staples include beef, lamb, chicken, cheese, *chai* (tea), *naan* (flatbread), fruits, such as grapes, melons, and apricots,¹⁰⁶ and vegetables, such as eggplant, leeks, carrots. (It is widely believed that Afghanistan is the origin of the domesticated carrot.¹⁰⁷) Pistachios and almonds are favorite snacks. A wide range of spices are used in Afghan cooking: anise, cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, cumin, dill seed, black pepper, poppy seeds, ginger, sesame seeds, green and red chilies, cilantro seeds, and saffron.



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Preparing naan in Balkh Province

On religious days, festivals, and celebrations, a large number of dishes and specialties are prepared such as *aus* (noodle soup with meat, peas, beans and yoghurt), *ausak* (ravioli stuffed with leeks and topped with yoghurt and meat), *boulanee* (potato and meat turnovers), kebabs, *qabili pilau* (traditional dish of brown rice with lamb, carrots, and raisins), *firni* (milk custard topped with pistachios), *kadu bouranee* (sweet pumpkin), pastries and fruit. Some foods and desserts are prepared only in certain seasons. Typical in spring is homemade ice cream like *sheer yakh* and *faluda* (rice, shaved ice, and ice cream), and *kishmish panir*, a white uncured cheese served with red raisins. During winter, it is common to see street vendors selling *haleem* (a dish of wheat and meat served with oil and sugar) and fried freshwater fish served with *jelabi*, a type of fritter in syrup scented with lemon, rosewater, and saffron.¹⁰⁸¹⁰⁹

Food is an important part of Afghan hospitality. After being seated in a place of honor, guests are served *chai* and the best food the family has to offer. Traditionally, Afghans share food from a common dish, eating with their right hand (the left hand is considered unclean) from dishes placed on a mat, called a *disterkhan*, spread on the floor. Everyone

¹⁰⁶ Settlement.org, "Eating Afghan Style", <http://cp.settlement.org/english/afghanistan/eating.html>

¹⁰⁷ http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/history/lecture12/r_12-1.html

¹⁰⁸ "Fish in Afghanistan" by Helen Saberi: <http://www.kal69.dial.pipex.com/shop/pages/890right.htm>

¹⁰⁹ Street Food and Snacks in Afghanistan: <http://www.kal69.dial.pipex.com/shop/pages/947stre.htm>

sits on large colorful cushions, called *toshak*, which are usually placed on carpets. While it is less traditional to use forks, spoons are used for custards and tea. (In the cities today, tables, chairs, and cutlery are more common.) When sharing meals, Afghans carefully wash their hands before eating in a ceremony called *haftawa-wa-lagan*. Chutneys, pickles, and fresh *naan* (flatbread) usually accompany the food. Sharing food with guests not only allows the host to show his generosity, but it is also a way to build relationships.

Current Issues

Field Notes

For many U.S. soldiers, the months they are stationed in Afghanistan are some of the most memorable of their lives. One soldier shared his experiences while deployed in eastern Afghanistan from October 2002 to July 2003. What follows is summary of his account.

Taking Advantage of Downtime

Even the most active troops stationed in Afghanistan have a generous amount of downtime. U.S. soldiers spend time some of that time reading books and playing cards. Video and computer games may work for a little while, but the fine desert sand, or “moon dust” as the soldiers call it, will eventually jam the equipment.



DoD image

A soldier reads on the airfield in Kandahar

Some American soldiers utilize the downtime to learn a new martial arts style or improve on one they already know. Some bring books on martial arts; others find a “battle buddy” who is willing to teach them one. This way, they keep in shape mentally and physically, with the added benefit of building a strong friendship with a sparring partner.

“It’s better to maintain than to retrain,” is the motto. While stationed in Afghanistan, many American soldiers continue some form of regular PT (physical training), using the high altitude to their advantage where they can. Most military posts already have physical training facilities set up, but it is still up to the individual soldier to take the initiative and utilize whatever facilities are available.

A Balancing Act

As with any other field situation, American soldiers are assigned details such as guard duty, trash detail, radio watch, and so on, to facilitate survival. Of these, the most common to units in Afghanistan are guard duty and radio watch. It requires a lot of self-discipline to stay alert at all times, especially on long deployments. But complacency could put soldiers in harm’s way, and they know it.

At the same time, troops stationed in Afghanistan aren’t under the same constant threat as soldiers stationed in Iraq. Not every Afghani carrying an AK-47 is a terrorist. Most of the locals are in some way happy that American forces are there, and they are curious, but friendly. The Afghans even treat American soldiers a bit like local celebrities.

This means U.S. forces have to perform a balancing act of encouraging a relaxed atmosphere while maintaining situational awareness at all times. They know that becoming too preoccupied with operational security can inhibit their ability to perform the necessary mission, which is promoting stability. Most importantly, US troops strive to demonstrate respect for the Afghan people, keeping in mind that they, as Americans, are the foreigners, not vice-versa.

Another Voice

What follows is another report based on an email from a soldier stationed in Mazar-e Sharif, northern Afghanistan, in early 2002.



The Blue Mosque in Mazar-e Sharif

In and Around Mazar-e Sharif

Mazar-e Sharif is an old city, and like most old cities in the Middle East and Central Asia, it is centered around a large mosque—in this case, the “Blue Mosque.” With its dramatic blue-tiled roof, the mosque is quite a sight. From the central square around the mosque, the streets spread out in a spoke formation through the city.

Different sectors of the city are controlled by different factions of the Northern Alliance forces, but there is no barrier to the movement of people. In general, everyone seems to be going about their daily life without interruptions. Mazar-e Sharif is famous for its Turkmen carpets, and the selection of rugs is something that any collector would enjoy browsing through.

The city itself is situated on the Mazar Plain, within sight of the northern-most range of the Hindu Kush Mountains. The transition is dramatic. As your eyes move south from the extremely flat plain, the mountains quickly rise up 4,000 feet.

Locals

As outsiders, U.S. military personnel evoke curiosity in the locals, who are friendly and cooperative. Afghan businessmen receive US soldiers in their shops with open and sincere smiles. Most Afghan women still wear *burqas* and keep themselves well away from strangers. The people of Mazar-e Sharif say they feel more relaxed now that the Taliban are gone and US soldiers are there.

A Sense of History

The area is fascinating and, like so much of Afghanistan, it is steeped in history. The Blue Mosque, for example, was originally built in 1136. Ghengis Kahn destroyed the mosque when his army overran the city, but the Afghans rebuilt it about 500 hundred years ago. Afghans believe it is the burial place of Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed. Muslims from all over have been making the pilgrimage to the shrine for centuries. South of Mazar-e Sharif, the Qala-Jangi fort, where American Taliban soldier John Walker Lindh was captured, is over 150 years old.

Even more striking than the age of the buildings is the realization that the people of this region have been farming or herding here in much the same way their forebearers have since the time of Alexander the Great. However, this tremendous sense of history does not prevent Afghans from welcoming a bright new future.

Looking Forward: The Author’s Opinion

Researching Afghanistan’s history from prehistoric times to the present is an extraordinary journey in itself. This nation, at the crossroads between Southeast Asia and the West, has endured the invasions of conquering armies for centuries, but it has always

managed to overcome all attempts at subjugation by a foreign power. Its most recent struggle was internal: The Taliban tried to throw Afghanistan back into the confines of totalitarianism in the name of religion. Women in particular suffered extreme subjugation under the regime.



© Luke Powell

A group of girls in Herat Province

Since the Taliban's defeat, Afghanistan has reemerged as a nation with hope for a prosperous future. Democratically elected President Hamid Karzai and his government have been working hard over the past few years to rebuild the country. The new Afghan Constitution has declared women full and equal members of society, and women's movements are gaining support in their struggle to overcome the intolerance they have had to face.

The U.S., Great Britain, France, the United Nations, the European Union, Japan, Canada, and many other nations and international organizations have shown their willingness to provide support for reconstruction efforts in war-ravaged Afghanistan. The struggle is not over yet. There are still some elements of the Taliban that continue their reign of terror. But their attempts to disrupt progress toward a free Afghanistan are being met with growing resistance, not only by the peace keeping forces there, but by ordinary citizens. Moreover, millions of hopeful Afghan refugees are returning from neighboring countries to start up their lives again, undaunted by the initial difficulties they may face. The myriad activities that were banned by the Taliban have returned into the lives of ordinary citizens : Poets, singers, and writers have emerged, finding their way to audiences not only in Afghanistan, but worldwide.

Afghanistan Timeline

- 1500 BCE: The Vedic Aryans** cross the Kubha (Kabul) River from India and settle in the area of present-day Afghanistan.
- 600 BCE: Zoroaster** introduces his monotheistic religion to Bakhtria (Balkh).
- 550 BCE: Cyrus II (the Great)**, founder of the Persian Empire, extends the Persian Empire into the territory of present-day Afghanistan.
- 500 BCE: Darius I (the Great)** consolidates Persian power.
- 327 BCE: Alexander the Great** defeats Darius the III and conquers new territories including present-day Afghanistan.
- 150 CE: Kushan King Kanishka** incorporates Afghanistan into his conquests and introduces Buddhism to the territory.
- 240 CE: Buddhist** colonies flourish in the **Bamiyan** area. Enormous statues of Buddha are carved into the mountainsides.
- 250 CE: The Kushan Empire** falls apart as **Persian** forces expand into the area.
- 427 CE: The White Huns** (Hephthalites) invade Afghanistan and destroy the remains of the Buddhist culture there.
- 600: Persian Sassanids** take control of the area and force the White Huns to leave.
- 637: Arab Muslims** overthrow the Persian Sassanid rulers in the battle of Qadisiya. They introduce Islam to the area.
- 900: Abbasid** caliphs, based in Iraq, extend their rule to the area of Afghanistan.
- 962: A former Turkic slave, Alptigin**, seizes Ghazni and establishes the **Ghaznavid Dynasty**, the first Muslim dynasty in Afghanistan.
- 998: Mahmud** converts Ghazni into a center of Islamic culture.
- 1186: The local Ghor** people from the Hindu Kush emerge and defeat the last Ghaznavid king.
- 1194: The second highest minaret in the world, The Tower of Jam** (also known as the **Ghorid Tower of Victory**) is erected.
- 1221: Genghis Khan** launches a devastating attack against Afghanistan.
- 1273: Marco Polo** travels through the northern part of present-day Afghanistan on his way to China
- 1361: Tamerlane**, the last great emperor of the area, maximizes his territories.
- 1405: Tamerlane** dies and leaves his kingdom to Babur.
- 1483: Babur**, a descendant of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, establishes the Moghul dynasty.
- 1526: Babur** attacks the Hindu city of Delhi, defeating the reigning Afghan sultans.
- 1556: Akhbar**, considered the greatest Moghul ruler, builds a road through the Khyber Pass.
- 1560: Persian Safavids** take over the area of today's western Afghanistan while the Indian Moghuls take the eastern part. The native Afghan Pashtuns hold their growing territories south of the Hindu Kush.
- 1709: Ghilzai chieftain Mir Vais Khan** takes Kandahar from the Persian Safavids. The Persian Safavids soon have to abandon other Afghan cities as well.
- 1739: Persian warrior Nadir Shah** takes over cities in Afghanistan, including Kandahar and Kabul.
- 1747: Nadir Shah** is assassinated in Iran.

1747: Called the father of the state of Afghanistan, **Ahmad Shah Durrani** succeeds Nadir Shah, expanding his power to areas from Central Asia to Delhi.

1773: Internal fighting weakens Afghanistan, and Ahmad Shah's rule comes to an end.

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

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

1826: Dost Mohammad becomes king.

1838: **Shah Shoja** asks for British help to take back the throne of Afghanistan. The British accept in order to secure their position against the Russians, who were negotiating with Dost Mohammad and looking to assert influence in Afghanistan themselves.

1839: **The First Anglo-Afghan War**, often called "Auckland's Folly," begins. Shah Shuja is placed back in control of the country.

1840: **Dost Mohammad** flees to India.

1842: The British are forced to leave the region. Afghans attack the retreating soldiers, causing the most bitter loss in British military history. Shah Shoja is assassinated soon afterwards.

1843: **Dost Mohammed** regains the throne.

1863: **Dost Mohammad** dies.

1878: **The Second Anglo-Afghan War** begins. The Russians renew their plans of expansion toward Afghanistan. The British return to Afghan soil to protect their interests in India.

1880: The British **withdraw**, but retain the right to control Afghanistan's foreign affairs.

1887: During Amir Abdur Rahman's rule, the British and Russians agree on the **Northern Boundary**, at the Amu Darya.

1893: In 1893, the British and Russians establish the **Durand Line** to separate Afghanistan from the Indian Empire.

1901: **King Habibullah** succeeds his father, Amir Abdur Rahman, and maintains a policy of neutrality throughout the First World War.

1907: Russian and Great Britain sign the convention of St. Petersburg, in which Afghanistan is declared outside Russia's sphere of influence.

1919: **Habibullah** is assassinated.

1919: **The Third Anglo-Afghan War**, after which the British relinquish control of Afghan foreign affairs. August 19 becomes **Afghan Independence Day**.

1921: **King Amanullah** establishes independence for Afghanistan with the signing of the **Treaty of Rawalpindi**.

1929: **King Amanullah** abdicates.

1933: **King Zahir Shah** ascends the throne and introduces constitutional democracy in Afghanistan.

1953: **Mohammad Daoud**, one of Zahir Shah's generals, becomes the country's first prime minister.

1964: Zahir Shah's interim government creates a new **Afghan constitution**.

1973: Backed by the military, **Mohammad Daoud** forces **King Zahir Shah** to abdicate the throne.

1976: **Mohammad Daoud** establishes the National Revolutionary Party and declares Afghanistan a Republic the following year.

1978: Soviet-backed forces kill Mohammad Daoud during **the April Revolution**. The **PDPA** take control of the country.

1979: Armed gunmen kidnap Adolf Dubs, U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan. He dies during the rescue attempt.

1979: Soviet forces invade Afghanistan, killing Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin and installing Babrak Karmal as Prime Minister.

1982: The **Northern Alliance**, led by Ahmed Shah Massoud, the “Lion of Panjshir,” leads successful attacks against the occupying Soviet forces.

1989: The last of the Soviet troops withdraw from Afghanistan.

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

1992: The **Afghan** communist rule crumbles.

1994: The **Taliban**, a new radical Islamic religious group, forms.

2001:

— **September 11:** **Al-Qaeda** attacks the **World Trade Center and the Pentagon** in the United States.

— **October 7:** **United States and British forces** attack Afghanistan.

— **November 13:** With the help of allied troops, the **Northern Alliance** marches into Kabul and ends the Taliban’s rule there.

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

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

— **December 15:** Al-Qaeda offers to surrender, sending their message from the mountains through a radio broadcast. They use the time won to disappear.

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

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

2004:

— **November 03:** **Hamid Karzai** wins Afghanistan’s first democratic elections, receiving 55.4 percent of the votes.

— **December 07:** Hamid Karzai is sworn in as Afghanistan’s first democratically elected president.

2005:

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

— **May 23:** President Karzai and President Bush sign a joint Declaration of the United States-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership.

— **June 15:** Ronald Neumann, nominated to be ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, addresses the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.