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May 2009

Afghanistan
Operational Culture for Deploying Personnel



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Revised and Updated May 2009

Foreword

This guidebook was designed specifically to provide basic cultural information for Marines deploying to Afghanistan. In such a short guide, it is sometimes necessary to simplify complex concepts, or to make generalizations about behavior, or to reduce complicated historical events to a few sentences. This guide is intended only as an *introduction* to the subject for Marines deploying to Afghanistan. It provides a basic understanding of a rich culture, a dynamic and living history, and a complicated insurgency. At the end of this guide, therefore, the Marine will find suggestions for further reading to dig deeper into the history, culture, and language of Afghanistan. You will also find contact information for the Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL) in Quantico, Virginia. The 1st edition of this Guide was published in the summer of 2005. This revised edition was published in May 2009. A guide like this must be regularly updated to share the new experiences of Marines in Afghanistan, and **CAOCL wants to hear from you** about the effectiveness and accuracy of the guide.

How To Use This Guide

This Guide is designed to avoid abstractions and focus on relevant information which will help the Marine on the ground in Afghanistan. However, it is not a simplistic "do's and don'ts" list. Those aren't bad, but they're not enough. If you were trying to rebuild the engine of your car, for example, a simple list of "do's and don'ts" wouldn't help you much, if you didn't understand how an internal combustion engine works. Practical advice is good -- and you'll find plenty of it here-- but you'll also find *some* "theory." For example, understanding the "reason why" for not running an engine without oil ("*theory*") is better than just telling somebody not to do it ("*do's and don'ts*"). Afghan culture is like that engine -- a lot of moving parts and a lot of friction. If you're going to understand it, and operate effectively in it, you're going to have to get some theory -- some of the "why" as well as the simple "what."

There is no "silver bullet," no quick "cheat sheet" where you can pick up a few tips and say, "OK, I got it" and press on -- any more than there is for rebuilding that engine. You've got to learn it. Your enemies - the *Taliban* and HiG insurgents who will be trying to kill you - know it cold. They know it and they use it. If they know it and you don't, they've got a weapon you don't have. Then you're going to make cultural mistakes that play into their hands and get Marines hurt. **So strap yourself in and read it.** This guide is meant to get you started towards understanding both the culture of the civilians around you and the culture of the enemy. We pulled together a lot of expert knowledge to put into this guide. To help you dig deeper, wherever an expert is noted or quoted, we've put that expert's name in **bold blue ink**. At the back of the booklet, you will find a complete list of all these books. If you want to dig deeper on that particular aspect, just order a copy of it online and get it sent out to you in the mail in the field. (www.amazon.com is a good source of cheap used books.) You'll also find a handy reference guide in the back to websites with more information.

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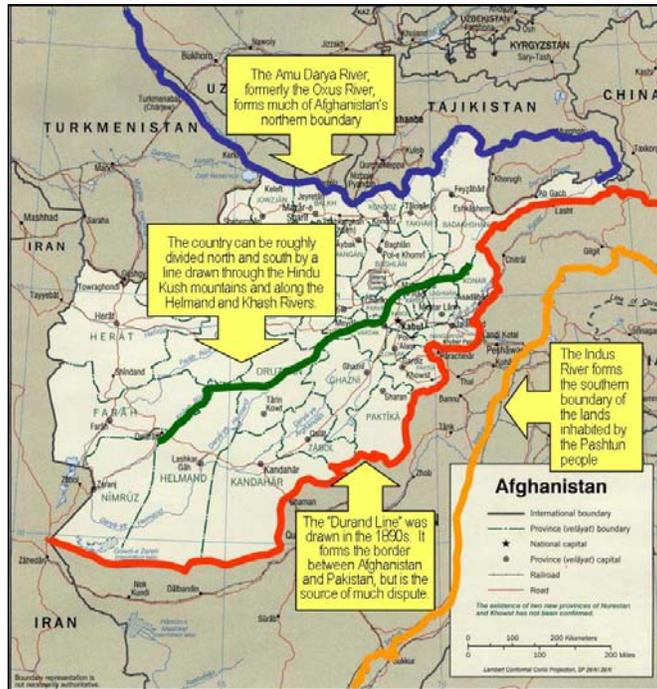
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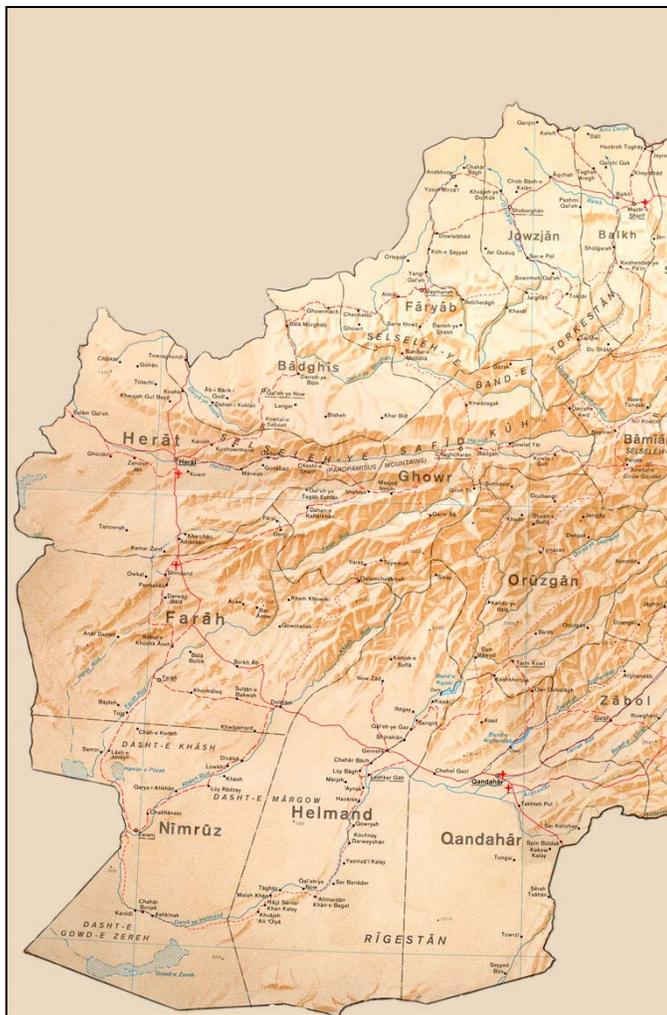
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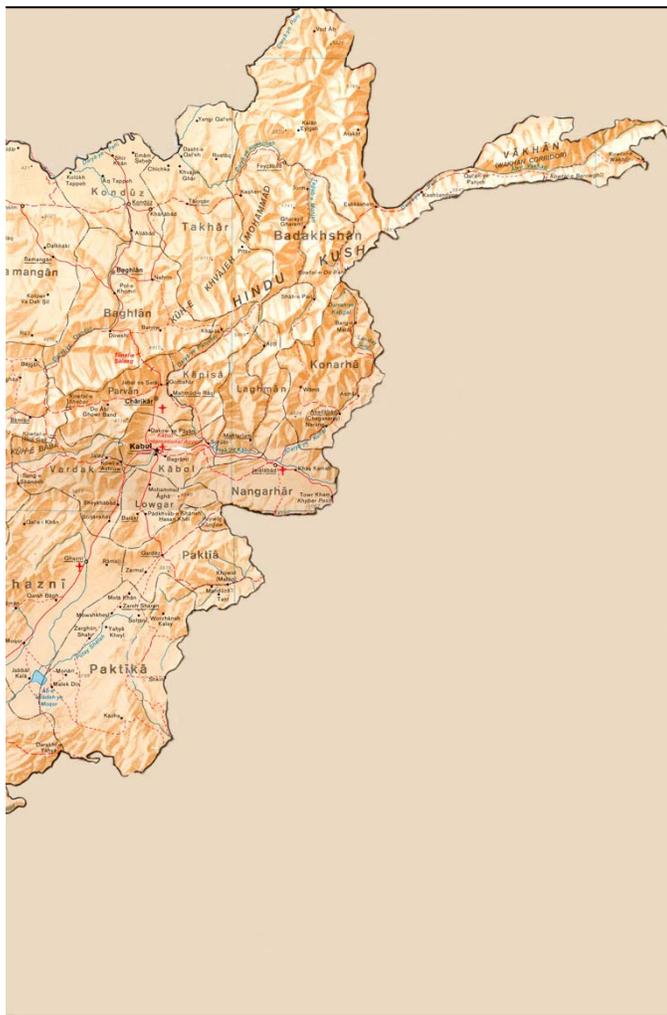
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This map of Afghanistan shows the country's northern boundary (the Amu Darya river) in blue and the southern boundary (the Durand Line) in red. The Amu Darya was once called the Oxus, and the lands north of Afghanistan were called "Transoxiana." The Durand Line was drawn by the British in 1893. It is the source of much tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan today. The orange line shows the mighty Indus River. The Pashtun people live largely between the green and orange lines. The insurgency in Afghanistan today is mostly confined the area between the green and red lines.





The Study of Culture

For 40 years, from the end of the 1950s until 2001, studying cultures, or the discipline of "cultural anthropology," was out of favor as a method of understanding and predicting human behavior. Instead, "modernization theory" held that both individuals and countries were "rational actors" who would behave the same under the same conditions to maximize their own personal benefit or profit. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 proved again how wrong this theory is. It became clear to almost all Americans that not all persons or countries were "rational" as we defined the word, or that they would work to maximize their profit as we understood it.

Unfortunately, 40 years is a long time to neglect a field of academic study. Data ages or gets lost, the experts retire or pass away, and few new students enter into the field. During World War II, the government assembled teams of experts on Japanese and German culture to help soldiers and planners. But by the Vietnam War, this kind of cultural study was out of style -- it was called "not scientific," or worse, branded as "Orientalism" by the new "social scientists." Instead, computer-based behavior models would explain everything. **On 9/11, we re-learned that culture *does* matter.**

After 9/11, there was a scramble to equip Marines and Soldiers with cultural knowledge of the battlefields they were deploying to. Because of the gap, some of what was first put out contained some mistakes or was incomplete. Eight years into the mission in Afghanistan, however, we have a much more complete picture of the human environment and have absorbed a lot of "lessons learned" in terms of the cultural terrain. They are here in this booklet.

The study of culture is never "finished." What was true yesterday is slowly changing. And it's not an exact science. So this Center is constantly collecting, updating and revising information. If you have an interesting cultural experience or find something to be different on the ground, we want to hear from you and add what you know to this Guide.

Understanding "Culture Shock"

As you live and work with the Afghans, you will need to avoid making value judgments about their culture, because these will cloud your daily judgment as a Marine. Some aspects of Afghan culture in the rural areas will seem backward and uncivilized to you. You may be tempted to try to change what you see, or to reject it as inferior to the culture you come from. As General Anthony Zinni (USMC, Retired) has said, however, **you cannot change these ancient cultural values. It's not your mission, and it won't work anyway. So you need to understand the culture, accept it without making judgments, and figure out how to work with it or around it to accomplish your mission.**

Three or four months into their tours, most Marines begin to feel a general anger towards Afghans and Afghanistan, and many experience an angry rejection of the whole Afghan experience. It's a normal set of feelings. This reaction is so common, in fact, that psychologists have a name for it: "Culture Shock." Most people experience it as a result of how different (and fubar) everything around them is from what they grew up with. So what do you do? Recognize it's happening, then try to work through it and stay neutral. You will be less effective as a Marine if you let this emotion affect your performance. Here's how:

Understanding the local culture and observing details is part of your situational awareness. So if you're going around angry and detaching yourself from your local environment, you're losing a key part of your combat alertness and turning off your "combat antennae." Little things around you can be important. *Why isn't that store open? Does a guy with a turban wrapped like that belong here?* The other Marines with you are relying on your cultural knowledge and your cultural awareness every bit as much as they are on your knowledge of your weapon. So recognize "culture shock" when you see it, and help your teammates work past it to stay focused on their situational awareness, too.

Introduction

When studying terrain, if you use a pair of binoculars, a set of night vision goggles, and infrared equipment, you see three different images. Which one is correct? All three, of course. Which one do you use? Same answer: all three. You combine them to understand the ground. The same is true of studying the cultural, or "human," terrain. You can look at "human terrain" through different "lenses," too. For example, we can study ethnic groups, or language, or religion, or social values. We might describe the different perspectives seen through these different lenses briefly as follows:

- Ethnicity: *"People do what they do because of their particular ethnic group or tribe."*
- Religion: *"People do what they do because of their religious beliefs."*
- Social Values: *"People do what they do because it's their culture to do it that way."*

Which one is correct? Again, all three are valid, but -- just like studying a real piece of ground -- there's no easy "single answer." You must combine the information. Understanding the cultural situation is a little like understanding how a play is developing in a football game. It's a dynamic situation, and there are a lot of moving parts - - you need to understand what each of the position players will do in the situation, and how well they'll do it, to know where the ball is going. It's not easy, but it's not rocket science either. Just like you can study the opponent's game videos and stats, you can study the culture and be mentally prepared for every new situation. **Afghans aren't mysterious, inscrutable people you can't understand. They're human beings, just like you. Study their culture and their language: It could mean the difference between success and failure, and it could save your life or that of other Marines around you.**

Part I: The Lens of Ethnicity

Learning Keypoints for Part I

- Afghanistan is a patchwork quilt of ethnic groups. The major fault line in Afghan society is between the Pashtun of the south and the Tajiks, Hazaras, Aimak and Uzbeks of the north. In terms of population, this divide splits the population roughly in half.
- The three main languages of Afghanistan are Pashto, spoken almost exclusively in the south, Dari, which is similar to Farsi (Persian) and is widely spoken in the north, and Uzbek, which is a Turkic language spoken by several minorities in the far north. More than two dozen other languages are also spoken in Afghanistan.
- Tension and conflict in Afghanistan are not solely the product of ethnic strife. There is often as much, or more, conflict within an ethnic group as there is between two different ethnic groups. The issue is usually power, not ethnic hatreds as such.
- Understanding these ethnic fault lines is one of three important tools you can use to figure out what is happening around you. The other two tools are understanding the role which religion plays, and understanding the social values which shape the way the people behave.
- The nomadic *Kuchi*, or *Kochi*, people who are seen throughout the southern provinces and as far north as Bagram from spring to late fall have the potential to solve the tactical intelligence problem in Afghanistan.

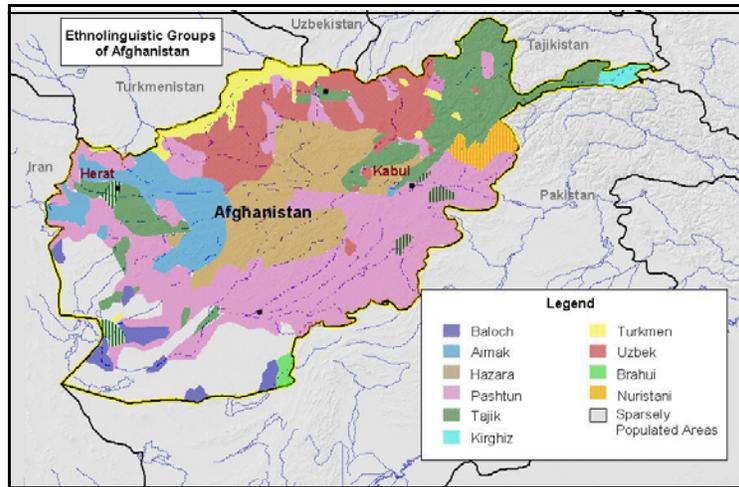
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Afghanistan is a patchwork quilt of ethnic groups. But what is an ethnic group? Is it a group of people who speak the same language? Or who share a common ancestor? Or is it people who live in the same geographic area or ecosystem, and share a common economy? Sometimes the lines are blurred. What happens, for example, if members of one ethnic group move into the middle of another ethnic group, marry, and have children who grow up speaking the local language and acting like all the other kids? If the new kids speak and act exactly the same as the other kids, and have the same values and traditions as the others, which ethnic group are they? There's no easy answer, but the question shows you that the "real world" is a complicated place.

Nevertheless, there are some meaningful differences in ethnic groups in Afghanistan, however blurry the edges might be in some cases. **The major ethnic groups of Afghanistan are traditionally referred to as the Pashtun, the Tajiks, the Hazaras, and the Uzbeks.** There are also a significant number of smaller ethnic groups, which, when important, will be discussed as well. No one knows for sure what the various percentages of the population these ethnic groups are, because there hasn't been a census taken since the early 1970s, and even that data is suspect for a number of reasons.

However, the relative size of these ethnic groups to each other is a serious source of conflict in Afghan politics, because it obviously affects how much power and representation each group should have. Therefore, if you ask a member of a particular ethnic group to tell you what percentage of the population of Afghanistan his own ethnic group represents, he will be tempted to exaggerate that percentage to you, because the greater the percentage, the more political representation -- and resources -- to which that group should be entitled.

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When studying the map above, which shows roughly where each of the main ethnic groups in Afghanistan is dominant, it is important to remember that these are not exclusive areas. Members of each ethnic group may be found all over Afghanistan, although, since the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom, there has been considerable voluntary and forced ethnic segregation at the community level, and a return to a more ethnically segregated landscape.

In the map above, for example, you will see several pockets of Pashtuns in the north of the country. These are largely Pashtuns who were forcibly resettled to the north by former governments during the first half of the 20th century in an effort to "detrribalize" Afghanistan. Some of this progress has been reversed in the last five years, and some families who were peacefully and happily integrated for decades into multi-ethnic communities have been forced to "return to their home areas" by their neighbors.

The Pashtun

The Pashtun, or Pakhtun (the pronunciation depends on where they live), are by far the largest ethnic group in the country. The British adopted an Indian word and wrongly called them "Pathans" (pronounced "Pah-TANS.") The best "guessestimate" is that Pashtuns constitute around half of the population of Afghanistan. What's more important to the deploying Marine is the fact that the southern region of the country where the counterinsurgency is being waged is virtually 99 percent Pashtun.

The Pashtun, however, are not one, monolithic ethnic bloc. As a result of centuries of ever-shifting feuds, alliances and political marriages among the tribes and clans, the fault lines and linkages in Pashtun tribal society are almost impossible to untangle, even for Afghans. Although the subject is somewhat contested among anthropologists, the easiest and most useful way to understand the approximately 30 million ethnic Pashtun is to say that they are divided into five major tribal confederations based on genealogy or common ancestry. These five major divisions are:

- the **Durrani**, or *Abdali*, or Western Pashtun confederation centered in Kandahar and Helmand Provinces of southwestern Afghanistan;
- the **Ghilzai**, or *Ghalji*, confederation dominating *Oruzgan*, *Zabol*, *Ghazni* and *Dai Kundi* Provinces and the *Katawaz* region of south-central Afghanistan;
- the **Ghurghusht** tribes, which primarily share Baluchistan province with the Baluch people of northern Pakistan;
- the **Karlanri**, or "Hill Tribes" of southern Afghanistan, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and the ill-defined borderland between them, and
- the **Sarbani**, or Eastern Pashtun, who live in southeastern Afghanistan, Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), and the princely states of Dir, Chitral and Swat in Pakistan.

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Except in times of *Jihad*, or "struggle," most of these major tribal groups rarely communicate, much less cooperate, with one another. As one Afghan expert, **Gilles Dorransoro** writes, "Opposition at the segmentary level of clan and tribe normally [has] impeded the emergence of a central power, other than at moments of crisis." Some key alliances exist, such as that of the *Kakar* tribe of the *Ghurghusht* group and the Hotaki tribe (which produced *Mullah Omar* and other top Taliban leaders) of the *Ghilzai* confederation. The *Ghilzai* and the *Durrani*, on the other hand, have been at odds for centuries, a situation which has had a profound influence on Afghan history and continues to plague Afghanistan today. Only rarely in Afghan history have the *Ghilzai* gained national power, however: Once in 1709, again briefly under the Communists (1978), and again in 1996, when *Mullah Omar* and the Taliban came to power. **The ancient power struggle between the *Ghilzai* and the *Durrani* tribal groups forms a part of what the insurgency is about.**



This sketch map shows the approximate locations of the five major tribal divisions of the Pashtun people. The red line is the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

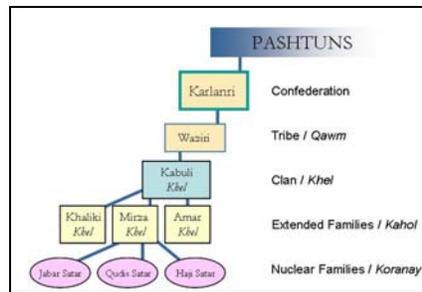
Each of the five major tribal confederations is subdivided into tribes, or *Qawms*, which are roughly analogous to an American Indian tribe, such as the Apache. Each member

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of the tribe traces his ancestry back to a single ancient ancestor. The *Yusufzai*, for example, trace their ancestry back to the biblical figure of Joseph (*Yusuf*), and it is a rare tribesman who cannot recite his family tree all the way back. Scholars believe that these genealogies were first written down for the Pashtun during the Mughal dynasty (around 1600 CE), but it would be a very bad idea to doubt out loud the genealogy of a tribesman, for whom it is a source of pride.

Tribal Organization

The chart below shows the typical subdivisions of a tribe. Below the confederation level, such as "Karlanni" in this diagram, will be many tribes, or *Qawms*. Each tribe will contain many *Khels*, or clans, such as the Kabuli Khel shown here. (Some *Khels*, like the Suleiman Khel of the Ghilzai in the Katawaz region, have grown so big that each *Khel* has still another layer of *Khels* beneath it!) Beneath each of these will be extended family groups, called *Kahols*, which in turn are comprised of varying numbers of individual families, or *Koranay*, the basic building block of Pashtun society. When two Pashtun strangers first meet, they will typically work their way up the genealogical ladder until they find their first common ancestor before beginning a conversation -- as you would if meeting a distant cousin, for example, at a family reunion.

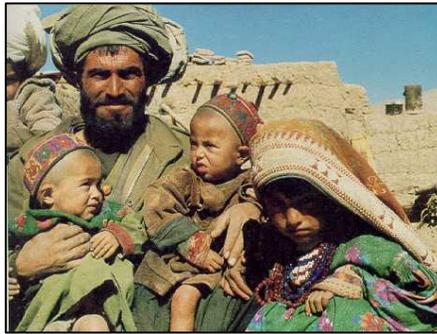


The *Durrani* Pashtun

The first of the five major Pashtun tribal confederations to consider is the *Durrani*, or *Abdali* group, which you may also sometimes see referred to as the Western Pashtun. The *Durranis* have dominated much of the political life of Afghanistan for the last 300 years, and a *Durrani* king or other leader has held power in Kabul for almost all of that time. The monarchy has always descended in the *Durrani* line, often changing hands between the *Popalzai* and the *Mohammadzai* tribes. The last king of Afghanistan, Zahir Shah, passed away in 2007. The monarchy was abolished by the new constitution approved by the *Loya Jirga* in 2004.

The *Durrani* royalty, and its grip on power (and the benefits that come with it), caused a centuries-old animosity between them and the *Ghilzai* tribes who live mostly to their east. The first President of Afghanistan under the new constitution, Hamid Karzai, is a *Durrani*, of the *Popalzai* tribe. The *Durranis* live mostly in Kandahar and Helmand provinces, and speak the "soft" Pashto language (in which "sh" sounds like "sh" instead of the "k" sound of "hard" Pakhto.) The *Durranis*, however, have never been regarded as warriors or fighters, and are rarely found in the army.

*Durrani
man with his
children.*



The *Ghilzai* Pashtun

The *Ghilzai*, or *Ghalji*, Pashtun, are the largest of the Pashtun groups, more than double the size of the *Durrani* nation. They live predominantly in Oruzgan, Zabol, Dai Kundi and Ghazni provinces, as well as the Katawaz region of Paktika province. In former times, *Ghilzais* made up the majority of the Afghan Army officer corps. This was their place of honor in the society, but that has been eliminated, and there are now few *Ghilzais* in the new Afghan National Army (ANA), and fewer still in the officer corps. **The majority of the leadership of the early Taliban were *Ghilzais***, notably from the *Hotak* tribe of Mullah Muhammad Omar Akhund, who was born in 1961 west of Kandahar city in the district of Panjway. (*Akhund* is an honorary title for a man learned in Islam.) In addition, the leader of the *Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin* (HiG) movement, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, is also a *Ghilzai*, of the *Kharoti* tribe.

The *Ghilzais* are a fiercely independent group of tribes who are generally at odds with the *Durranis*. Three of seven main *Mujahideen* (resistance) groups of the Soviet-Afghan War were led by *Ghilzais* (none of the seven were led by *Durranis*). The *Ghilzais* have frequently been a source of instability in Afghan history, and are famous as warriors.



Ghilzai tribal leaders of the Suleiman Khel. The cross-shoulder pistol rig is the symbol of an important Khan. Khans however are not chiefs like the Shaykhs of Iraq and cannot give orders to other tribesmen outside their own extended families.

The *Ghurghusht* Pashtun

Only a few *Ghurghusht* tribesmen, mostly of the *Kakar* tribe, live in Afghanistan, in the far south of Kandahar province. The great majority live in Pakistan's Baluchistan province, south of the Durand Line, the notional border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but which no Pashtun really pays any attention to or considers to be a legitimate national boundary.

The former British colonial authorities believed the *Ghurghusht* to be a relatively peaceful group of tribes, but since 2000 they have become more radicalized. **The *Kakars* and the *Hotaki Ghilzais* of *Mullah Omar* formed an alliance by marriage about a century ago, and are frequently linked to the *Taliban*.** Several key Taliban leadership positions are held by *Kakar Mullahs*, and the *Kakars* are generally hostile to Coalition forces.



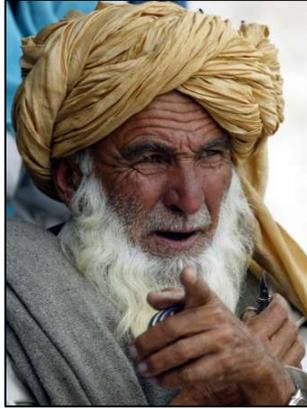
Kakar man with dark turban, photographed near the town of Lorelei in Baluchistan province.

The *Karlanri* Pashtun

The *Karlanri*, or "Hill Tribes," are a large group of extremely independent Pashtun *Qawms*, many of whose names are woven into the legends of the frontier, like the *Waziris*, the *Mahsuds*, the *Zadrans* and the *Afridis*. No conqueror or invader has ever subdued these Hillmen, who live in Paktika, Paktia, and Khost provinces of southern Afghanistan, and the remote Agencies of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of northern Pakistan. Many tribes, like the *Waziris*, live on both sides of the border and give it no thought. Historically, if the *Ghilzais* succeed in enlisting the support of most of the *Karlanri* tribes in rebellion against the government in Kabul, the security problem in Afghanistan becomes acute, as it is in 2009. The Haqqani family of Jallaludin Haqqani directs many fighters from these tribes today.



Zadran tribesmen in Neka District of Paktika. The man in the front row, far left, is a Taliban fighter (note the AK47 in front of him and the Chinese-made green canvas ammo pouches worn on his chest). The two men, front row center, are Mullahs, wearing the typical white or light grey turbans common to that position. Note also the traditional eye make-up of the Mullah seated in the front, second from right. Once common, this is now seen usually only in the most remote areas.



Two Karlanri tribesmen. The elder in the upper photo is a Waziri from the Bermol region of Waziristan. The Bermol part of Waziristan is in Afghanistan's Paktika province. Most of Waziristan is in the FATA of Pakistan, part of an old border agreement with the British. The saffron colored turban and the way it is wrapped is typical of Waziris. Colorized postcards from 1900 show this same exact color and style.



The Afridi elder, below, shows the classic profile of a Pashtun hillman, with the famous hawk nose and the full white beard of an elder. He wears the hard basket khola, or cap, under his turban, a uniquely Afridi style, recognizable at 100 yards by any Afghan. Such tribal styles do not change much, and Afghans can easily distinguish the clan, tribe and occupation of other Afghans at such ranges with knowledge of these tribal styles. Note that both men wear one end of their turban cloth down over the shoulder, a sure sign of a Pashtun, but a style sometimes copied now by other ethnicities as well.

The *Sarbani* Pashtun

In Afghanistan, the *Sarbani*, or eastern Pashtun tribes, live in the area around Jalalabad and Assadabad in southeastern part of the country. The majority of *Sarbanis*, however, live in Pakistan, in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP). The *Sarbani* speak the "hard" dialect of Pashto, known as "Pahkto." The tiny Afghan *Pashai* minority group inhabits the area between *Sarbani* lands and Nuristan, speaks a dialect of Pashto, and typically allies itself with the *Sarbani*. Many *Sarbanis* have become successful businessmen and farmers, and tend to live in the more settled and better irrigated areas, known as *Qalaang* land. As a result of their greater assimilation, some other Pashtuns say they are losing their "Pashtun-ness." Nevertheless, they are often fierce fighters, and several tribes, most notably the *Yusufzai*, were held by the British to produce outstanding soldiers when enlisted into the colonial British Indian Army.

*A Shinwari
Pashtun of the Sarbani group,
photographed in Lowari Pass,
which is called the
"Gateway to the Chitral."*



The *Kuchi* Pashtun

The *Kuchi*, or *Kochi*, are not a separate tribal group of the Pashtun in the sense of their ancestry, but they are different in other important ways. The *Kuchi* are a nomadic people who travel north and south across the Durand Line each year with their herds of sheep, goats and camels. Most *Kuchi* (the word means "nomad") make their winter camp, or *Qish-lak*, near the Indus River or in the northern Punjab. In the spring of each year, the long trek begins. Families and herds move northwards together towards higher summer pastures in Afghanistan. They will range as far north as the Shomali Plain outside of Bagram Airbase to make their summer camp, or *Yil-lak*. (In Pakistan, they are called *Powindahs*, which also means "nomad.") Ethnically, roughly 70 percent of the *Kuchi* today are *Ghilzai* Pashtun. About 20 percent are *Durrani* Pashtun. (A small number of nomads in the south are of the Brahui ethnic group, and, in the Wakhan Corridor in the far north of Afghanistan, there are some nomadic Khirghiz.) In the fall, they begin the long walk south again.



A Kuchi camp in the Katawaz. Kuchi women often dress more colorfully and are less totally hidden away than other Pashtun women.

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Their numbers have been decimated by 30 years of war in Afghanistan, but they remain the largest nomadic group on earth today. Perhaps 150,000-200,000 still make the annual migration. Some have settled down over the years, and some are semi-nomadic, meaning that some stay in Pakistan each year, while other family members move the herds. Because they are nomadic, there are few, if any, literate *Kuchi*, and their access to health and veterinary care is very limited.

There are many operationally important aspects of the *Kuchi*. First, each family goes to virtually the exact same campground every year, because grazing boundaries for each group are carefully defined. **So the *Kuchi* outside your firebase this summer will be the same *Kuchi* outside your firebase next summer.** Second, the *Kuchi* see and hear everything around them. They graze their herds up in high pastures which few other Afghans or OEF patrols ever see.



A typical Kuchi encampment in Afghanistan.

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Third, they share information among their different groups through a communication network that is only vaguely understood by anthropologists. They have no radios or cell phones, but still pass information quickly and accurately across hundreds of miles. Thus, the Kuchi on the plains outside your firebase know everything that is going on within a 100-mile radius of your position. Their information fidelity is amazingly good: because the Kuchi have been sellers of information for centuries, the information has to be reliable to be valuable. Fourth, **the Kuchi live outside the politics of ordinary Pashtun village society.** They have no vendettas and no tribal feuds like the sedentary villagers around them, and there is relatively little friction between them. The *Kuchi* are an ancient part of the Afghan landscape, and few people bother them. Even the Taliban mostly leaves them alone. However, like the Gypsies of Europe, most Afghans look down on them as "dirty" and think of them as occupying a lower rung of society. (Some Afghans will tell you that "*Ghilzai*" and "*Kuchi*" are synonyms, but they are not, because most *Ghilzais* are not nomadic.)

Imaginative intelligence officers will see the possibilities, and any patrol would do well to stop occasionally and chat with *Kuchis* seen along the road. A few blankets and some bottled water may be exchanged for answers to useful questions. (The Provincial Reconstruction Teams, or PRTs, often have a lot of humanitarian supplies like blankets, tentage, tools, and so on in storage.) The *Kuchi* are tolerated wherever they travel, because they are still an important part of the economy and the ecosystem. Their herds provide vital genetic diversity to sedentary herds, and their grazing has been shown to slowly convert desert into pasture land. They are very poor, and the men look for day labor jobs at both ends of their trek. In addition to paying jobs, clothing, blankets, tools, and tentage, the *Kuchi* are also in need of basic medical and veterinary services. Friendships with them may pay many operational and tactical dividends.

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When first visiting a *Kuchi* camp, they will be suspicious and worried about the motive for your visit. Do not approach too closely to the tents -- no closer than 50 meters. Some one expendable (a young man) will come out to see what you want. Drink tea with them, assure them you just want to be good neighbors, and that you respect the *Kuchi* and the *Kuchi* way of life.

On your future visits to the same group, the more important men in the encampment will gradually make themselves known, and the group will become more friendly to you, once they learn to trust you. **Remember, although they are not literate, they have survived for centuries through their intelligence, quick wits, sharp eyes and local knowledge.** It will take time and effort, but forging a long-term, good-neighborly relationship with the *Kuchi* in your operational area could pay good security dividends for you -- and those who come after you.

A Kuchi elder with hennaed (red-dyed) hair. The small square amulet he is wearing on his Khola (cap) by his temple contains a scripture from the Quran (prepared by a Mullah with special training) as a cure in this case for migraine headaches. Such amulets are a common form of medical treatment in the rural areas.



The Tajiks

Some anthropologists dispute that the Tajiks are even an ethnic group at all. The best way to describe this group of Afghans is as the group of Dari (Farsi) speaking Sunni Muslims not of Pashtun or Mongolian descent. The Afghan people we call Tajiks most often refer to themselves by more local descriptors, such as "*Panshiris*" for the powerful clans which live in and around the Panshiri valley north and east of Kabul, or "*Heratis*" for those who live in Herat province in the northwest of the country. Although ethnically distinct, the Dari-speaking Chahar Aimak people in and around Herat province are often lumped together with the greater Tajik ethnic bloc. Added together, all these Dari-speaking Sunnis comprise roughly 25 percent of the population.

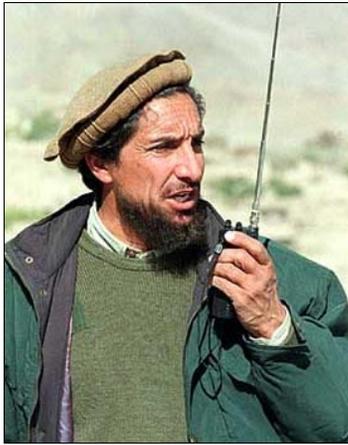
Because the Tajiks, together with the Hazaras, took the brunt of the fighting against the takeover of the Taliban in 1996, and the defeat of the Taliban during Operation Enduring Freedom, their political position is that they deserve a larger representation in the government than 25 percent. **History has shown, however, that Afghanistan has never been stable when a Tajik-dominated government held power in Kabul.** While power must be shared in a way that protects the rights and interests of the Tajiks, even most Tajiks will admit that a Pashtun must sit at the top of the pyramid of power in Kabul for the country to be at peace.

As a group, the Tajiks are a hardy, tough, and politically savvy element of Afghan society with a flair for successful trading and business. They are brave and resourceful fighters. The national hero of Afghanistan, Ahmed Shah Massoud, known as the "Lion of the Panshir," was a charismatic natural leader with a gift for combat leadership and an intuitive grasp of tactics that served him well in years of fighting against the Soviet occupation (1979-1989) and the Taliban (1995-2001). He was murdered by an *al Qaeda* suicide team posing as journalists on September 9, 2001. The Tajiks are disproportionately represented in the Afghan National Army (ANA), especially in the officer corps.

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Above, a Tajik man wearing a Pakol cap, vest, and a prayer scarf. This style of cap is popular with all Afghans of all ethnic groups, as well as being a major souvenir item. The shape, material, style, and the way it is rolled up reflect tribal and ethnic preferences.



Below, The fabled Mujahideen leader, Ahmed Shah Masood, a revered national hero, was a Tajik from the Panshir valley north of Bagram Air Base. He led a resistance group against the Soviets that fought off at least six major armored assaults by crack Soviet forces. He tried unsuccessfully to form a coalition government and then fought the Taliban takeover. He was murdered by al Qaeda terrorists on September 9, 2001.

The Aimak

The Aimak, or Chahar Aimak (“*Four Clans*”) people live in northeastern Iran and northwest Afghanistan. They are a Farsi- and Dari-speaking people who for this reason are frequently, but incorrectly, lumped together with the Tajik peoples. The four clans are the Taimani (the predominating element in the population of Ghowr), the Ferozkhoi, the Temuri, and the Jamshidi. They are Hanifi Sunni Muslims and have shown little or no interest in Islamic fundamentalism or *jihad*.

Members of the four clans of the Aimak tribe are seen in the photos on the right. The map, below, shows their approximate distribution in Iran and Afghanistan. It should be remembered that they are not the only peoples who live in these areas.



The Hazaras

According to romantic legend, the Hazaras are the descendents of Genghis Khan, the great Mongol conqueror who controlled much of the known world by 1200CE. The word "Hazara" means "thousand" in Farsi, and Genghis Khan left garrisons behind in multiples of 1,000 warriors. That, plus the clearly Mongolian facial features, has given rise to that belief. Recent anthropology suggests the less colorful explanation that they may simply be the descendants of a larger ethnic migration in ancient times. Whatever the case of their origins, the Hazara, who comprise 12 to 15 percent of the population of Afghanistan, occupy the lowest rung on its economic ladder and have been the victims of persecution and "ethnic cleansing" for centuries.

This is primarily because they are Shi'a Muslims, while virtually all other Afghans are Sunni Muslims. Unlike most other ethnic groups in Afghanistan, their ethnic bloc is "landlocked" inside a landlocked country, and they have no ethnic kinsmen in bordering countries, as do the Uzbeks, for example (in Uzbekistan), or the Turkmen (in neighboring Turkmenistan). This makes them isolated and vulnerable.

A Hazara militia fighter with an RPG7 rocket launcher at the site of the ancient giant Bamian Buddhas, which were wantonly destroyed by the Taliban. Note the Asian appearance resulting from the epicanthic fold around his eyes. As a result of their Asian features, they are easily distinguished and discriminated against by other Afghans. Because of widespread bigotry, their position in Afghan society today is not unlike that of Black Americans in the American South in the 1920s and 1930s.

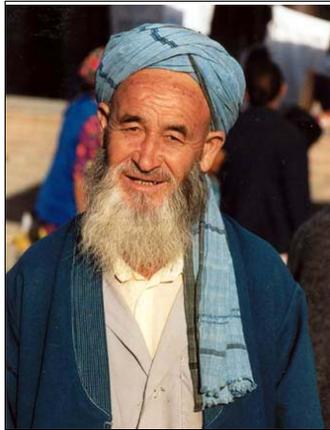


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Hazaras typically hold the most menial jobs, frequently work as household servants and construction laborers, and continue to be the victims of racial prejudice. Tens of thousands were slaughtered by the Taliban during their reign of terror from 1996 to 2001. The Hazaras speak a dialect of Dari called "Hazari" which can generally be understood by other Dari speakers. Hazaras are easily recognizable from other ethnicities because of their Mongolian facial features. US military personnel assigned to mentor the ANA should be alert for discrimination against them in the ranks. Few Hazaras have been selected for the officer corps.

The Uzbeks

The Uzbeks are a small group in Afghanistan, representing perhaps six percent of the population. Unlike the Tajiks and the Hazaras, they speak a Turkic language, and an Uzbek and a Turk can generally still make themselves understood in a conversation. Uzbeks are well-represented in the ANA.



Uzbek elder with turban. He wears one end of his turban down over his shoulder in imitation of the Pashtun style, a relatively new fashion. However, the more compact turban style worn higher on the head is distinctive. Also, the indigo blue color of his coat is popular with Uzbeks, and is often seen in Uzbek clothing.

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Because of their relatively small size as an ethnic group, the Uzbeks have often formed alliances with their neighbors the Tajiks. Both are Sunni Muslims, and the two groups share many common social values. The best known, or most infamous, Uzbek leader is Abdul Rashid Dostum, whose rapidly changing allegiances and power grabs have left many political enemies in his wake.

The Turkmen

Another Turkic-speaking minority in northern Afghanistan are the Turkmen. They comprise no more than three percent of the population, and live across the Amu Darya river, Afghanistan's northern border, from Turkmenistan, with whom they share descent, language, and customs. They are a hardy pastoral people and make tough soldiers, but because of their small numbers, they play little role in Afghanistan's politics, and are rarely seen or encountered by Marines in country. There are a handful in the ANA enlisted ranks, but few if any are officers.



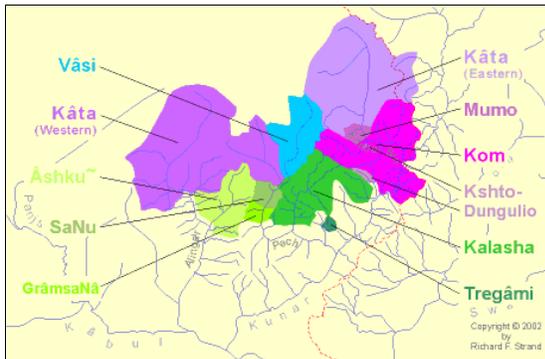
Above left, Turkmen man with the typical Turkmen fur headdress. This headdress is a sure sign of a Turkmen. Above right, a group of Turkmen women and girls at a wedding ceremony. Marines in Afghanistan will rarely encounter Turkmen.

The Peoples of Nuristan Province

The peoples of Nuristan province have long been a fascinating subject of study by cultural anthropologists. They comprise only a tiny fraction of the population of Afghanistan, no more than three percent (but 100 percent of Nuristan province), and they live in near total isolation in the steep mountains and narrow mountain valleys of that region. **Their province is a known operational area for the enemy guerilla forces of Hizb-i-Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, however, as well as other extremists and criminal groups, who use the province for rest and training. It may thus become an area of increased cultural interest for US forces, so it requires more than a passing mention here in the guide.**

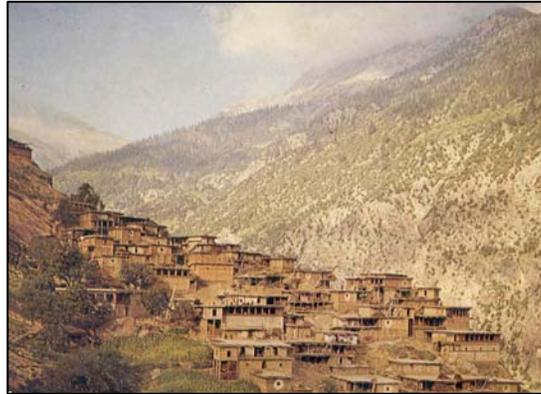
While virtually all of Afghanistan had converted to Islam by 1000CE, the tribes of Nuristan were not converted until barely a century ago. Until then they practiced an animist religion and were called "Kafirs" ("unbelievers"). The region was known on maps as *Kafiristan*. (In the movie and short story by Rudyard Kipling, "The Man Who Would Be King," the two British adventurers were headed for Kafiristan.)

Chart showing the main tribes and languages of Nuristan.



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There are five languages spoken by some 15 ethnic groups in Nuristan. These were formerly divided into *Safid Posh* (White Coat) and *Siah Posh* groups, but this distinction is now archaic. (The term "white coat" may have been an ancient reference to the relative wealth of a man in Nuristan, whereas the "black coat" may have indicated greater relative poverty.) The peoples of Nuristan are believed to have intermarried with the descendants of the Greek civilization which reached Afghanistan with the army of Alexander the Great in 325_{BCE}. The people of Nuristan are rarely seen outside of Nuristan province, and their valleys are so remote and hard to reach that only a few villages have so far been visited. There is now a PRT operating in Nuristan province.



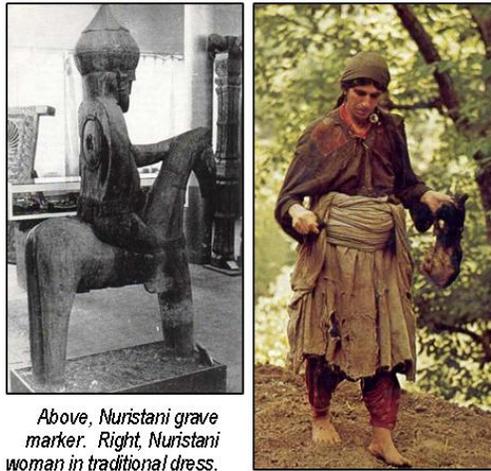
The Nuristanis typically live in wooden houses clustered in cascading levels, such that one man's front porch is usually another man's roof.

The Nuristani follow the dress strictures of conservative Afghan society a little less rigidly than other ethnic groups in Afghanistan. For example, women and men sometimes

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go without head coverings. Women wear a traditional style consisting of loose pajamas, a wrapped dress with large waist sash, and often wrap their lower legs in distinctive leggings. Colorful ornamented jackets are also commonly worn. *Purdah*, or the shielding of women from the eyes of men, is less practiced in Nuristan, and men and women are often seen together.

Nuristani grave markers have been observed fairly recently bearing traditional carvings, such as stylized horse heads, which are never seen in Muslim cemeteries. This suggests that Islam in Nuristan may be locally adapted. This process of layering a new set of beliefs over another, older, set of traditional beliefs is known as *syncretism*. A few soldiers from the peoples of Nuristan soldiers may be found in the Afghan National Army. Language for these recruits is often an issue, as few people in this isolated region speak any language other than ones from the regional itself.



Above, Nuristani grave marker. Right, Nuristani woman in traditional dress.

The Baluch

The Baluch are an Iranian people inhabiting part of Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. They speak Baluchi, which is a north-western Iranian language. The Baluch are Muslims of the Hanafi school. About 70 percent live in Pakistan, 20 percent in Iran, and the rest in Afghanistan. The total Baluchi population in the three countries is about 4 million. In Pakistan, the Baluchi are divided into two groups, the Sulaimani and the Makrani, separated from each other by a compact block of the Brahui ethnic group. The Baluch of Pakistan are currently waging a low-level insurgency against the government of Pakistan for more local control of natural resources in Baluchistan province, which is also home to many Taliban guerillas and supporters. In Afghanistan, they inhabit the harsh deserts of the southwestern corner of the country, where there is little vegetation and population density is correspondingly low. **Their social customs and culture are similar to the Pashtun, with whom they are usually friendly.**



A group of three Baluchi men. Note how headdress, hair and beard styles differ from the Pashtun..

The Brahui

The 250,000 Brahui of Afghanistan live in a part of the country called *Registan*, "the Land of Sand." **Although their numbers are small, a glance at the map below shows that they migrate through an area that could be called "Taliban West."** Like the Kuchi discussed on pages 24-27, they share information among themselves about whatever they see. Thus, a relationship with the Brahui could be very helpful from an intelligence perspective.

The Brahui occupy only a small part of Afghanistan (shown in green), but it is an area where the Taliban is active.



They are a nomadic people who do not speak either Pashto or Dari, but rather a Dravidian language, which is a mystery for anthropologists, because the nearest Dravidian language speakers are 1000 miles to the south in India. The Brahui are Sunni Muslims who are divided in 29 tribes. They organize themselves into groups of cooperating households called *khalks*. Each *khalk* has combined their herds into one flock under the care of a professional resident shepherd. The *khalks* are beneficial to the economy of the Brahui. By utilizing a resident shepherd who can control up to 500 sheep, the men and their adult sons are able to work on local village farms in return for wheat, and to take their stock to market for sale. They are also free to exchange information with other Brahui about the locations and news of other camps and flocks.

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The Brahui have become expert shepherds through the use of the *khalks*. When the herds increase to more than 500 animals, the *khalk* will multiply, and a shift of tents will form a new *khalk*. Brahui marriages are arranged within the families. First-cousin marriages are preferred, especially between a man and his father's brother's daughter. Although it is permissible for a man to have several wives, the expenses incurred tend to limit this practice. Divorce is rare. The ideal family consists of married sons who live with their parents. After the father's death, the brothers continue living together with a united family estate, following the leadership of the eldest son.

Their social code is similar to that of the Pashtun, emphasizing honor, independence, and patrilineal ancestry. They have shown little or no interest in religious extremism, and are slowly being absorbed into sedentary Pakistani society.



A Brahui woman and Brahui man. The dress of Brahui men is very similar to that of Pashtun men. As with Kuchi women, Brahui women are slightly less conservative in their facial covering, although male Marines will never see one this close. Life is hard and often short for the Brahui. Like the Kuchi, their movements and exchange of information with other neighboring Brahui means they may know a lot about the movements of the Taliban.

Other Afghan Ethnic Groups

Other minor ethnic groups in country include the Shi'a *Qizilbash* (literally, "redheads"), the *Ismaili* Wahki people in the extreme northwest, *Arabs* (who speak Dari), the *Pashai*, a small Pashto-speaking group between the Pashtun lands and Nuristan province around Assadabad, and the *Khirghiz* in the far north, who are nomadic and live in round huts called *Yurts*. People known as the *Sayeds* (the correct plural is *Saadat*) are sometimes incorrectly identified as an ethnic group. However, *Saadat* are not an ethnic group *per se*, but rather persons who trace their lineage directly to the Prophet Mohammed. (There are no female *Saadat*, only the daughters of *Saadat*.)

A Khirgiz man showing strong Mongolian features. A few Khirghiz nomads sometimes enter the Wakhan corridor in the far north of Afghanistan, but are rarely seen by OEF personnel.



Non-Muslims

On the southern edge of the Afghan-Pakistan border live a tiny group of about 5,000 non-Muslims called the Kalash people. They are believed to be of ancient Greek descent. In addition, a small number of Sikhs and Hindus live in Kabul and Gardez, where they are merchants and traders.

Two Kalash girls just south of the Afghan border in the area near Chitral. The Pashtun call them the Kalash-Kafirs (unbelievers) because they are still animists.



Summary of Part I:

Afghanistan is a patchwork quilt of ethnic groups. The major fault line in Afghan society is between the Pashtun of the south and the Tajiks, Hazaras, Aimaks, and Uzbeks of the north. In terms of the national population, this divide splits Afghanistan roughly in half. Too much may be made of this division, however. Tension and conflict are not solely the product of ethnic strife, although it is certainly in play. There is often as much -- or more -- conflict within an ethnic group as there is between two different ethnic groups. **The issue is often power, not ethnicity as such. Things are always more complex than they appears on the surface.**

The nomadic Kuchi people who are seen throughout the southern provinces and as far north as Bagram from spring to late fall are traders in information and have the potential to solve a big piece of the tactical intelligence puzzle in Afghanistan. The Brahui nomads are small in number but move through an area in which the Taliban frequently operate. **Both cultural groups are usually overlooked, but a good relationship with them could be very helpful in the counterinsurgency effort.**

The three main languages are Pashto, spoken almost exclusively in the south, Dari, which is similar to Farsi and is widely spoken in the north, and Uzbek, which is a Turkic language spoken by several minorities in the far north. More than a dozen other languages are also spoken in Afghanistan, including 5 tribal languages in Nuristan, Baluchi, and Brahui.

The ethnic fault lines of Afghanistan are one of three major shaping influences which create the political and social environment around you. **They have been a part of the landscape for more than a thousand years, and they will not change during your lifetime.** The other two major shaping influences are religion and social values. We will examine the role of religion next.

Part II: The Lens of Religion

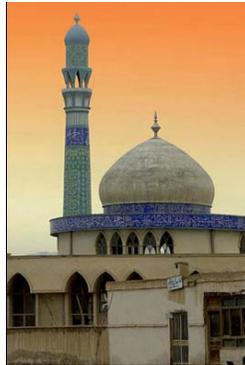
Learning Keypoints for Part II

- Islam is a central part of Afghan identity. It shapes behavior in many ways, and most Afghans are devout in their beliefs. Virtually 100 percent of Afghans are Muslims, and Islamic law, known as Sharia law, is an important component of justice in Afghanistan.
- Islam has five pillars: (1) The commitment to the oneness of God, (2) daily prayers five times per day, (3) fasting during the month of Ramadan, (4) caring for the poor (giving alms), and (5) a pilgrimage to Mecca once in a Muslim's lifetime for those able to afford it.
- About 85% of Afghans are Sunnis of the Hanifi school. The remainder, mostly the minority Hazaras, are Shia. There are a small number of Shia Muslims in each ethnic group. The differences are a source of conflict.
- Islam has no priesthood, although some scholars believe the Ayatollahs of Shia Islam function like priests in some ways. Spiritual leaders may include *Imams* (scholars), *Pirs* (teachers), *Sayeds* (the male descendants of the Prophet Mohammed), and *Maulvis* (clerics with less knowledge than *Imams*).
- The village *mullah* is a critical figure in the counterinsurgency struggle. He is not generally an educated man, or an important local figure in terms of his ancestry, but he is influential in shaping mass opinion in his village, and stands to gain the most if the *Taliban* were to regain power. Understanding and engaging the mullahs is critical to success.
- Sufism plays an important role in the rural areas in shaping social resistance to change and fueling *jihad*.

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Another "lens" through which the culture of Afghanistan can be studied is that of religion. Afghanistan was once a thriving center for Buddhism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism as well, but today 99 percent of all Afghans are Muslims (there are still a few Sikh and Hindu traders in the major cities, and some people in Nuristan may still be Animists). It is hard to explain to a Westerner how deeply ingrained Islam is in the lives of Afghans, because there is really no parallel in Western religion. As the legendary British World War I leader of Bedouin Arab guerillas, **T.E. Lawrence**, wrote almost a century ago, "Islam is so all-pervading an element that there is little religiosity, little fervor, and no regard for externals. Do not think from their conduct that they are careless. Their conviction of the truth of their faith, and its share in every act and thought and principle of their daily life is so intimate and intense as to be unconscious, unless roused by opposition. Their religion is as much a part of nature to them as is sleep or food."

The mosque is the equivalent of a church for Christians. You must never enter a mosque with your shoes on, and you must never enter a mosque with a weapon of any type. Under normal circumstances, you should not enter without an invitation from a religious leader. In many places, the mosque also serves as a hostel for travelers. Many mosques have boarding schools for boys, known as madrassas, attached.



There are five obligations for all Muslims, regardless of which tradition or school they follow. These are often called the "Five Pillars of Islam."

The Five Pillars of Islam

- **Shahadah: Testament to the Oneness of God** and the finality of the prophethood of Mohammed. (To become a Muslim, one says the words “There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his Prophet.”)
- **Salat: Establishment of the daily prayers.** All Muslims are expected to pray facing Mecca five times per day at specified times, except in special cases. The call to prayer is sung each time from the Mosque.
- **Sawam: Self-purification by Fasting.** For the month of *Ramadan* each year (usually around November), all Muslims except pregnant or breastfeeding women, the elderly, newborns, toddlers, and the sick fast (take no food or water) from dawn to dark each day.
- **Zakat: Concern for and almsgiving to the needy.** Muslims should give a percentage of their wealth each year to the poor.
- **Hajj: The pilgrimage to the Holy City of Mecca** for those who are able. Every Muslim who is physically and financially able to make the pilgrimage, or *Hajj*, to the holy city of Mecca (In Saudi Arabia) is obliged to do so once in his or her life. Because of the huge cost of making the trip and limited number of spaces allocated to each country, for the great majority of Afghans, this is an impossible dream. A Muslim who has fulfilled this obligation is given the honorific title "Hajji," a word which is filled with deep emotional and religious meaning and which implies great respect. **A person who has not completed the Hajj should never be called "Hajji,"** as this is a deep humiliation and shame to the man who has been unable to fulfill this sacred obligation due to poverty.

Islam and Christianity

Muslims respect the prophethood of Jesus and Moses. In fact, Jesus is mentioned more often in the Holy *Quran* than Mohammed. However, Muslims do not believe in the Resurrection, or that Jesus was the Son of God. Rather, they believe he was a great prophet who was a mortal man. While they revere his teachings, however, Muslims believe that Mohammed was the final prophet sent by God, and he is therefore referred to as the "Seal of the Prophets."

The Holy *Quran*, or Koran, is held by Muslims to be the exact word of God. In this respect it differs from the Bible. Muslims believe God spoke to Mohammed through an angel, and that Mohammed transcribed the words which God spoke exactly onto the page. It must therefore be handled only with the reverence shown to a divine object. Whereas a Christian might casually take his or her Bible from one room and lay it on a bedside table for reading before bed, a Muslim would never do this with a Koran. It is never touched or moved casually. This is part of the reason why Muslims are so deeply offended if a Koran is mishandled. **It must, however, be in Arabic to be a Koran.** The same words translated into English, for example, are not the Koran, they are only an interpretation of the Koran.



Prayers are made in a ritual sequence, and always facing in the direction of Mecca. Never attempt to interrupt them.

Islam has no priesthood. A Muslim has a direct relationship to God. **However, the Holy *Quran* is only one source of Islam; the other is the *Hadiths*, the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Mohammed.** Religious scholars, known as *Maulvi*, *Imams*, and *Pirs*, devote their lives to the study of Islam, and discuss and debate the meanings of specific verses (*Suras*) of the Koran or specific *Hadiths*. Differences in interpretation are reflected in the different schools of Islam.

The largest divide in Islam, that between Sunnis and Shi'ites, resulted from the issue of who would be the leader of the religion after the death of the Prophet Mohammed. Mohammed himself declared that it should be a succession of Caliphs, and this is the tradition followed by Sunnis. However, the Shia broke from this tradition, and believe that the true leader of Islam should be the lineal descendant of Mohammed. (Mohammed had a daughter, Fatima, who married Ali, Mohammed's cousin. They had two sons, Hassan and Hussein). In many parts of the world, this dispute is the source of religious tension and violence. (In Afghanistan, only the Hazara and a few scattered pockets of Tajiks, Pashtuns and Wahkis are Shiites.)



A Madrassa is a boarding school where boys learn to read, write, and recite the Koran. In many Madrassa, science and math are also taught.

Some Simple Guidelines for Respecting Islam

- Never attempt to interrupt prayers.
- If you must pass a man praying, pass at a respectful distance. Do not walk between the man praying and Mecca -- walk behind him.
- Never spit or urinate towards the West in the presence of Afghans -- that is the direction of Mecca from Afghanistan and it is hugely disrespectful.
- If you are sleeping in a bivouac with Afghan soldiers (such as on an ANA operation), sleep with your head pointed towards Mecca -- never your feet (doing so got many British officers killed by their own men during the 19th Century.)
- Be considerate during Ramadan -- if you are out in the presence of Afghans, do not eat and drink in public, or offer them food or water. They cannot take it. Take your meal or drink privately.
- Avoid all discussion of religion with Afghans. Do not bring it up. If asked, simply state what you believe honestly, but do not make comparisons between your religion and theirs.
- Do not touch Qurans or prayer rugs. If giving these as gifts to local Mosques, let Afghan government personnel handle them.
- Never enter a Mosque without invitation. Never enter a Mosque with shoes or boots on. Never enter a Mosque with a weapon.
- Do not cremate the dead. Muslims must be buried within 24 hours of death.

The Village Mullah

One of the most important figures in the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan is the village *Mullah*.

Traditionally, the *Mullah* had a position in rural Pashtun life on the lower rungs of the clan hierarchy. There are no priests in Islam, so he is not a priest, but more like a cross between a monk and a notary public with important village functions. Rural *Mullahs*, generally speaking, are neither born into one of the high *Nikat* lineages in the clan (see pages 55-57 for a full discussion of *Nikat*), nor is he a *Sufi* mystic. He is also not a scholar respected in the culture for achieving great Islamic learning, such as a *Pir*, a *Maulvi*, or an *Imam*, and he is not a person of importance by bloodline, such as a *Sayed* (a descendent of the prophet Mohammed) or the descendent of a revered saint. And he's not a great warrior. Thus he is not typically a person who derives a great deal of respect from the traditional sources of learning, wealth, battle or bloodline.

The *Mullah* however, has his own power network. On one level, his religious knowledge enables him to preside at ordinary village rituals such as births, deaths and marriages. Traditionally, *Mullahs* also serve as impartial mediators in tribal disputes. A *Mullah* also sometimes has a role as a healer, if he has received the proper instruction for making amulets for the relief of aches and pains. **However, *Mullahs* also form a hidden leadership network, reinforcing one another, and wielding extensive power to shape tribal behavior, foment *jihad*, and ensure conformity.**

The *Mullah* has an extensive covert communication network, via his *Talibs* (*madrassa* students), who travel throughout the op area without attracting attention. **Harold Deane**, a political agent on the frontier during the Great Pashtun Revolt of 1897, believed the ability of these *Talibs* to "move quietly about the country (and) attract but little notice" played a vital role in "creating uneasiness and in trying to rouse the people to a *jihad*." Because the village mosque (or the *langarkhana*, the almshouse portion of a larger or important mosque) is a vital social center for the men of each village, the *Mullahs* who run them are also critically important sources of news and opinion.

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Scholars have noted, however, the *Mullah* himself has no authority to actually command followers in the sense of giving orders. Instead, *Mullahs* tap into tribal psychology to channel behavior in the desired direction. His message must "frame its intent not as an order but rather as a sort of public service announcement." For example, the *Mullah* might say: "You are followers of the Prophet Mohammed. Other Muslims have done such-and-such. If you want to be equal to them, you should do such-and-such." (David Edwards) Finally, he may be able to draw on belief in supernatural powers, if he can appear to perform miracles or predict the future. Many *Mullayan* (plural of *Mullah*) fomenting rebellion against the British, for example, performed simple parlor tricks or appeared magically to feed the masses, and then declared that British bullets would be transformed into water. **They can also wield the power of ostracism to ensure conformity, however, an enormously powerful weapon.**

It is not uncommon historically for a *Mullah* to seek to increase his relatively lowly social status, either by giving himself a higher title (such as the case of the *Mullah* of Waziristan in the 1980's, who promoted himself to *Maulvi*), or by taking on a mystical dimension, or by inspiring *Jihad* against authority. In the latter case, because the Holy *Quran* forbids revolution against properly constituted Muslim authority, the only way this can be done is by declaring the ruling power to be infidel. Thus, for example, *Mullah* Omar, the *Taliban* leader, was able to attain legitimacy by wearing the garment which many Afghans believe to be the original sacred cloak of the Prophet Muhammad in Kandahar and mounting an insurgency against the Rabbani government in 1994 and the Karzai government of today by calling those governments infidel. **One way you can judge the sentiments of the local *Mullah* is to ask your interpreters, when they attend Friday prayer services, to listen for a benediction for the national president in the *Khutba* (sermon) of the *Mullah*. A benediction of support for the national ruler is a mandatory part of the sermon, if the government is perceived locally as legitimate.** If the local *Mullah* supports the national government, he will offer a few words of praise

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and ask God to protect the President. But if he leaves this important blessing out of the speech, it is a key indicator of a lack of local support where you're sleeping.

Mullahs have become very powerful men in rural areas in the last 30 years. It is vital that OEF personnel engage them in each village they visit. They are influential in the village in terms of support (or lack of it) for the government. If you go to a village to meet with elders, and the local *Mullah* does not attend the *Jirgas*, seek him out for a courtesy call before departing the village. Have a cup of tea if it is offered (as it should be). If he blows you off, by having some one tell you he's not there, at least you tried, and that will be known and respected throughout the village.

One good technique for building support is to plan ahead, and have the senior Afghan with you bring a small gift of a few prayer rugs or Korans for the village, or some school supplies for the *Madrasa*. (Don't touch these yourself.) If the meeting is to take place inside the Mosque at the invitation of the *Mullah*, take off your shoes before entering. If possible within your ROE, clear it with your higher authority in advance to leave your *visible* personal weapons with a Marine guard detail just outside. It is an offense against Islam to have weapons inside the Mosque. Don't sit with your back to Mecca in the meeting. Simply be friendly and say that you wanted to pay your respects, the government in Kabul is trying hard to establish peace in Afghanistan, 30 years of killing is too much, etc. (in other words, simple peaceful messages.) Showing respect for Islam in this way will go a long way toward winning the support of the village.

The Role of Sufism

Sufism might be described as the mystical side of Islam. It is powerful in rural Afghanistan, more so than Afghans will usually admit. However, the Sufi orders, or *silsilas*, of rural Afghanistan and their role as a vehicle for social resistance to change are little studied and less understood. The most

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important of these orders are the Naqshbandiyya, the Mujaddidiyya, and the Qadiriyya. Each employs a different *Tariqa*, or method, for drawing closer to God in daily life. Sufi *Pirs*, or teachers, have often been the leaders of resistance movements. (**Sana Haroon**)

Summary of Part II

We are using three "lenses" to study the human terrain in Afghanistan: Ethnicity, Religion and Social Values. In Part I, we examined the ethnic diversity of Afghanistan, and some of the issues that it creates. Here in Part II we studied Islam in Afghanistan, and in particular, the position and the role of the village *Mullah*, who is a critical figure in the counterinsurgency effort.

Roughly 85 percent of Afghanistan's population is *Hanafi* Sunni, while virtually all the remainder are Shia -- of whom most are from the Hazara ethnic group. Partly as a result, the Hazara have been the victims of persecution for centuries in Afghanistan, and still occupy its lowest economic position in society. With this knowledge as a background, we will now examine the third element of culture, the social values of the people, and focus especially on the Pashtun areas where the insurgency is being waged.

A typical rural village Mullah. In Afghanistan, Mullayan (the correct plural for Mullah), may sometimes be recognized by the wearing of white turbans. Marines should use the term "Mullah Saheeb" when referring to a Mullah as a term of respect. Mullahs have become very powerful figures in the rural villages as a result of the events of the last 30 years and it is critical to engage them. Failure to do so will be perceived as disrespect, and you'll pay for it with increased attacks.



Part III: The Lens of Social Values

Learning Keypoints for Part III

- Afghans have been noted since the dawn of recorded history for their independence and dislike for externally-imposed authority. Generally speaking, during those periods when Afghanistan has been stable and at peace, the national government at the time allowed a wide degree of local autonomy in decision-making.
- The Pashtun are a highly tribalized people, but unlike many tribal societies, they do not recognize chieftains. In principle, no one has the authority to tell a tribesman what to do. *Khans* are the honorary figureheads of extended families, but act more like spokesmen than leaders. In some places the old Malik system of appointed spokesmen is still seen.
- Importance in a tribe is determined by an intricate and extremely complex calculation of family genealogy called *Nikat*. Although the Pashtun are superficially very egalitarian and democratic in the sense that each man gets to speak and vote, the weight of each man's opinion in the meeting of village elders, or *Jirga*, is determined by *Nikat*.
- Pashtun society, particularly rural society, is shaped by *Pashtunwali*, "the way of the Pashtun." The central elements are honor (*Nang*) and revenge (*Badal*) for dishonor. A man who loses his honor is an outcast. Many events may cause dishonor, from the trivial to the criminal. Chief among them are seeing or talking to his women, violating his home, or disturbing his property. Honor must be regained with revenge.
- "*Nanawatey*," or *forgiveness* (literally, "going in," sometimes translated as *repentance*) is another critical component of *Pashtunwali*. It is impossible to refuse a request for temporary *Nanawatey*, even from an enemy. It is essentially a conflict resolution mechanism between individuals, families, clans and tribes.

"The Land of the Rebels"

The insurgency in Afghanistan today is being fought primarily in the south and east of the country. It is almost exclusively a Pashtun phenomenon. This section will focus on the social values of the Pashtun people, because that is where the great majority of Marines deploying to Afghanistan will be based. Most of these values, however, are shared to some extent by all people in Afghanistan, particularly with respect to the importance of honor and hospitality to visitors.

When Alexander the Great encountered the warlike tribes south of the Hindu Kush and north of the Indus River in 325 BCE, like many conquerors who would follow him, he attempted to take control of the region and bring its inhabitants to heel. And, like the many who would follow him, he failed. The Greek historian Herodotus called the tribesmen there "the most warlike of the Indians" and referred to their land as *Paktiike*. No one ever conquered them: Not Genghis Khan, not Tamerlane, not the Safavids. The Moghuls fought them for two hundred years, the British for another hundred. The Moghuls and the British called the lands of the tribesmen *Yaghistan* -- "the Land of the Rebels." (See map on page 6.)

Over the centuries, many civilizations spreading south across the Oxus River from Central Asia or the Mongolian steppe, or east from Persia across the bleak Khorasan, or pushing north from the Indian subcontinent like the Sikh empire, would encounter them, attempt to subdue them, fail, and sweep around them like an island, isolated in their mountains. And so they would remain, savagely independent, isolated, for the most part occupying marginal lands almost too barren and devoid of resources to support life. They did not themselves know where they had come from, or how they came to be in the mountains of *Yaghistan*. The two

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greatest civilizational influences upon them would be the Moghuls, who first wrote down the complex Pashtun family trees, and the religion of Islam, which they had all embraced by 1000CE. **These two external factors (precise tribal lineages and Islam of the Hanafi school) blend together with an unwritten code of social values and tribal law known as Pashtunwali and create a tribal society almost uniquely impervious to further change.**



The combination of loose, baggy, comfortable trousers and long knee-length shirt is called the Shalwar Kameez, and is worn by virtually all Afghan males. The sleeveless vest is also customary. The pen in the vest pocket of the man in the foreground (Pacha Khan Zadran) is a symbol of literacy. Note the different styles of headgear worn.

The Pashtun are the largest tribal society on earth. There are approximately 30 million Pashtuns, divided almost equally into southern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan by the Durand Line. As a result, they are the largest ethnic group on earth without their own country. They are highly segmentary (tribal), but, **unlike most segmentary groups, they don't have chiefs.** Nominally, every Pashtun male is an equal, and viewed from outside, rural Pashtun society appears fully egalitarian. **Decisions are made by unanimous**

consensus at informal meetings of elders called *Saleh Mashwara*, or formal meetings of elders called *Jirgas* or *Shuras*. (The term *Shura* has religious overtones, and Marines should substitute the word *Jirga* for the word *Shura*, to avoid ceding any additional ground to the religious extremists.) Every adult male member of the tribe has a right to equal use of all undivided communal land, and every adult male who is entitled to use communal land may attend, speak and vote in the *Jirga*.

Pashtuns recognize no tribal leader in the sense of the "chief" of the American Indians, the *Sheiks* of Iraq, or most sub-Saharan African tribes, who can give orders and generally expect to be obeyed. Instead, the senior male member of an extended family, or *Khan*, or an appointed intermediary called a *Malik* (pronounced "ma-LECK") chosen by the *Jirga* in some villages as a sort of official point of contact with the government, may speak for the clan. **Neither the *Khan* nor the *Malik*, however, have any inherent authority to command the actions of others.**

***Nikat*: The Hidden Hierarchy**

In spite of this egalitarian exterior, there is actually an invisible hierarchical structure at work in Pashtun tribal society, one which has been missed by most Western analysts. This critical hierarchy is a direct outgrowth of the elaborate genealogies discussed earlier, and is called "*Nikat*." *Nikat*, which comes from the same linguistic root as the word for "grandfather," means, essentially, "pedigree," and it describes the relative position of a person to the ancestor. As **Olaf Caroe** noted, every male has a social position in the *Khel* superior or inferior to every other male based on the directness of his genealogical descent from the founding ancestor. Thus, for example, the first son by the first wife has a higher social and political importance than the third son of the third wife of the same father. **Over time, these relationships become extraordinarily complex, yet exert a pivotal influence on tribal decision making,**

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because the views of males with greater *Nikat*, from more important lineages, carry greater weight in the *Shura*.



A typical large Jirga room. Men sometimes (but not always) stand to speak. Men always sit cross-legged -- never show the bottom of their feet to anyone. It is customary to take off your boots before entering the room and carry only sidearms inside. Officers should assign a Marine to hold their rifles just outside the entrance.

One example of how this demonstrated itself in frontier life was in promotions of native soldiers in substantially Pashtun military units of the British army in India. The British military structure sought to promote Pashtun soldiers on the basis of observed martial skills and potential leadership abilities -- in other words, on merit. A soldier who demonstrated bravery, military bearing, intelligence and coolness under fire, British officers reasoned, would be a suitable non-commissioned officer. But they discovered that promotion of Pashtuns on this basis often mysteriously coincided with desertions of soldiers from the same tribe or family as the promoted soldier. Eventually, the British deciphered what was happening. Soldiers from the same tribe whose social standing was higher in the *Nikat* system than that of the promoted soldier could not bear the dishonor which would result from having to obey the orders of a person of lesser social status, and desertion from the unit to

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avoid this fate was the only alternative. The British tried for almost a century to overcome this impediment to the orderly imposition of British values on their army, through training, lectures, and repetition of the principles of merit and performance. They failed completely. Nothing could shake the fundamental principle guiding Pashtun social order. Finally, they gave up, and resorted to asking the native officers for the names of acceptable candidates for promotion when a rank became available to be filled.



Ghilzai Pashtun fighters, circa 1880 with primitive long rifles called jezails. British artillery officers, who knew their business when it came to ranging, estimated these marksmen could hit a man at 600 yards over open sights.

When visiting a village to meet with elders, it is advisable that you use local government resources to pre-identify the high-*Nikat* (important) elders in the *Jirga* and ask to meet with them. **Not everyone with a white beard is an**

important elder: Having tea with three whitebeards in the *Jirga* doesn't do you any good if they are the village idiots.



The harsh, rugged lands the Pashtuns inhabit have bred a tough race of men and women long accustomed to hardship.

Geography, Language and Isolation

Several factors combine in rural Pashtun society to create a state of virtually permanent insurgency. The first of these is **geographic isolation**. Subsisting in remote mountain valleys, the rural Pashtun have been almost literally walled off from the rest of human society for more than a millennium. The second is the **language**, Pashto. It is entirely distinct from other regional languages and cannot be understood by any non-Pashtun neighbors. The third is the usual **resistance to change** of tribal societies, which the Pashtun take to extremes, and the fourth, and most important, is a uniquely warlike culture resulting from a tribal moral foundation created by their **unique social code**, called ***Pashtunwali*** (literally, "the Way of the Pashtun").

The Way of the Pashtun

The code which is largely responsible for Pashtun conservatism is a set of individual values and social norms which are collectively called *Pashtunwali*. *Pashtunwali* has fascinated Western anthropologists for more than a century, and so much has been written about *Pashtunwali* -- and so much of it is distorted in one way or another -- that it is necessary to the study of Pashtun insurgency to set out briefly what it actually is. First of all, *Pashtunwali* is not written, nor is it something that can be easily put into words by even most educated Pashtuns. It is best described as a subconscious set of commonly understood social values and behavioral patterns. But it would be a serious mistake to dismiss it, as most adherents of modernization theory do, for example, as quaint and archaic tradition. It is the heart of tribal Pashtun-ness. It combines an exaggerated sense of personal honor based on defense of home and hearth, faith in tribal governance and tribal law, well-understood parameters for acceptable behavior, and a dispute resolution mechanism which serves to keep the social system from imploding under the weight of the trans-generational blood feuds which perpetually wrack the hills.

*Life in the rural
areas is hard.
Most rural
Pashtuns live as
pastoralists
(shepherds) and
subsistence
farmers*



Central to the Pashtun -- and *Pashtunwali* -- is a group of values which are usually collectively translated as "honor," yet the Western word for "honor" as an abstract concept has

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no exact transliteration into *Pashto*. Honor is usually rendered as *Nang*, but *Nang* is more precisely the obligation to protect the central elements of life -- women, property, and home. The worst epithet that a man can be called in Pashto is *dahwuz*, "without honor." On the other hand, the Pashtun who maintains a high standard of *Nang* is said to be *bawayqaar*, a man of honor. **Maintaining honor is the central focus of a Pashtun's life**, and it is the basis of rural Pashtun behavior. It is difficult to do: An almost infinite number of incidents, such as spitting on a man's shadow, barging into his home, catching a glimpse of his wife, or jostling a man with your shoulder in the bazaar, which would most often be shrugged off in America, or provoke an exchange of words, are seen as profoundly dishonoring..

Being dishonored in any way incurs an automatic obligation for *badal*, or "revenge," no matter how long it takes, because without honor, a Pashtun man is ruined. A man who is *dahwuz* becomes a social outcast. A *dahwuz*, for example, cannot hope to marry his sons or daughters to leading families, or prosper economically in a closed tribal society. The revenge does not have to be taken against the individual who caused the dishonor; it can be taken against another member of his clan.

Such blood feuds arising from real or perceived dishonor can and often do last for generations. When American soldiers or Marines search a man's home, he is obligated to take revenge for this dishonor against an American (all Americans are seen as belonging to the same clan.) This revenge may be taken by planting an IED, for example, or by sniping at and killing an American. There is no statute of limitations in *Pashtunwali*, and no sense that "time heals all wounds." One famous Pashtun proverb holds that "I took my revenge after 100 years, and I only regret that I acted in haste." Grandsons and great-grandsons in the Pashtun region often take revenge for wrongs done to their forefathers 60 years earlier, and, as **James Spain** noted, it is not uncommon for a murder in London to be traced back to a

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feud in the hills of northern Pakistan. These bloody wars between families have brought rural development to a standstill in many places, as feuding neighbors exist for decades in a literal state of siege. An example of this was the 60-year war over ownership of a small stand of trees waged between the *Mangals* and the *Khostwals* of eastern Paktia province, begun during the Second World War and finally resolved by Governor *Hajji* Ghulab Mangal in 2005.

Nanawatey, literally "going in," is an act of social surrender from a weaker man. It's the balancing mechanism which keeps the Pashtun world from imploding under the weight of centuries of this feuding. ***Nanawatey is a conflict resolution mechanism.*** It provides for a truce between two parties while the dispute is judged, usually by an *ad hoc* group of elder members of the clan who are not themselves party to the matter. *Nanawatey* must be requested in a traditional manner, which varies by tribe, but involves going to a man's house to seek it. When given, it requires that the giver provide food, water, shelter and protection to anyone who asks for it. Stories abound on the frontier of men who discover those given *Nanawatey* in their homes are enemies who have injured their families, yet refuse to break the code and harm them. To fail in this obligation to the refugee, once granted, would be a grievous dishonor.

Pashtunwali makes counterinsurgency very difficult for several reasons. First, any interference with personal freedom (such as temporary detainment) or attempts at externally-imposed order (i.e., government) are cause for war. Second, dishonor -- particularly that involving the spilling of blood -- must be avenged by all male relatives. ***The Pashtun thus have a saying: "Kill one enemy, make ten."*** Insurgencies historically are seldom defeated by killing insurgents, but this is particularly true of Afghanistan, where killing a Pashtun guerilla is an act of multiplication of the enemy rather than one of subtraction. (The Soviets killed nearly a million Pashtuns, and the impact this had on the number of guerillas in the field was that there were more *Mujahideen* on the battlefield every day than the day before.)

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The tribal nature of Pashtun society, and the sense of communal responsibility in rural villages, which consist entirely of relatives, mean that entire villages can be permanently lost by counterinsurgents as a result of the killing or arrest of a single village resident. (For example, when collateral damage to a village from a U.S. air strike kills a child, that entire village is permanently lost to the enemy.) Thus, the Taliban fights inside villages, just as the *Mujahideen* did against the Soviets, to try to provoke such air strikes. They will gladly martyr a few young fighters to gain the support of a whole village. Finally, *Nanawatey* enormously complicates the counterinsurgency problem in Pashtun areas because it makes mandatory what guerillas can only hope to achieve voluntarily or take by force in most insurgencies: the absolute, if temporary, support of virtually all rural villagers.

The Role of Women

Women in rural Pashtun society are not so much second-class citizens as property. In tribal law, they have no legal rights and no right of inheritance. In the resolution of disputes, they are frequently given away as trade items. *Purdah* is extreme. In most rural Pashtun communities, women live completely hidden lives inside their father's or their husband's *Qalaa*, or high-walled mud compound. Few schools for girls exist, and female literacy among the rural Pashtun is well under five percent. The Taliban's distortion of *Deobandi* Islamic thought (see p. 68) about the position of women thus finds ready acceptance in rural Pashtun society. The preferred marriage for all Pashtun women is within the *Kahol*, and the ideal marriage for a woman is to her father's brother's son (i.e. her first cousin.) It is rare for rural Pashtun to marry outside the *Kahol* and virtually unknown for them to marry outside the *Qawm*. Marriages are arranged for political benefit and advantage, as males never see females during their lives who are not in their *Koranay*. As a result of this state of hidden bondage, women play no part whatever in the insurgency.



Pashtuns observe strict Purdah, the shielding of women from the eyes of men. Virtually all Pashtun women wear a Burka when outside the home -- if they are allowed outside the home at all.

The Rule of Law

For most of the 80 percent of Afghanistan's 15 million Pashtuns who live in the rural areas, and the five million Pashtuns living in the FATA, 90 percent of whom are illiterate, tribal law is the law of the land, and government is little seen. In the FATA, it is not seen at all. **Thus, the effort to help establish an external rule of law involving courts, judges and prisons is not welcome.** The state justice system is seen as corrupt, protracted, and incomprehensible, and the law of the tribal *jirga* or the quick, incorruptible decision of a Taliban *Mullah* is usually preferred. Living in physical conditions little changed from biblical times, in homes of mud and straw, without electricity, running water, schools, clinics or roads, most rural Pashtun of the mountains have changed little over the centuries. Suspicious of outsiders, the majority remain not simply resistant to outside influence and societal change, but violently opposed to it. This resistance to change is fostered by rural landlords and rural religious leaders with a vested interest in the *status quo*.

The Tribe as the Source of Political Power

The tribe almost inevitably forms the basis of political power. As anthropologist **Bernt Glatzer** notes:

"Most of the tribes in Afghanistan are neither corporate nor political entities, yet the tribal system has more

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often than not served as a blue print for political alliances. Political entrepreneurs found kinship and tribal links most convenient as a basis for alliances or confederations in order to challenge even imperial powers and to secure areas for their clients."

This was true of the *Mujahideen* resistance: All seven of the consolidated *Mujahideen* groups formed during the Soviet-Afghan War by Pakistan's secret Inter Services Intelligence Directorate, or ISI, **were created along tribal lines. As will be seen, it is also true of the Taliban.**



A Pashtun's home is literally his castle. Most live in square forts like these, called Qalaas. Much of the interior area is used for vegetable gardens, fruit trees, or for enclosing and guarding livestock at night.

Highlanders and Lowlanders

Another major fault line in Pashtun society is **the divide between lowlanders and highlanders** -- those who live on the cultivated, irrigated plains on the external edges of the mountains, and those who live on the generally more marginal lands high up inside them. The folk saying among the Pashtuns that "honor ate up the mountains, and taxes ate up the plains" refers to this divide. The lowlanders, without the refuge and remoteness of the mountains to provide defensible sanctuary, have, over the passage of many

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centuries, gradually come under the partial umbrella of external governance, and with it, various forms of much-hated taxation and other government control. They farm the better lands of the plains, known as *Qalangs*, watered by a complex irrigation system called a *Karez*. There are many such "settled" Pashtuns in Afghanistan, but, although it is spiraling politically out of Pakistani control, the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) in Pakistan still remains the largest example of this phenomenon of "settled" tribesmen.

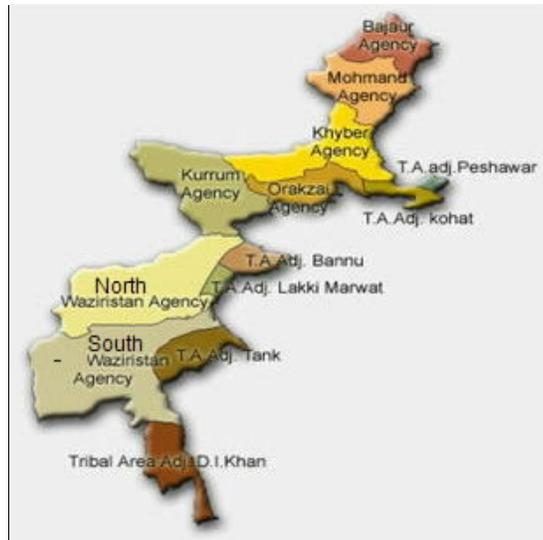
Highlanders, on the other hand, in the remote mountains of southern Afghanistan and the FATA, are intensely proud of their self-won immunity to economically debilitating government taxation. For many tribes, such as the *Waziri*, this legacy of independence forms a central part of tribal identity. Yet their independence from taxation and the law has brought its own curse, as discussed, in the form of the endless cycle of feuds and honor killings. While plainsmen might think of the hillmen as "hillbillies," they maintain a healthy respect for them as "real Pashtuns." Hillmen in turn view the Pashtun on the plains as soft and weak. **Dr. Akbar Ahmed** has referred to this basic social divide as the "*Nang* and *Qalaang*" cultures.

The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)

As mentioned earlier, at the geographic heart of the Pashtun nation lies an administrative construct in the Pakistani Constitution called the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, or FATA. The FATA is comprised of seven administrative Tribal *Agencies*: Kurram, Khyber, North Waziristan, South Waziristan, Bajaur, Mohmand, and Orakzai, plus six smaller, additional Tribal *Areas*, or TAs, which are named for the district of Northwest Frontier Province they are adjacent to - TA adjacent Peshawar, TA adjacent Kohat, TA adjacent Bannu, TA adjacent Lakki Marwat, TA adjacent Tank and TA adjacent Dera Ismail Khan. The FATA, which lies along the northeastern edge of Pakistan's contentious boundary with Afghanistan, the Durand Line, is the "Jurassic

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Park" of tribal society: a place unchanged by time. **The FATA** is roughly the same size as Massachusetts, it holds some five million Pashtuns (no one knows for sure) and **is specifically exempt from Pakistani law**. Indeed, the Pakistani Constitution is quite clear in regard to the reach of the law and the Pakistani police into the FATA: in theory, it is precisely 100 meters. That is the distance, on either side of a paved road (of which there are few), where any Pakistani law pertains. Beyond that narrow belt, tribal law is officially the law of the land. In point of fact, the law there now are the various religious extremist movements like the Taliban.



The Federally Administered Tribal Areas, or FATA, which border Afghanistan to the south, are home to roughly five million Pashtuns. It is an autonomous Pashtun homeland where tribal law is constitutionally protected as the only law.

Islam and the Pashtun

As noted previously, the Pashtun had converted to Islam by about 1000ce. Virtually all of them are *Sunni* Muslims of the *Hanafi* school, although there are a few pockets of *Shia* Pashtun, notably the *Turi* tribe in the Kurram Agency, and some *Khels* of the *Orakzai* tribe in the Orakzai Agency. Islam, with its focus on the direct relationship of the individual to God and the absence of a priestly caste, was well-suited to the independent and egalitarian Pashtun. However, as the great Afghan scholar **Louis Dupree** noted, the Islam of Afghanistan often bears little resemblance to the religion as it is understood by educated Muslim clerics:

The Islam practiced in Afghan villages, nomad camps, and most urban areas (the ninety to ninety-five percent non-literates) **would be almost unrecognizable to a sophisticated Muslim scholar**. Aside from faith in Allah and in Muhammad as the Messenger of Allah, most beliefs [in Afghanistan] relate to localized, pre-Muslim customs. Some of the ideals of Afghan tribal society run counter to literate Islamic principles. The *Pashtunwali*, for example, demands blood vengeance, even on fellow Muslims, contradicting Sura 4:92-93: 'It is not for a believer to kill a believer unless it be by mistake.'

Thus Islam as practiced by the Pashtun is an Islam grafted onto Pashtun tribal customs, which generally supersede it where the two are in disagreement. This grafting of religious tradition onto an older set of beliefs is called *syncretism*. A small number of Pashtuns, perhaps three percent, are adherents of Sufism. Despite their small numbers, however, influential *Sufi* mystics such as the extended Gailani family wield significant political power, particularly among the superstitious rural Pashtun. In addition, after the Soviet invasion, a small number of Afghans, including Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Burhanuddin Rabbani, and Abdul Rassoul Sayyaf, adopted the *Ihkwan* model of Muslim revolution

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to overthrow the Soviets (the endstate goal of the *Ikhwan* model is the creation of a true Islamic state as constituted by the Prophet Mohammed in Mecca). Thus, excluding the handful of *Turi* and *Orakzai Shi'a* Pashtun, there were three models of Islamic belief among the Pashtun prior to the rise of the Taliban: Traditional *Hanafi Sunni* Islam grafted onto tribal customs, a small school of *Ikhwan* thought embodied in Hekmatyar, and a small but influential *Sufi* movement.

Religious "purity" and the return to Islamic values, such as those preached by the Taliban are not something new. **The Taliban represents an extreme interpretation of the Deobandi school of Hanafi Sunni Islam**, but its beliefs have also been shaped by generations of religious purists and a long tradition of transmitting religious knowledge and belief through the *Pirimuridi* ("teacher-student") method. The *Pirimuridi* system is not unlike the relationship between guru and disciple. The *Deobandi* center, including a mosque and a madrasa (school), was founded in Deoband, India in the 1830's, embodying resistance to British colonial rule. It evolved a very restrictive view of the role of women, opposed *Shi'ism*, and eventually developed into a religious egalitarian movement which rejected caste, monarchy, and all hierarchies in Muslim society. The Taliban and its offshoots today have taken these interpretations of religious purity to extremes, according to **Ahmed Rashid**. However, the origins of fundamentalism in the tribal areas are complex, and are the result of multiple influences, including *Wahabist* thought encountered on the *Hajj* of influential *Mullahs* and *Pirs*, and *Sufi* traditions and methods (*Tariqa*). It took political form in Pakistan, in the creation of the *JUI*, the *Jamiat e-Ulema Islam*, which opened more than 1,000 *Madrasas*, or religious boarding schools in the FATA and Northwest Frontier Province. Extremism grips much of northern Pakistan today, where it finds safe haven, but it has been a cross-border phenomenon for 150 years. As a result, most Taliban foot soldiers and their commanders today believe they are waging a *jihad*, or holy war.

Summing up Part III

We have seen that the culture of the Afghans, and particularly that in the region of the Pashtuns, where the counterinsurgency campaign is largely being waged, is a mixture of **ethnicity, religion and social values.**

The Pashtuns are a proud people. There is often tension between them and the non-Pashtun ethnicities of the north. But it is not a simple question of ethnicity -- the Pashtuns often fight among themselves, while the tribes of the north often ally with each other and avoid ethnic conflict. However, all Afghans are proud of their warrior heritage. In their view, they have defeated four world superpowers -- Alexander the Great, the British (twice), and the Soviet Union -- all at a time when those armies were at the height of their international power. They believe they are invincible.

Religion also plays a key role in shaping Afghan culture. The divide between the majority Sunni and the minority Shia has led to bloodshed and oppression in the past. The few Sufi Muslims in Afghanistan have political influence far in excess of their numbers, particularly among the illiterate and superstitious tribesmen of the south. Afghans are deeply devout in their religious beliefs, and even if you don't see that manifested broadly, never doubt that it is present.

Most importantly, subconsciously, Pashtuns' behavior is always shaped by *Pashtunwali*. Although it seems simple and organized when presented in neat categories in a guide like this, however, it is far more complicated and difficult to grasp on the ground. Remember that even educated Pashtuns have difficulty explaining *Pashtunwali* -- and educated Pashtuns who have left their village roots are the first to dismiss it and downplay its importance. Ironically, educated expatriate Pashtuns are often the ones who understand rural culture and the importance of the tribal code the least!

Part IV: Working With Afghan Civilians

Learning Keypoints for Part IV

- Success in working with Afghans is a question of respect and establishing relationships. If Afghans respect you, they will listen to what you have to say, but if they don't, they can't be bothered with you, regardless of your official rank or position. **Relationships are everything.**
- Respect can be won or lost in many ways. Courage and exterior calmness are vital. A man who lacks these qualities is a weakling, and weaklings are despised. For example, losing one's temper or showing emotion of any kind (except laughter) are indications of weakness.
- Understanding the culture is vital to successful interaction with Afghans, whether with government, military or civilian personnel. Afghans are unfailingly polite, and hospitality to guests and travelers is universal. For example, introductions and greetings often take ten minutes at the beginning of a conversation.
- Never ask a man about his wife. Never photograph women or show photographs of women you know. Be modest in your dress, keeping arms and legs covered. Never show the bottoms of your feet to anyone, or show disrespect (spitting, urinating) towards Mecca (West from Afghanistan). **Doing so got many British officers killed.**
- Odd as it may seem for warriors who would not make a sound even when seriously wounded, Afghans love poetry, and many of their most revered ancestors are poets. So what? As a result, they do not really respect simple, direct speech. Instead, they admire and listen to the man who speaks in a more poetic way, using allusion and metaphor.

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In Parts I, II and III, this guide presented three "lenses" that you can use in understanding the culture of the people around you. With this "operational" understanding of the Afghan culture in mind, this next part of the guide will go into "tactical" culture -- how you use what you now know to interact more effectively with Afghans, whether you are meeting with elders in a village, mentoring ANA (Afghan National Army) troops, or working with Afghan government officials on a project or a proposal. We will examine the time-proven ways of gaining the respect and trust of the Afghans, and look at some of the big mistakes to avoid.

First and foremost, in Afghanistan, personal relationships are everything. They are the only way anything gets done. Work to build them. No Pashtun is going to be impressed by your rank, or the fact that you're an American, or your physical size. **They will either work with you, or not, strictly on the basis of whether they perceive you as a man worthy of respect and trust.** At this point, it would be dishonest to downplay the difficulties female Marines will experience in this regard. Afghanistan, particularly the Pashtun south, is a culture in which women have little or no power. The new *Wolesi Jirga*, the national parliament in Kabul, where women hold 27 percent of the seats, may change that slowly over time. But in the Pashtun south today, women Marines are at a disadvantage. In 2009, an experimental, all-female Marine platoon in the south yielded impressive results in reaching tribal women.

What qualities inspire respect? Basically, they're the Marine Corps leadership qualities the Marines have been recruiting, training and promoting for since the beginning of the Corps: **Integrity, courage, honor, and commitment.** British officers serving on the Northwest Frontier, as the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan (then British India) was known, found that their Pashtun soldiers would follow them into battle fearlessly, and even sacrifice their lives for

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them, once they had proven themselves as men worthy of their respect. This took time -- and personal friendships. Again, everything in Afghanistan happens on this basis -- much as it does in the United States, for that matter, although we call it "networking," or the "buddy network." In fact, some British officers became such a legend among the Pashtun of the Frontier that a few are still remembered today. Consider the case of Sir John Nicholson. He was a soldier and a political agent among the Pashtun in the 1850's. Whenever there was a cavalry charge to be made, he led it. Whenever there was a firefight, he was in the thick of it. And in councils, he spoke the language perfectly, understood the culture of his men, and was wise and thoughtful when he spoke. His men loved him for it, even though he was a Christian and a foreigner. Some Pashtuns even formed a cult to worship him, which he rejected fiercely as a devout Christian.

Nicholson was such a giant figure on the Frontier that when a team of British anthropologists traveled into northern Pakistan in the 1970's to collect folk stories and folk songs, they found that naughty Pashtun children there were still being hushed and made to behave obediently by parents saying "Nicholson is coming." For every Nicholson, there are countless other men who came and went without making an impression, because they were not successful in building relationships of trust. Will you be remembered or forgotten?



Sir John Nicholson, a British officer serving with the Pashtuns in the 1850's, was killed during the siege of the Delhi Gate during the Great Indian Mutiny in 1858, but he is still remembered today for his courage and leadership.

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The reverse of this is also true -- it's a two-sided coin. If you do not show yourself as a man to be respected, you will accomplish little. **One of the biggest mistakes Americans make in this regard is losing their temper, or showing anger. This is normal, even tolerated in the US military. However, it is a terrible weakness among the Pashtun.** A man who cannot control his emotions to them is a complete weakling, and a weakling, it is said, "is only fit to be beaten from the village by the women." If you ever show anger or other emotions in Afghanistan, you might as well go home the next day, because your effectiveness in that culture is at an end. They will never respect you after that, because you are a weakling, no matter what else you may do, because you can no longer be trusted or respected. **So keep your emotions to yourself at all times!**

When speaking, Afghans do not admire "plain, simple manly speech," saying things simply and directly in the way you learn as a Marine to communicate. As odd as it may seem for tough, fearless warriors who could be tortured to death by their enemies without making a sound, Pashtuns love poetry, and the great poets of the past, like Kushal Khan Khattak, are revered and admired as titans among them. Direct speech tends to be disregarded as the way foolish men speak. For example, if a local leader is considering the murder of his enemy, you might say to him, "I don't think that is a good idea." This simple advice, while good, will probably not change his mind: It is too simple and childlike in his eyes. If you were say instead something more allegorical, wise and poetic, such as, "A tree which is cut down bears no fruit," he would rub his chin and think that perhaps his enemy should be spared because he might still have his uses. Sound silly? Nicholson knew it and used it, as did many other successful British officers on the Frontier. **Remember: Cultural awareness is about changing the superficial ways in which you go about doing something not about understanding the way *they* do it.**

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Another common mistake senior Marine officers make is the way they act in a village. Americans love kids, and like to talk to kids, pass out candy, and joke with the local teenagers that cluster around the Humvees. This is fine for all Marines except the senior leaders and ETT personnel. If you observe the behavior of Afghan elders, you will notice that the teenagers and street children of the village are invisible to them. They are too dignified and important to lower themselves to playing with children. **If senior officers banter with kids in the streets, the Afghans won't think they're nice to children -- they'll think they're persons of no importance.** As hard as it is for officers who must interact with leaders at the village or government level, they must maintain "Rank Appropriate Behavior." It's fine if you see a shy little boy or girl to give them a piece of candy and pat them on the head. But the senior officers present must maintain their dignity by not interacting with the teenagers and street riffraff.

No one is saying that winning the "hearts and minds" of the kids in the village isn't critical -- it definitely is. And you would be wise to have a plan in place for doing just that when you visit a village. The point is that it should be the junior personnel whose duties do not include winning and keeping the trust and respect of the elders who get to do this fun job. So give the candy and toys to "PFC Smith" to hand out, and keep the senior officers present above the "street scene" so that they are on par with the elders.

Greeting People

Afghans greet one another in many different ways, from a simple handshake to a big bear hug, and everything in between. In the most remote rural villages, the wizened old elders will sometimes touch your heart with the palm of their hand when they greet you, then lean towards you for a gentle one-armed hug before shaking your hand, for example.

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You can't go wrong with a simple handshake, but make eye contact, and don't crush the poor guy's hand in yours. Don't give a "wet fish" handshake either -- just firm but not crushing. To really show respect, while you're shaking hands, place your second hand on top of his shaking hand. This is warmer and friendlier.

A simple handshake is never wrong. To add a personal, warmer touch or to demonstrate friendship, add your second hand to the shake. If an Afghan does this to you, it's a sign he thinks of you as a friend.



While it is common in big towns and cities in America to walk past someone on the street without acknowledging them, this is never done in Afghanistan, and is considered terribly rude. If you don't say hello to each person you pass, they will think you are a stupid, rude, swaggering, arrogant bastard. It's like small town America -- you say hello to every one. As you pass someone, simply say, "*Salaam Aleikum*," (pronounced "SA-lahm a-LAY-kuhm") to everyone. If they say it to you first, reply "*Wali Aleikum asalaam*" (pronounced "Wally a-LAY-kuhm A-sa-lahm"). It simply means "peace to you," and "peace also to you," respectively. Whenever you see an elder -- a person with a white beard or a person significantly older than you, place your right hand over your heart and nod your head slightly while saying it. **Placing your hand over your heart is traditional when meeting elders, and is a sign of respect.**

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If you know some one well, and want to show real friendship, as you would to a brother, the bear hug is appropriate. Afghans sometimes kiss both cheeks when greeting old friends, or make mock gestures symbolizing kissing both cheeks, but this not expected of, or often demonstrated to, US personnel.



The President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, greeting an elder by making the gesture of the hand over the heart. This is a simple gesture of respect, and should be made by all personnel to everyone who would be considered a senior citizen in the US.

In government offices, chairs and sofas are the norm. In the rural areas, however, the traditional Jirga room is usually without furniture. Carpets cover the floor. **It is considered polite to take off your shoes before entering a Jirga room, and to place them just inside the door.** They will be perfectly safe there. When inside the *Jirga* room, sit cross-legged, yoga-style. Never show the bottom of your feet to anyone -- this is a huge insult, and if anyone does it to you, they are deliberately insulting you by showing you disrespect. If you observe this, mark the individual down as a political enemy. It does not happen by accident.



Afghans sometimes greet each other, particularly family members, with bear hugs.

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A typical Jirga room. The position shown with the numeral "1" is the position of highest importance in the room.



The position of highest importance in the room is typically the position farthest from the door way where you enter. The highest ranking American in your group should be closest to that position in the meeting. **If your rules of engagement permit you to remove your body armor inside the Jirga room, it is a good idea to do so.** There are good reasons why we wear body armor in Afghanistan -- but it doesn't win us any respect among the Afghans.

In any meeting, you will almost certainly experience the custom of *Malmastia* -- hospitality. Normally this takes the form of tea being served. Sometimes it is brought with some sweets or nuts or crackers. This is much more important symbolically than just a tasty beverage. It is a social contract. **By offering you Malmastia, they are saying you are a guest under their roof at this time, and no harm will come to you.** By drinking tea, you are implying that you also mean no harm. It rarely happens, **but if this simple hospitality is not offered on a visit to a rural village, it is a sign of hostility and probably a warning sign of danger to you and your Marines.** There might be another explanation, but be alert. Send word to the Marines outside the room to double the guard, keep the engines running, and keep your own personal weapon ready. Be polite, but cut the meeting short, stay on your guard, and exfiltrate from the village immediately. Show no anxiety or panic. Just go.



Malmastia, (hospitality) in the form of tea, is almost always offered. If it is not, it is a danger signal. Be doubly alert for attack. Note the picture of Ahmed Shah Masood on the back wall.

First Meetings

The Afghans have a saying: **"First meeting, a stranger, second meeting, a brother."** What this means to you at the tactical level is that you shouldn't expect too much at a first meeting. Your first meeting with any Afghan should be very polite, very formal, and somewhat "stiff" by American standards. No jokes or humor, and don't try to do any serious business. When you meet someone for the second time, then you can begin to discuss serious matters.

Even then, **don't try to "get down to business" quickly. It's a quality in America, but it's rude in Afghanistan.** Never try to discuss anything of consequence for at least the first ten minutes of any meeting, and never before tea has been served and sipped. At any first meeting, they will be sizing you up, watching you and evaluating you to determine if you are a man of honor, a wise man, and a man who is to be trusted. In rural villages, often the elders who appear for a first meeting will be the least consequential men in the village as determined by *Nikat*. **Determining who the important elders are -- the high *Nikat* elders -- and getting them to come to a meeting with you is the art of communication in Afghanistan.** There are resources to help you within the provincial government -- the Provincial

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Police Chief, the Provincial NDS Chief (the National Directorate of Security, or NDS, is like the Secret Service, the CIA and the FBI all rolled into one), and the Provincial Representative of the Ministry of Border and Tribal Affairs are all key men to get to know and work closely with, because they all understand the *Nikat* in the province. Having a list of the key elders in a village before you go there will save you many cups of tea with unimportant elders.

Don't try to accomplish much at a first meeting. These are typically "getting to know you" sessions, not business meetings.



Taboos

In Afghanistan, a man never asks another man about his wife. The safest course is to act as if women do not exist. Don't talk about them, don't photograph them, don't look at them, don't ask about them. And don't show an Afghan a picture of your wife or girlfriend. He will think you are *dahwuz* -- a person without honor. **Remember: Rural villagers have no worldly experience, and are not able to understand that you are foreigners and do things differently. You have to see it through their eyes.**

Homosexual activity is taboo in Afghanistan, and officially can result in a death sentence, but it is far more common than most sources and most Afghans will admit.



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There's no romantic dating or romantic marriage in Afghanistan -- boys and girls do not meet and do not talk to one another. Marriages are arranged by parents when a suitable match is agreed upon. This is a long and convoluted process in itself, but one you don't have to worry about. What you do need to know is that a man in Afghanistan, especially a Pashtun, rarely if ever sees the face of woman who is not his mother, his sister, or his wife, two days after he marries her (a wedding ceremony typically lasts three days). So, homosexual behavior is relatively common, but taboo, in rural Afghanistan, because there no other outlets for normal sexual energies. Afghan men often take younger men as lovers. Many US soldiers have heard an Afghan say "women are for babies, but men are for love," and Afghans will sometimes joke among themselves about homosexual activities with boys. Just understand it's there, be mentally prepared to encounter this attitude, and move on.

Entering a Village

Think of a village as a living organism in which all the cells are related to one another. Entering an Afghan village is like entering a body. You should avoid entering a village without an invitation from the elders whenever your tactical rules of engagement permit it, because entering a village without permission is an invasion of privacy which results in a loss of *Nang*, honor, for the village. This may unnecessarily cost you hearts and minds when the tactical situation does not require it. The best procedure is to stop a short distance from the village -- 50 meters or so -- and wait for someone to come and ask your business. Through an interpreter, explain that you came to ask for a friendly visit with the village elders, for whom you have great respect. The message will be relayed to the elders, who then typically will invite you into the village. **It may seem to you like an odd formality, but it is their custom, and you will make more friends and fewer enemies if you respect it to the extent possible in a given tactical environment.**

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When visiting a village, if possible it is best to wait to be invited by an elder before entering the settlement. Once inside, you will be the "entertainment committee" for the men in the village, who rarely see outsiders. It is not threatening behavior.

Once inside the village, you will immediately experience *Tamasha*, the collective curiosity of the villagers. The men will come out to watch you. Since they have no movie theaters, no television, and few radios, your visit is like the circus coming to town -- **you're the most interesting thing they've seen in a long time, and they will come out to watch you.** It doesn't mean they're about to riot or attack you. Of course, you'll have to keep a sharp watch on the crowd for suspicious activity, but there is no need to feel threatened simply because they're watching you, that part is normal.

Eating, Drinking, Relieving Yourself

In the cities, Afghans eat just as you do, with silverware. In the rural areas of the south, however, Afghans eat with their hands. Meals are served in separate common bowls of rice and meat, which all men dip into with their fingers. Oval, flat loaves of unleavened bread will also be passed around. Any cooked foods are relatively safe, but avoid vegetables and uncooked foods if possible. Eat just enough to satisfy them that you enjoy the food. What isn't eaten by the men is given to the children later.

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Meals are a time of bonding and sharing for Afghans. Afghans do not generally seem to avoid use of the left hand, as Arabs do, but do not eat or pass food with your left hand just to be on the safe side.

There are three kinds of tea in Afghanistan; green, black and goat milk, which is often served freshly milked and boiled by Kuchi nomads. Green and black teas are quite safe to drink, because the water is boiled for some time while the tea is made. Goat's milk tea may cause diarrhea, but it contains nothing which can cause permanent harm. Avoid drinking other fluids, such as well water or other local waters. Sometimes at meals, canned sodas are given to guests. The contents are safe, but there is no telling where the lid of the can has been, and no way to clean the lid politely without causing offense to your host (it would be like telling him he is dirty), so it is easiest just to avoid them altogether. Sometimes bottled water is offered. Make sure the plastic seal is actually sealed -- Afghans often refill them.

Afghans are very modest about their bodies. Men keep their arms and legs covered at all times, and you should too, to avoid offending them. Don't wear shorts or short sleeved shirts outside the FOB, and it is not recommended even inside the FOB for ETT personnel. When nature calls, Afghans squat to urinate as well as to defecate. In a vehicle convoy, you'll notice that the Afghan soldiers and policemen will move well away from the vehicles to relieve themselves. You should be more modest than you would be around other Marines. **Most importantly, never spit or urinate toward the west in the presence of Moslems. It is the direction of Mecca, and very disrespectful of Islam to do so.**

Some Cultural Guidelines for Afghanistan

- Results will only come from personal relationships. Your rank and position mean nothing.
- Respect is earned, not given, in Afghanistan. Afghans admire courage, endurance, wisdom, and strength.
- Afghans despise weakness. A weakling, it is said, is fit only to be driven from the village by the women.
- A man who cannot control his temper and shows emotion is a pathetic weakling. Nothing he ever says is worth listening to. So, never show emotion. Ever.
- When you meet some one, shake their hand firmly and look them in the eye when you talk to them.
- Afghans do not admire direct, simple speech. That is the talk of the fool. Afghans admire poetry, allusion, and cleverness in speech.
- Never show anyone the bottoms of your feet. Sit cross legged. Eat and pass food only with your right hand.
- Observe "rank appropriate conduct." Observe that Afghan elders do not interact with village children or teens. US officers should not, either, or they will lose respect. Assign junior enlisted personnel to pass out the candy and toys.
- A man never asks a man about his wife. Do not mention women. Do not photograph women. Do not look at women. Do not show Afghans pictures of your wife or girlfriend.
- Keep your arms and legs covered at all times. Be modest about relieving yourself. Afghans are very modest about their bodies.
- Learn as much Pashto as you can. The more of their language you speak, the smarter they think you are.

Summary of Part IV:

Success in working with Afghans is a question of respect and establishing relationships. If Afghans respect you, they will listen to what you have to say, but if they don't, they won't. Remember the example of the legendary Sir John Nicholson -- although he was a foreigner and a Christian, his Pashtun troops would have followed him into Hell because of his courage, wisdom, and respect for their culture. Be like him. **And remember: always keep your temper -- Anger and emotion are the sign of a weakling.**

Afghans are generally very polite and hospitable. Greetings are important and can go on for some time. Afghans think the American way of "getting right down to business" is rude. First meetings are about getting acquainted -- don't try to accomplish anything substantive the first time you meet some one. **If tea is not offered during a visit, it is always a negative sign, and in the rural areas, a danger signal.**

Senior officers and ETT officers should avoid putting themselves at the level of the youths and teenagers in the street. Their hearts and minds are important, too, but let more junior personnel win them. Never ask a man about his wife. Never photograph women or show photographs of women you know. Be modest in your dress, keeping arms and legs covered. **Never show the bottoms of your feet to anyone, or show disrespect (spitting, urinating) towards Mecca (West from anywhere in Afghanistan).** In the field with Afghan troops, sleep with your head pointing West.

Learn as much of their language as you can. Even the best interpreters give you a 50 percent conversation, and nuance is often lost. Oddly, the more of their language you can speak, the smarter rural people tend to think you are. Afghans do not really respect simple, direct speech. Instead, they admire and listen to the man who speaks in a more poetic way, using allusion and metaphor. That is how wise men talk.

Part V: Enemy Culture

Just as in World War II, American Marines fighting in the Pacific theater were trained in Japanese culture in order to understand how they thought and thus better defeat them, this Guide provides an explanation of the culture of the enemy in Afghanistan.

Learning Keypoints for Part V

- It is a mistake to simply dismiss the insurgents as "Islamic fanatics" and not look deeper into the nature of your enemy. Yes, severe and even bizarre interpretations of Islam are a part of the enemy's thought -- but social and political factors are also important.
- Insurgent groups in Afghanistan today, including those affiliated with the *Taliban* and *Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin* (HiG), are virtually 100 percent Pashtun. It's not about religion -- it's about the synthesis of religion, *jihad* and *Pashtunwali*.
- The HiG (*Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin*) group uses the *Ihkwan* model of Islamic revolution developed by the Muslim Brotherhood. It is more like Che Guevara's *foco* model of insurgency, with an urban elite attempting to mobilize the rural masses. HiG leadership is highly centralized in the figure of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, an angry and twisted killer on the fringe of Afghan politics since 1979.
- The original *Taliban* was able to mobilize as effectively as it did in after 1994 because the leadership role of the charismatic *Mullah* is subconsciously understood in the Pashtun areas. In 2009, the *Taliban* is more like a brand name or ideology than a tightly centralized organization, with many cells and splinter groups loosely allied to *Mullah* Omar, the leader of the original *Taliban* movement.

Why Insurgent Culture Matters

During World War II, Marines fought Japanese troops in the Pacific. They were shocked at first by how the Japanese would mass for suicidal "*banzai* charges" when they ran out of ammunition and, later in the war, carried out *kamikaze* attacks by piloting cheap airplanes loaded with explosives deliberately into Navy ships. This kind of fanaticism is alien to American values. Marines could have just simply labeled the Japanese as "fanatics," but that wouldn't yield any useful knowledge about how they did business on the battlefield. So, the War Department found experts on Japan who taught Marines about Japanese culture. They identified resulting weaknesses in the Japanese way of war, such as their tactical



Mullah Muhammad Omar Akhund, who was born in 1961 west of Kandahar city in the district of Panjwai, was the leader of the original Taliban movement. He is still alive and is rumored to be living near Quetta, Pakistan. Omar is a Ghilzai, of the Hotak tribe. He lost an eye fighting the Soviets. He is said to be completely illiterate. Today his role is thought to be less operational and more like that of a spiritual guide.

inflexibility after launching an attack, and used them against them. It saved Marines' lives and it helped win the war. **In the same way, to defeat the enemy in Afghanistan, it is vital to understand your enemy's culture and the weaknesses it creates.** They are a tough and formidable enemy, but they're not "supermen," any more than the Japanese were. The purpose of this chapter is to give deploying Marines a better understanding of the enemy's culture in Afghanistan. The *Taliban* is not simply a religious movement, and it's a mistake to just dismiss the current insurgencies, as many people do, as simply "Islamic fundamentalism."

Understanding Your Enemy

How you see your enemy in Afghanistan is not how he sees himself. If you don't understand who your enemy *thinks* he is in a counterinsurgency, and what *he* thinks and believes he is doing, you're essentially fighting the wrong war. The enemy is presenting an image of himself to the local population, based on the story he believes about himself. If you're countering some other image of him than the one he is presenting to his own people through his own culture, you're not only not in the same ballpark as the enemy, you're not even playing the same sport.

The United States government never really understood the insurgency in Vietnam in these terms. *We* were fighting the spread of communism, but we never really grasped that Ho Chi Minh and the North Vietnamese were fighting a nationalist struggle for freedom from colonial masters to reunite their country, or at least they convinced virtually everybody in both North and South Vietnam they were. We *consistently* underestimated this motivation, and were trying to depict the enemy in a way that was foreign to how the majority of the Vietnamese people *saw* him (which is different than *agreeing* with him). In this sense, historians today largely agree, we were fighting the wrong war.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, leader of the "Hizb-i-Islami (Party of Islam) Gulbuddin," usually referred to simply as "HIG." He is a detribalized Kharoti Ghilzai Pashtun. He has been a perennial loser in Afghan politics since 1979. He used to prowl the bazaars of Kabul throwing acid in the faces of women without Burkas. Although he is an educated man, he is driven by a total hatred of the Western world.



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This part of this guide is an attempt to draw a Lesson Learned from this misunderstanding by explaining who the enemy thinks he is in Afghanistan, and what he believes he is doing. **Don't get the wrong idea: the authors of this Guide don't agree with their beliefs or their actions**, any more than we would with *banzai* charges or *kamikaze* attacks. The purpose here is to keep you in the same ballpark and the same sport as the enemy, who is able to control this aspect of the game because it is *his* country, *his* culture, and *his* language. The insurgent gets to define who he says he is, not the foreign army who is fighting him. In other words, you have to defeat him on *his* cultural terms, not yours.

The insurgency in Afghanistan today is being waged by several loosely linked insurgent groups commonly referred to in the media as "the *Taliban*," but which include reinforced elements of the old, pre-2001 *Taliban*, splinter groups like the Haqqani Faction and the Tora Bora Front, and the followers of the insurgent leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and his *Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin* (HiG) party. What they all have in common is the supremacy of their religion in their lives, and the belief that they are waging a holy war, or *jihad* .

Afghan scholar Dr. Thomas Barfield has noted that one of the easiest adjectives to use in referring to Afghanistan is "**medieval**," because, in fact, Afghanistan is still a medieval country in many ways. Land ownership in much of the south, for example, is feudal, just as it was in Europe in the Middle Ages. Much of the land is owned by a few powerful lords (landlords), and the people who work the land are essentially serfs whose survival depends on the whim of the landlord. Just as rural medieval Europe was dominated by the Church of Rome (the Vatican today) and focused on the crusades, rural southern Afghanistan today dominated by Islam and its version of the crusades, the *Jihad*. And just as in medieval Europe, secular (non-religious) authority is weak and often corrupt. Religion impacts every aspect of life.

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The various insurgent groups in Afghanistan today believe they are on a crusade. In this sense, perhaps the best analogy for their organization and operation are the monastic warrior orders of medieval Christian Europe such as the Knights Templar, as **Ahmed Rashid**, for example has suggested. Religious warrior orders of this type were remarkably similar to the various *Taliban* groups today in many ways. Both had three basic occupations - religious leaders, warriors and students. Both believed they were acting on the will of God and their faith in their beliefs was absolute. And both spent a major amount of effort fundraising for the crusades.



The orders of warrior monks of medieval Europe, such as the Knights Templar, seen in this old engraving, had much in common structurally and culturally with the insurgent groups of Afghanistan today.

Many of the hard-corps foot soldiers of the insurgent groups today literally grew up in the madrassas of the *Taliban* order as orphans or refugees. Monastic life devoted to religious study inside the walls of the all-male *madrassa* is all they have ever known, and they are comfortable in it. It gives them a sense of brotherhood and a sense of purpose to life. There is always a wide spectrum of insurgent participation in any insurgency, which is a different way of thinking about military service. (In the Marine Corps, you're either a Marine or you're not, for example, but an insurgency is more fluid. Some insurgents are farmers or shepherds by day and IED bombers by night, while others are hard-corps, full time insurgents.)

Holy War

Your enemy is fighting a *jihād*. The word literally means "struggle," but in the rural Pashtun areas, it is largely synonymous with "holy war" or crusade. The *Taliban* insurgent is certain that it is God's will that he fight to eliminate the Afghan infidels in Kabul and drive the foreign infidels (you) from Afghanistan. This form of resistance - holy war - is centuries old in the Pashtun region. **It is a reaction to external pressure and to the threat of change.**

The *mullahs* who provide most of the operational leadership of the insurgents have a complex underground network of support in the rural areas through their mosques and *madrassas*. Their foot soldiers come from many sources for many reasons. Many soldiers are recruited directly from these *madrassas*. Others come from the existing Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan still leftover from the Soviet war. It has been estimated that there are some 5,000 *madrassas* in operation with approximately 600,000 students in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan alone. In addition, there are still some 2.5 million Afghan refugees still in the camps, a quarter of whom are fighting age males. Other *Taliban* fighters come from within Afghanistan for a number of reasons. One is *badal* -- revenge. In an informal survey of more than 50 *Taliban* soldiers in 2008, more than a third said they volunteered after a family member was killed or injured by coalition air strikes. Others may be fed up with corruption and injustice. A few just need the pay.

What they all have in common, however, is Islam. The enemy has succeeded in defining their actions among the people as a *jihād*. Thus, supporting it in the rural areas is more than just an obligation under *Pashtunwali*, but also a religious obligation. While the historical roots of this type of resistance to social change are deep, as we have seen, the current *jihād* can be traced directly back to the 1979-1989 Soviet-Afghan War.

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The Soviet-Afghan War in a sense played right into Pakistan's hands. Before the war began, Pakistan had already embarked on an aggressive program of "Islamizing" the whole country and all its institutions, including the courts and the army. After Bangladesh became independent, Pakistan was seized with the fear of the whole country further splitting apart into an independent Baluchistan, Punjab, Sind and Pashtunistan. The counterweight to ethnic nationalism, which had been so catastrophic for the country in the Bangladesh crisis, was to be a shared religious identity.

At the same time, since 1948, Pakistan has feared invasion by India and a resulting "two-front" war. In the event of a conflict with India, Pakistani strategy is based on having a secure northern border to avoid having to fight on two fronts at once. **As a result, Pakistan has a policy of pursuing "strategic depth" in defense of its northern border.** In practice this has meant extensive Pakistani meddling in the affairs of Afghanistan in order to ensure a government in Kabul friendly to Pakistani interests. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and the massive influx of money and weaponry to the anti-Soviet guerillas that it triggered, was seen by the Pakistanis as an unbelievable opportunity to achieve both Islamicization of their society and strategic depth at the same time -- and get somebody else to pay for it.



Mujahideen ("Holy Warriors") battling the Soviet army in Afghanistan in the 1980's. Most of today's Taliban commanders have combat experience in this conflict.

A Classic Case of "Blowback"

In certain parts of the US government, when an operation has unintended negative second or third-order consequences, they are called "blowback." The radical Islamic movements in the Pashtun areas today were always present, but putting them on steroids in the 1980's was pretty short-sighted by any reasonable accounting -- a classic case of "blowback."

During the Soviet-Afghan war, the Pakistanis had their own agenda. The Pakistani Army's intelligence branch, called the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, or ISI, became extremely powerful by cooperating with the United States and the government of Saudi Arabia to channel roughly \$7.2 billion dollars worth of covert foreign military aid to their preferred *Mujahideen* clients. To control the *Mujahideen*, the ISI formed seven resistance groups, each with a notional political party associated with it. These became known as "**the Peshawar Seven**." CIA oversight of the covert money was weak, and much of it went into ISI's pockets.

The ISI wanted puppets they could control when the war was over. The Durrani Pashtun tribes which traditionally supplied most of Afghan's national leadership and all of its royalty were anathema to the Pakistanis -- they would never cooperate in setting up a government which owed allegiance to Islamabad. So they were marginalized, and their traditional rivals, the Ghilzais and the Hill Tribes, were favored. **Significantly, three of the seven recognized groups were led by Ghilzai Pashtun tribal leaders. None was led by a Durrani Pashtun.**

For the CIA, the object of the war was to bleed the Soviets -- payback for the Vietnam War and Soviet support to the North Vietnamese (**Steve Coll**). Afghanistan was thought of as "the Soviet Vietnam." The CIA was happy to steer money towards whichever groups fooled them into believing they were killing the most Russian troops. The undisputed champ of faking battles and Soviet kills was Gulbuddin Hekmatyar

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of the HiG organization, which in reality spent most of the war assassinating other Afghan *Mujahideen* commanders and stockpiling arms and money, positioning itself for the inevitable postwar power struggle. (So effective was HiG in killing other *Mujahideen* leaders from other parties that it was rumored Hekmatyar must be working for the Soviets!)

Some Afghans at the time said this was a bad idea, including the exiled Afghan King, Zahir Shah, and Hamid Karzai (then a U.S. contact in Peshawar). The U.S. State Department also argued for giving the money and weapons to more moderate or nationalist groups in the **Peshawar Seven**, like Ahmed Shah Massoud's *Jamiat-i-Islami* movement, or the royalist NIFA party, as this would be better for the country, and warned the CIA that arming, funding and equipping radical anti-western extremists and terrorists who hated the United States would backfire. This advice was ignored. As a result, the religious extremists among the *Ghilzais* and the hill tribes around **Jallaludin Haqqani** became very wealthy and powerful.

Because the majority of enemy commanders in Afghanistan today are *Mullahs* who learned their business as *Mujahideen* in the Soviet-Afghan War, it is not surprising that the tactics of the almost-exclusively Pashtun *Taliban* today are similar to those of the *Mujahideen* against the Soviets. *Mujahideen* combat tactics were studied and recorded in detail by **Lester Grau** in two well-known books.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai (left) bows to the late King Zahir Shah (right). Both advised against too much support for Islamic extremists during the Soviet-Afghan war.



A Frontier Phenomenon

If you could sit around a campfire with a British officer or NCO on the Afghan frontier a hundred years ago, and you could tell him about your day-to-day operations and your battle with the *Taliban*, he would understand exactly what you were talking about. Only the suicide bombing and the IEDs would be new to him. But *mullahs* leading *jihads*, *Talibs*, and the battle tactics of the guerillas would be all too familiar. In fact, it was such a common occurrence, the British even had a name for it: "**The Mad Mullah**" Phenomenon.

And, if you could sit in a little café in Heidelberg, Germany, with the brilliant "father of modern sociology," **Max Weber**, a hundred years ago, and you told him about *Mullah Omar* and his *Taliban*, he, too, would know exactly what you were talking about. He, too, would have a familiar name for the problem: He'd tell you it was a religious "**charismatic cult**."



Max Weber, left, the 19th century German social scientist, would have understood Mullah Omar exactly. The Fakir of Ipi, right, was a "Mad Mullah" who led an insurgent movement very similar to the Taliban in the 1930's.



Here's how Weber would describe *Mullah Omar's* power:

"charisma is a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader."

The Charismatic *Mullah*

There are many well-known frontier antecedents for the *Taliban*, including the *Fakir* of Ipi (Mirza Ali Khan), the *Mullah* Powindah, the *Mullah* of Hadda, and, more recently, *Mullah* Noor Muhammad, also known as the "*Mullah* of Waziristan." As **Akbar Ahmed** notes:

"Muslim revolts and their leaders, from Sudan to Swat, have interested the West over the last centuries and have provided the prototype of the 'Mad *Mullah*.' The implicitly hostile reaction of the West to the contemporary Muslim movements and their leaders may be partly explained as a historically conditioned response to this prototype."



Another one of the many charismatic "Mad Mullahs" on the frontier, photographed with his followers.

The *Taliban* movement of *Mullah* Omar was originally able to mobilize effectively in the rural areas in large part exactly because this phenomenon was such a normal, accepted, well-recognized and subconsciously understood cultural set piece in the Pashtun areas of northern Pakistan and southern Afghanistan. In each of the historical cases, the *Mullah* who

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led the insurgency was a rural *Mullah* with little or no prior social standing or importance. In each case, he was able to inspire followers by taking on new, "charismatic" powers.

Mullah Omar is a classic example. After seizing control of Kandahar, Omar removed the garment believed by many Afghans to be the original cloak of the Prophet Mohammed from its vault in the *da Kherqa Sherif Ziarat* shrine on April 4, 1996, and wore it over his shoulders while standing atop a mosque before a crowd in the city. As the sacred cloak is a holy relic believed to hold mystical properties, many Afghan believe this endowed *Mullah* Omar with supernatural powers. The Kandahari crowd duly proclaimed Omar as *Amir-ul-Momineen*, the "Leader of the Faithful." Everything about him subsequently fits the charismatic prototype -- as did the *Fakir* of Ipi, the *Mullah* of Hadda and the other "Mad *Mullahs*" of frontier history.

The *Taliban* organization by 1996 conformed to the colonial era "Charismatic *Mullah*" movement model perfectly. (It is still very similar to the "Hindustani Fanatics" movement of the 1800s.) Virtually every decision in Afghanistan was referred to *Mullah* Omar alone for confirmation. No one else in the *Taliban* had any latitude to make any decisions at all. As **Ahmed Rashid** writes, "After 1996, power was entirely concentrated in the hands of *Mullah* Omar."

"Fanaticism, Fanaticism, and Fanaticism"

British colonial authorities assumed their efforts to "bring the benefits of British civilization" to other peoples were inherently good, and they had a hard time thinking of the negative reactions of the people to those changes as rational behavior. However, as **David Edwards** notes, the "colonial vision of progress and civilization" often represented "a cultural threat...to the *Mullah* and the Islam he embodied."

When revolts occurred on the frontier, such as the Great Pashtun Revolt of 1897, the British authorities of the day attributed the cause to "Islamic fanaticism." Writing in 1898

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of the Great Pashtun Revolt, for example, **Lionel James** noted:

After having studied the attitude of the tribes from the first burst of their energy through the varied phases of their resistance, and the final collapse of the majority of sections, one is inclined to sum the causes of the outbreak up under three heads: the first of which is fanaticism, the second, fanaticism; and the third, fanaticism.

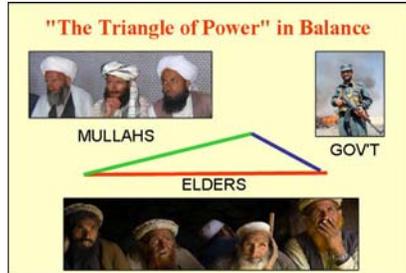
They can perhaps be best viewed, as **David Edwards** suggests, as a conservative reaction to threatening social change. In addition, for the leadership of the movement, there is increased political power, which is usually transmitted through a particular tribal agency. In the case of *Mullah Omar*, it was initially the *Hotaki Ghilzai* and their allies seeking ascendancy over the royalist *Popalzai Durrani*. In addition, it is necessary to demonize some "other," some common threat, such as "infidels," or *Shia* Muslims to maintain momentum. For the *Taliban* today, the demonized other is the "infidel puppet government in Kabul."

A Society Out of Balance

In a very real sense, Afghan rural society today is a society out of balance. Whenever in the past the Pashtun south has been peaceful and stable, there has been equilibrium between three power elements: The elders, the religious leaders (*mullahs*) and the government. This is sometimes called "The Triangle of Power" in Afghanistan. It is not an equilateral triangle, however. When the southern part of the country is in balance, the side of the elders is the longest, and the government side is the shortest. Today, after 30 years of war, the *Mullahs* side has basically become the longest side. Thirty years of war also created a new, fourth side to the traditional triangle: Warlords. Unlike most wars in Afghanistan, the Soviet-Afghan War lasted long enough to create a new leadership class of *Mujahideen* commanders.

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After the Soviets left, these men, who either through skill or luck or combination of both had acquired money, guns and men, did not want to go back to a life of poverty in their little villages. So they used their new power to set themselves up as local power brokers -- warlords. This new force tore into the traditional "triangle" and began to shred the fabric of Afghan society.



The traditional triangle of power in rural Pashtun society. During the war, the Mullahs' power grew to be larger than the elders, and returning Mujahideen leaders further damaged the society.

This further undermined the power of the elders, began to fragment the tribes, and weakened the tribes' resistance to outside political forces. The country disintegrated into civil war, with former *Mujahideen* using the leftover ordnance and heavy weapons abandoned by the Soviets to fight each other for control of the country. Some simply became bandits. Many former *Mujahideen* returned to northern Pakistan and became political leaders. Hundreds of foreign fighters also settled in the remote FATA instead of going home. Others went back to their own home countries, or to third countries, and became a sort of floating terrorist army. But the worst impact was on Afghanistan, where the new warlords ran wild, looting, stealing and raping. The country descended into anarchy. The rural people wanted peace and security at any price to end the hell they were living in. The stage was set for the *Taliban* takeover beginning in 1994 -- and a new kind of hell. At first, however, when the Taliban ended the lawlessness, the people liked them.

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In addition, as we have seen, the type of *jihād* the *Taliban* was on was one which was familiar to the people, a continuation of a long tradition. **These four developments** -- (1) the dramatic increase in the military power of the *Ghilzais* and the Hill Tribes, (2) the further weakening of the tribal leadership structure caused by returning *Mujahideen* warlords, (3) the anarchy and chaos in the rural countryside caused by warlords, and (4) the rise of Islam as a political force -- **set the stage for a *Ghilzai*-based, Pakistani-backed traditional Islamic law-and-order movement (*jihād*) which was able to overpower the weakened tribal leadership: "The *Taliban*."**



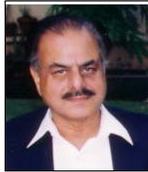
After the Soviets were defeated and withdrew, the US also pulled out, and warlords and former Mujahideen drove Afghanistan into chaos and lawlessness.

A New Frankenstein Monster

When it became clear to the Pakistani ISI in 1992 that their favorite killer, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, could not dislodge the new Rabbani government from Kabul, that in fact he had no popular support, and that he would always be a powerless loser on the Afghan political stage, they needed a "Plan B." (His guerilla training camps, however, were still useful to the Pakistani government because they trained many terrorists for the insurgency against Indian security forces in the Kashmir, so they didn't drop him completely.) Pakistani genetic meddling in the politics of Afghanistan then went to a whole new level. They put a marginal *jihadi* group in Kandahar province calling itself the *Taliban* on steroids in 1994 and created a new Frankenstein monster.

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The rest of the story you know already. The *Taliban* were totally incapable of governing. In fact their view of life, that all that is needed is belief in Islam, precluded administration and governance at all. They became dependent on *al Qaeda* and their Pakistani masters for funds and military power. Osama bin Laden used Afghanistan as a safe haven to plan and carry out the attacks of September 11, 2001. Shortly afterwards, the United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom, and the *Taliban* retreated into Pakistan in good order, keeping most of its senior leadership intact.



Former ISI Chief General Hamid Gul, left, helped create the Taliban and now supports it and other Islamist groups in Pakistan. He blamed the al Qaeda terrorist attacks of 9/11 on "Israeli Secret Agents." There are many other former and current ISI officers like him who are sympathetic to the terrorists.

The insurgents who emerged from this battlefield defeat in 2003 to launch the current insurgency, however, are not the Ghilzai-based *Taliban* of old. Whereas the "original" *Taliban* of 1992-2001 had been firmly under the leadership of *Mullah Omar* and many of its leaders had been either from his Hotaki Ghilzai tribe, or its allied tribe, the Kakar Ghurghusht, the "new" *Taliban* is culturally more of a franchise operation -- a looser network of insurgent groups with a wider tribal base. They still revere *Mullah Omar* as a spiritual leader, but no longer as the primary political leader of the movement. That leadership is now more diffuse.



Two typical Taliban fighters. Note the Chinese-made chest packs for AK magazines, and the black or dark grey turbans, which are worn by many Pashtuns but are also popular with the guerillas .

Summary of Part V:

The insurgents are clever. Don't make the mistake of underestimating your enemy, and thinking that just because your enemy is illiterate, he is also stupid. He will try to use the local culture to turn civilians against us when we fail to understand the importance of local social values. **Cultural awareness doesn't mean being aware that the Afghans have a culture. Cultural awareness means changing your own behavior to the greatest extent possible consistent with your Rules of Engagement.** Don't let the enemy take the weapon of cultural knowledge out of your hands and use it against you.

Your enemy is not afraid to die. He believes that to die in battle against the infidel is an express ticket to paradise. He has not yet figured out that the *Mullahs* sending him to die are in no hurry to get there themselves. However, tribal culture is used by the enemy to create the paradox of warfare in Afghanistan, which for centuries has been: **The more enemies you kill, the faster you lose.** Because of *badal* (revenge), the Pashtun have a saying: "**Kill one enemy, make ten.**" Successful counterinsurgency is rarely, if ever, about killing insurgents, and in Afghanistan, killing Pashtun guerillas pretty much just makes more Pashtun guerillas. The fight against the insurgents will be won by showing the tribals that life will be better without the *Taliban* in charge than with it. The less you act like a foreign goon squad, and more like a friendly temporary guest who is trying to help them, the more likely you will be to get that message across.



This powerful Taliban PsyOps leaflet conveys the message that infidels are defiling the tribal women. Such searches are often death sentences for the women searched, because the search has brought dishonor on the family, and the woman must be killed to reduce the family's dishonor.

Part VI: Working With the ANA

Deploying Marine Corps Embedded Training Team (ETT) personnel regularly receive many hours of cultural training from CAOCL before deploying, and this guide is not intended to substitute for that training. Use it as a handy pocket "refresher" to what you were taught in the classroom.

Serving as an embedded trainer with the Afghan National Army is challenging and rewarding. **The job is closer in nature to "combat advisor" than "embedded trainer."** The ANA soldiers are an ethnic mix from all the ethnic groups discussed in this guide. As in any army, barracks room fistfights between men from different backgrounds are not uncommon. In combat, you'll find they generally make excellent soldiers. Afghans love a good scrap, and the ANA has proven itself to be reliable and trustworthy. Keep in mind that many ANA soldiers have seen more firefights than you've had hot dinners. There have been very few cases of ANA troops helping the enemy or being otherwise unfaithful. In the very earliest days, some ANA units lacked aggressiveness, but now, with seasoning and experience, they are performing well. The men are all volunteers, and most cite patriotism as their reason for joining. Many have hidden health issues, such as poor eyesight, injuries they're afraid to report, and even mental health problems. Afghans don't like to fight at night, which can be an issue when operating with US and coalition forces.

Former ETTs often report that you have to push ANA units into proactive patrolling, community interaction and regular training, as they tend to stay on the FOB if you don't.



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You'll find officer quality to still be widely variable, as the officer training academy has just recently come on line, and officer selection is still largely political. Most are good. Some are tough veterans from both sides of the Soviet-Afghan War who have seen a lot of combat. A few lack leadership skills and should not be in the army. **One of the biggest issues with officers is corruption.** In their culture, enriching themselves through their positions as officers in the old army was traditional and normal. This included skimming pay, rations, and equipment for their own profits. Instilling a sense of duty to country and professionalism among the officers has been one of the most frequently-reported challenges by Marines who have served as ETTs.

Other issues that have been frequently reported include the tendency to break tactical formations and charge straight at the enemy in a firefight, standing up to fire their weapons instead of using cover and concealment, and a big lack of understanding of the role of the NCO. This last issue is a legacy of the old Afghan Army, which was modeled on the Russian Army. Getting your officers to understand the function of NCOs and not see that as a weakening of their own authority will take a lot of work in most cases. When working with Coalition units, you will sometimes have to act as an advocate for your unit to get them in the thick of the action, as there is a tendency to see the ANA as landscaping.



Keep the teaching simple and use easy-to-understand training aids. Many ETTs buy a bag of plastic toy soldiers from their local toy store in the States before deploying and report using them in sand table exercises to good effect.

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As in working within the civilian community, personal respect is everything. Your Marine Corps leadership skills will stand you in good stead here -- the kind of leadership the Marine Corps has taught you, in terms of honor, integrity and taking care of your men -- is exactly what ANA soldiers respect. Just remember to never, ever lose your temper, and maintain your "rank appropriate behavior."

Other challenges for you to keep an eye out for include discrimination against the ethnic Hazara soldiers in your unit, the possibility of drug use, and hygiene and sanitation on the FOB. Most ETTs report a lot of tension and conflict with the local police. Corruption in the police is endemic, and your ANA unit will be a challenge to the local police graft, bribery and corruption schemes. You may have to work to keep this from boiling over into fistfights and real trouble. Make an effort to keep on good terms with the local Police Chief, including frequent visits for tea and talk. Although it's against regulations, somehow many FOBs seem to acquire pet dogs. Afghans don't really understand the idea of a pet, and treat dogs badly. Dogs are regarded as "unclean." Training them to understand your FOB's dog is different and not to kick it or throw rocks at it will be a challenge. Remember also that it will be very difficult or even impossible to bring a dog home from Afghanistan. **And above all, understand the tribal angle of everything going on around you, and don't let your unit be seen to be taking sides.**

Keeping a pet on the ANA FOB is common, but remember veterinary services are non-existent. Take deworming medicine and other common pet health needs with you if you like dogs.



Some Guidelines for Working With the ANA

- Always keep your temper. Afghans do not respect a man who cannot control his emotions. If you lose their respect, you're finished. Marine Corps leadership will earn their respect.
- Whenever possible, avoid putting your soldiers in positions where villagers can make false accusations (such as theft) against them. If possible, during searches, pair one searching ANA soldier with one adult male of the compound being searched.
- Learn as much Pashto as you can for working with the local villagers and elders.
- If you find yourself short of AK47 ammunition for training, try the THT soldiers at the local PRT compound.
- If you are bivouacked with your men, make certain you sleep with your head pointed towards Mecca (West), not your feet.
- If somebody gives you a case of MREs for your soldiers, be sure to remove the meals which contain ham, bacon and other pork products. Muslims are forbidden to eat them.
- During the month of Ramadan, your men absolutely may not eat or drink anything from dawn to dark. What would Chesty Puller do in this situation?
- Do not talk about women. Do not show pictures of your wife or girlfriend. Do not look at or photograph women. Let villagers hide their women before your men go into their homes.
- A friendly relationship with the Kuchi nomads outside your FOB may yield big security dividends for you and your successors.
- Remember the words of TE Lawrence: "Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the (Afghans) do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them."

Books for Further Learning

All of the authors mentioned in the text of the guide are listed here in alphabetical order, together with the titles of their relevant books. The **highlighted** book titles are highly recommended.

- Ahmed, Akbar Resistance and Control in Pakistan. About Mullahs and Pashtun tribesmen in Waziristan.
- Caroe, Olaf **The Pathans**. The classic about the Pashtuns.
- von Clausewitz On War. A classic of military strategy.
- Deane, Harold see **Soldier Sahibs** by Charles Allen. Soldier Sahibs is a must read book for ETT personnel!
- Dorronsoro, Gilles Revolution Unending. A good book about the politics and modern history of Afghanistan.
- Dupree, Louis **Afghanistan**. The best work ever done on the culture of Afghanistan. A must read.
- Edwards, David Heroes of the Age. A good study of a "Mad Mullah" movement and how it evolves and operates.
- Glatzer, Bernt "The Pashtun Tribal System," Chapter 10 in Pfeffer & Behera, "Concept of Tribal Society," (Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies, Volume 5)
- Griffin, Michael **Reaping the Whirlwind**. About the Taliban
- Lester Grau The Bear Went Over the Mountain, and The Other Side of the Mountain, are detailed studies of Taliban combat tactics.
- Haroon, Sana **Frontier of Faith**. Outstanding standing study of the invisible but powerful role of Sufism.
- James, Lionel see **Soldier Sahibs** by Charles Allen.
- Lawrence, T.E. Seven Pillars of Wisdom. About Arabia, but still good cultural advice for all ETTs.
- Rashid, Ahmed **The Taliban**. The best book on the enemy.
- Spain, James **The Way of the Pathan**. An excellent book on the Pashtun culture and *Pashtunwali*.
- Weber, Max "On Charisma and Institution Building." For those interested in sociology and charisma.

Websites for Further Learning

This website is highly recommended. If you join the mailing list, every day you will receive an e-mail containing every English-language news story about Afghanistan printed anywhere in the world in the last 24 hours:

- www.mobycapital.com

These websites contain a wealth of information on Afghanistan, including maps, history, language dictionaries, proverbs, folktales, videos, jokes, photographs, and more:

- www.afghan-web.com/culture
- www.pashto.org
- www.afghan-network.net/Culture/
- www.afghanland.com/culture/culture.html
- www.culturalorientation.net/afghan/
- www.afgha.com
- www.afghana.com
- www.afghanistan.net
- <http://www.aims.org.af/> (especially good for maps)

This website is an online encyclopedia of Afghanistan created by the Library of Congress:

- <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/aftoc.html>

This website contains 30 years of research on Nuristan by Dr. Richard Strand:

- <http://users.sedona.net/~strand/>

This website, of the Afghan Studies Center at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, contains many links to maps, factbooks, and other websites:

- <http://www.unomaha.edu/~world/cas/>

These two commercial websites may be useful in tracking down good reference books on Afghanistan:

- www.alibris.com
- www.amazon.com

How to Contact CAOCL

The Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning wants to hear from you, while you're in country and when you return to the United States about your cultural experiences in Afghanistan. Instructors are available for unit training prior to deployment. Contact us for comments, feedback and questions at:

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Quantico, Virginia 22134

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www.tecom.usmc.mil/CAOCL

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Field Notes

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Survival Pashto

My friend, I am an American and do not speak Pashto.
zemaa malGaryah, zeh yaw aamreekaayee yim aaw peh pakhto neh powhaygam.

زما ملگریه، زه یو امریکایي یم او په پښتو نه پوهېږم.

Please protect me and help me reach my American brothers.
heelah kawum panah rakRei aaw merestah raa sarah wukRei cheh Khpelo aamreekaayee
wuroNo tah werasaygim.

هیله کوم پناه راکړئ او مرسته راسره وکړئ چه خپلو امریکایي ورونو ته
ورسپېږم.

I ask for Panah (refuge/ asylum/ protection).
zeh panaah ghuwaaRem.

زه پناه غواړم.

I put my trust in your honor.
zeh staaso peh eemaandaarei baawar larem.

زه ستاسو په ایماندارۍ باور لرم.

If you give this paper to the Americans, they will understand the situation.
keh taaso daa kaaghaz aamreekaayaano tah warkRei, haghooi peh wazA powhaygee.

که تاسو دا کاغذ امریکایانو ته ورکړئ، هغوی په وضع پوهېږي.

To show my thanks for your hospitality, I will give you two sheep when I reach my
American brothers.

kalah cheh zeh Khpelo aamreekaayee wuroNo tah werasaygim, taaso tah bah staaso de
milmastyaa peh Khater dwah pesoonah darkRem.

کله چه زه خپلو امریکایي ورونو ته ورسپېږم، تاسو ته به ستاسو د مېلمستیا
نه د منني په خاطر دوه پسونه درکړم.

My government will help you.
zemaa Hukomat bah taaso sarah merestah wukRee.

زما حکومت به تاسو سره مرسته وکړي.

Thank you very much.
Dayrah maninah.

ډېره مننه.

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Afghanistan

Operational Culture for Deploying Personnel



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