

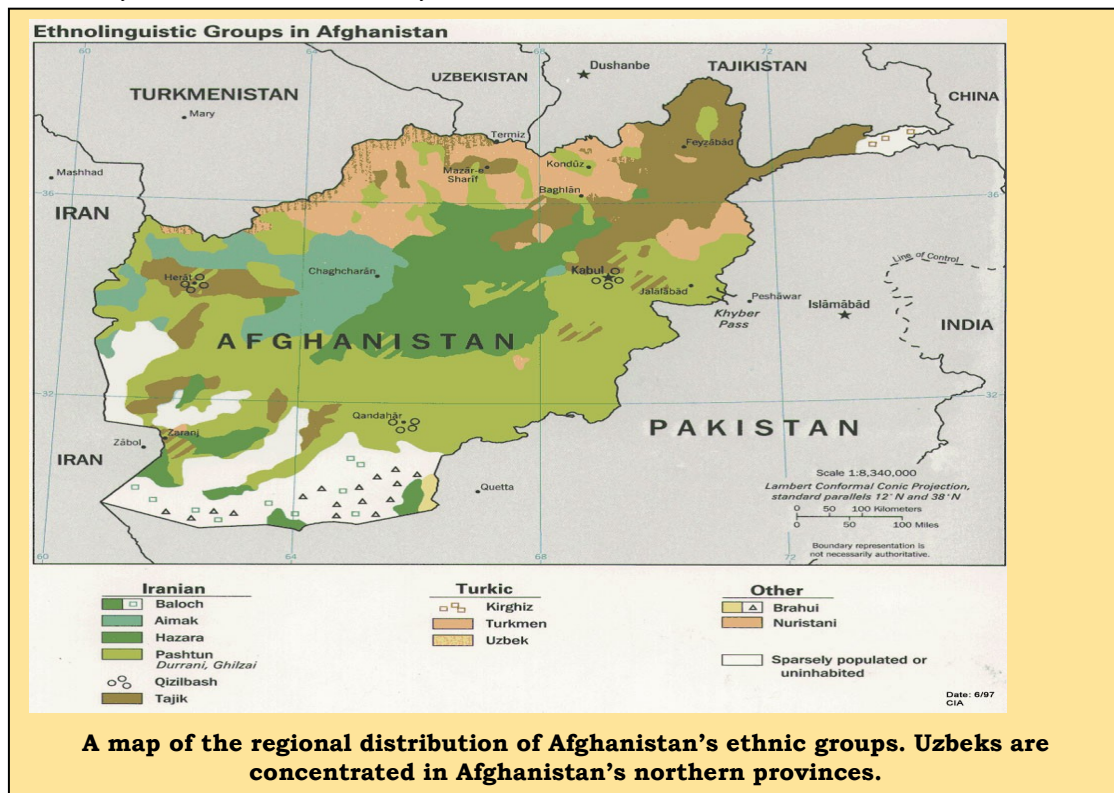
# **Central Asian Cultural Intelligence for Military Operations**

## **Uzbeks in Afghanistan**

### **Summary of Key Issues**

- Uzbeks are the fourth largest ethnic group in Afghanistan (behind the Pashtuns, Tajiks and Hazara), comprising between 6-10% of the Afghan population, or approximately 2-2.5 million people.
- Uzbeks are the largest of Afghanistan's Turkic ethnic groups. The Turkic ethnic groups are of a different ethnic origin than the Pashtuns, Tajiks and Hazaras.
- While Uzbeks make up only a small minority of Afghanistan's population, they do account for 80% of the 25 million people living in the Central Asian Republic of Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan shares a short southern border with Afghanistan. Afghan Uzbeks are closely aligned with their ethnic kin in Uzbekistan.
- The history of the Uzbek migrations from Central Asia to Afghanistan dates back to at least the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. The majority of the recent migrations from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan occurred in the 1920s and 1930s in an effort to escape the newly established Soviet regime, and again after the Second World War.
- Uzbeks are traditionally nomadic, but are now largely settled in the towns and villages north of the Hindu Kush mountain range that effectively divides Afghanistan in two. A small minority of Uzbeks on the northern slopes of the Hindu Kush, west of the city of Maimana, continue to pursue a semi-nomadic life.
- Geographically, Uzbeks live in Afghanistan's Northern Region, the most ethnically diverse region in the country. This area is predominately ethnic Uzbek, but also has sizeable Hazara, Tajik, and Turkmen populations. There are pockets of Pashtuns in this region.
- The Uzbek cultural and political center in Afghanistan is the strategic crossroads town of Mazar-e-Sharif.
- Uzbeks are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi School and speak a form of the Uzbek language known as Southern Uzbek. This language is related to, but also distinct from,

Uzbek (also referred to as Northern Uzbek) which is spoken in Uzbekistan. A large minority of Uzbeks are also fully literate in Dari.



- Most rural Uzbeks are farmers—primarily cotton, but also fruits, vegetables and grain—or herders. Urban Afghan Uzbeks maintain a range of professions: artisans, merchants, silver and goldsmiths, leatherworkers. Uzbek women are known for making high quality Afghan rugs.
- The tribal organization of Uzbeks has mostly disappeared among the settled communities, though it does survive in the scattered nomadic Uzbek communities.
- Uzbek cultural identity is rooted in geography, either in the valley or village where an Uzbek lives, or the town in Central Asia where an Uzbek's family is originally from. Extended families with strict patriarchal authority play an important role in the organization of Afghan Uzbek societies.
- There are at least two main components to the Uzbek cultural identity in Afghanistan: sedentary Turkic peoples living in settled communities without tribal divisions and groups of semi-nomadic farmers and herders that have kept the name and sometimes the subdivisions of their tribe. Throughout Central Asia and Afghanistan settled Uzbeks without tribal divisions are also sometimes referred to as *Sarts*. The differences between the settled *sart* population and the semi-nomadic farmers and herders are primarily historical and cultural. They do not appear to have a significant effect on the political solidarity of Uzbeks in Afghanistan.

- Afghan Uzbeks, like all Central Asian Uzbeks, are generally highly conservative and traditional people. Traditional cultural values, however, often take precedence over Muslim law.
- Afghan Uzbeks are politically cohesive in Afghanistan and are represented by the *Junbishi Mili-yi Islami* (National Islamic Movement or National Islamic Front). This organization was founded by and is currently led by General Abdul Rashid Dostum. The *Junbishi Milli-yi Islami* is one of three main militias in Afghanistan's Northern Alliance, the fighting force made up of mainly non-Pashtun ethnic groups that resisted the Taliban. Dostum is generally considered to be the most powerful warlord in the Northern Region.
- Uzbeks are of Mongoloid appearance and have broad, flat faces and lighter skin than Pashtuns.

## **Uzbek Ethnic Group**

Uzbeks are a people of predominately Turkic origin, although the Uzbek ethnic group contains a substantial mixture of Iranian and Turkicized Mongol elements. Uzbeks trace their history back to Genghis Khan, and to the Golden Hordes that ruled Central Asia and most of Russia after his death.

The ethnic designation 'Uzbek' comes from one of the most powerful rulers of the Golden Horde named Ghiyath ad-Din Mahammad Uzbek Khan (who ruled 1312-1341). Uzbeks also claim to descend from Tamerlane, the Muslim Mongol conqueror of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## Ethnic Description

Tamerlane established an empire running from Turkey across Arabia, Persia, Central Asia, Afghanistan, and large portions of modern day Russia and India. His armies were made up of Turkic soldiers and many Turkic-speaking Mongols. His capital was in Samarakand, part of which is now the state of Uzbekistan. He was succeeded in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century by a series of rulers known as the Timurids. The Timurid rule in north Afghanistan, centered in the city of Herat, led to the rise of the Uzbeks as a dominant political force in northern Afghanistan.

It was during the 16<sup>th</sup> century that many of the Uzbeks of the Golden Horde living in the plains north of the Caspian Sea migrated to Central Asia and to northern Afghanistan. These Golden Horde Uzbeks then mixed with the Uzbeks that had already settled in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the rivalries between the Uzbek khanates in Afghanistan had weakened them to the point that the Pashtun Afghan ruler Amir Abdur Rahman was able to consolidate the Uzbek khanates under his rule.

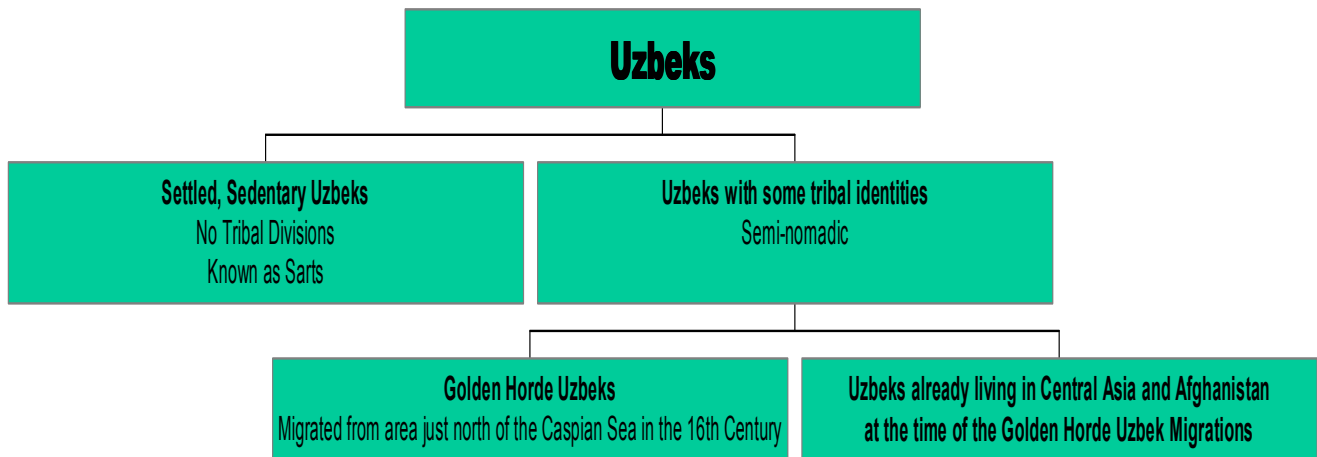
More waves of immigration to Northern Afghanistan from Turkic Central Asia occurred after the Soviet occupation of Central Asia in the 1920s and 1930s. It was during this period that many Pashtuns settled among the Afghan Uzbeks. The Uzbeks were already sharing the north of Afghanistan with large populations of Tajiks and Hazara. These internal migration patterns continued, and by the 1960s the Uzbek had become a small minority within the area it had once dominated.

### *Cultural Identity*

Uzbeks are culturally divided into settled and nomadic populations. The settled, or sedentary, Uzbeks have become urban dwellers or agriculturalists. There are few tribal divisions within these settled Uzbek groups. These settled groups are often known as *sarts*.

Nomadic Uzbeks continue to maintain a tribal identity. Many are still semi-nomadic cattle-breeders. Others chose an isolated pastoral, agricultural lifestyle similar to that of the Mountain Tajiks living in the Pamirs and Hindu Kush mountain ranges.

Most Uzbeks in Afghanistan are settled Uzbeks and lack any real tribal affiliations. These settled Uzbeks instead focus on geography—the actual place an individual Uzbek's family is originally from—as the main determinant of their cultural identity.



### Origins and Cultural Identity of the Uzbeks of Afghanistan

## Centers of Authority

### *Description*

The tribal organization that once characterized Uzbeks throughout Central Asia has mostly disappeared in the settled Uzbek areas of Afghanistan. In these areas the center of authority has shifted to the male head (or patriarch) of an extended family. The patriarch has authority over several generations. This patriarchal power structure extends to the broader village organization. At the village level considerable authoritarian power is ceded to male leaders, also known as *begs*, *arbabs* or *khans*.

Over the past decade, the regional center of Uzbek authority has been the National Islamic Movement and the Northern Alliance. The National Islamic Movement is one of three main parties that comprise the Afghan Northern Alliance (also known as the United Front). The National Islamic Movement is headed by the ethnic Uzbek General Abdul Rashid Dostum.

General Dostum is the dominant representative of Uzbek interests in both the Northern Alliance and Afghanistan more generally.

### *General Abdul Rashid Dostum*

General Abdul Rashid Dostum, the central Afghan Uzbek leader, is a controversial figure with a complicated past. Unlike most of the Northern Alliance members, Dostum was not part of the *Mujahideen* that fought the 1978-1979 Soviet invasion. Rather, he began as a Communist union boss working on a Soviet-built Afghan gas field. The Soviets trained and armed Dostum, and by the mid 1980s he was the commander of the 20,000 man strong Juzjani militia that was based in Mazar-e-Sharif, and controlled many of Afghanistan's northern provinces. During this time Dostum was fighting with the Soviets against the *Mujahideen*. When the Soviets left Afghanistan in 1989, Dostum and his militia continued to support Najibullah's regime against the *Mujahideen*, and Dostum was even awarded the 'Hero of the Republic of Afghanistan' medal for his contributions to the pro-Communist cause. Throughout his years supporting the Soviets and Najibullah, Dostum and his men developed a reputation for cruelty, rape and looting.

In spite of his close relationship with Najibullah's rule, Dostum betrayed the Communist regime when its downfall appeared imminent. In 1992, Dostum joined sides with the *Mujahideen* that he had spent the last decade opposing. Dostum briefly sided with Rabbani's government after the Tajik took power, though this was an uneasy relationship. Dostum was never particularly close to Rabbani, and was more interested in consolidating his power in the north of Afghanistan—in Mazar-e-Sharif and the provinces of the north where most of Afghanistan's Uzbek population lived—than in extending Rabbani's power throughout the country.

Dostum established the "Itihad Shama" (Northern Unity) organization, which acted as a semi-autonomous administration in northern Afghanistan. At one point, Dostum exercised

power over all or parts of seven Afghan provinces: Farwab, Jowzjan, Balkh, Sari-Paul, Samangan, Kunduz and Baghlan.

In 1994, Dostum turned on Rabbani, supporting a movement to depose Rabbani's government led by the fundamentalist Islamic extremist Pashtun and ex-*Mujahideen* warrior, Gulbiddin Hekmatayar. In January of 1994 Dostum laid siege to Kabul. After two months, 4,000 residents of Kabul were dead and nearly 200,000 more were forced out of the city. Ultimately, General Dostum was not able to take control of Kabul and was forced to retreat back to northern Afghanistan.

Dostum's next alliance was with the Pashtun-dominated Taliban. According to one account, in 1995 Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency helped broker an agreement between the Taliban and General Dostum, whereby Dostum helped the Taliban create a small air force from captured aircraft. Meanwhile, Dostum's own planes began a bombing campaign on Herat against the anti-Taliban Tajik commander, Ismail Khan.

During this time, while much of the rest of Afghanistan was in the middle of a civil war, Mazar-e-Sharif and Dostum's northern provinces appeared to be thriving. His followers gave him the title of Pasha—a title used by many of the region's ancient kings—and many believed he was coming to see himself as a modern Tamerlane, the Turkic/Mongol leader that conquered Afghanistan in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century.

When the Taliban came to power in Kabul in 1996, however, Dostum's plans were rudely interrupted. The one-time allies split when the Taliban refused to give Dostum autonomy in the northern provinces that he had controlled for a decade. By the end of 1996, Dostum was using his air force to bomb Taliban positions in and around Kabul. In 1997, the Taliban moved against Mazar-e-Sharif. Dostum's forces buckled when Dostum's chief deputy, General Abdul Malik Pahlawan, betrayed Dostum and handed the city over to the Taliban. Dostum fled Afghanistan for Turkey.

Soon after the Taliban entered the city, Malik turned against *his* new allies, driving them out of Mazar-e-Sharif. Dostum, recognizing the opportunity to recapture the city and deliver a blow to both the Taliban and his new rival, Malik, returned to Afghanistan. Both Dostum and Malik were defeated by the Taliban in August of 1998. Dostum again fled to Turkey where he remained for nearly three years.

General Dostum made his second return to Afghanistan in 2001, quickly reaching a compromise with his former bitter rival, Rabbani's Minister of Defence, Ahmed Shah Masood, whereby the two would join forces and fight against the Taliban. Masood's Northern Alliance provided Dostum's Uzbek militia with enough transportation and equipment to open up a second front in Balkh and Samangan provinces. After Masood's assassination on September 9, 2001, Dostum accepted the appointment of the Tajik, General Fahim, to replace Masood as the head of Northern Alliance forces.

General Dostum became a US ally during the 2001 multinational war against the Taliban. Dostum led the assault on the key strategic city of Mazar-e-Sharif that drove the Taliban out of the city, and began the demise of the Taliban in Afghanistan.



## The Shifting Allegiances of the Uzbek General Rashid Dostum & the National Islamic Movement

<b>Mid 1980s-1989</b>	Fought with the USSR against the <i>Mujahideen</i>
<b>1989-1992</b>	Supported the Soviet sympathizer Najibullah
<b>1992-1994</b>	Helped <i>Mujahideen</i> overthrow his former ally Najibullah, then sided with the Tajik Rabbani
<b>1994</b>	Split with Rabbani, allied with <i>Mujahideen</i> Pashtun Fundamentalists, Gorbunov Hekmatyar. Laid siege to Kabul
<b>1995</b>	Allied with Taliban against Rabbani and Masood
<b>1996</b>	After the Taliban came to power, Dostum fought against them in order to maintain control over Mazar-e-Sharif. Betrayed by his principle deputy, General Malik. Flees for Turkey
<b>1997</b>	General Malik turns on the Taliban. Retakes Mazar-e-Sharif for himself. Dostum returns from Turkey to fight Malik. Dostum and Malik both are defeated by the Taliban. Dostum again flees for Turkey
<b>April 2001</b>	Returns to Afghanistan. Forms alliance with Rabbani and Masood led Northern Alliance against the ruling Taliban.
<b>November 2001</b>	Retakes Mazar-e-Sharif
<b>December 7, 2001</b>	Threatens to boycott Afghan interim government
<b>December 24, 2001</b>	Allies with interim government after being named Deputy Defense Minister

General Dostum remains a key figure in the evolving post-Taliban Afghan political environment and the most prominent Afghan Uzbek leader.

### *Rule of Law*

At a cultural level, Uzbeks are a very traditional people who adhere more closely to cultural values and traditions, than to either Muslim law or civil law. Afghan Uzbek forms of justice are rough, they focus on retribution, and they are not rooted in religious principles.

The Afghan Uzbek reputation for abiding by civil law is particularly tarnished by General Dostum and the behavior of the Uzbek National Islamic Movement. Dostum and his Uzbek followers were trained by the Soviets to combat *Mujahideen* guerilla tactics through torture, rape and plunder.

More recently, Afghan Uzbek troops were involved in the killing of several thousand people in Mazar-e-Sharif in November of 2001, and of 3,000 Taliban soldiers in May of 1997. According to accounts of the 1997 massacre by the Human Rights Watch, “[S]ome of the Taliban troops were taken to the desert and shot, while others were thrown down wells and then blown up with hand grenades.” Dostum also engaged in the indiscriminate shelling of Kabul during his 1994 seige of the Afghan capital in which 4,000 people were killed and 200,000 were made homeless. Dostum is known for his particularly harsh punishment of criminals. During his ten year rule of Mazar-e-Sharif, before the town fell to the Taliban, Dostum regularly ordered the public execution of common criminals. In one account of meeting Dostum in Mazar-e-Sharif, an observer witnessed Dostum’s form of justice in action:

The first time I arrived at the fort to meet Dostum, there were bloodstains and pieces of flesh in the muddy courtyard. I innocently asked the guards if a goat had been slaughtered. They told me that an hour earlier Dostum had punished a soldier for stealing. The man had been tied to the tracks of a tank, which then drove around the courtyard crushing his body into mincemeat, as the garrison and Dostum watched.

There have been calls by international organizations to isolate Dostum for his role in war-time atrocities in Afghanistan.

### *Role of State vs. Role of Ethnic Group*

Afghan Uzbeks are suspicious of any Afghan central government. Much of this suspicion is rooted in the long history of Pashtun rule over Afghanistan and their use of power to advance Pashtun economic, social and political well being, often to the perceived detriment of other ethnic groups. Afghan Uzbeks also have an inherently independent nature, which contributes to their negative views of any Afghan state.

Uzbeks have never held the positions of highest authority in the central government of Afghanistan. Uzbek representation in the interim government is light. General Dostum has been included as the Deputy Defence Minister. Dostum is by far the most prominent Uzbek representative in the Afghan interim government.

Prior to the December 6, 2001, Bonn Conference to determine the make-up of the new Afghan government, Dostum had insisted on being given the position of foreign minister (a job that was given to the Panjshiri Tajik, Abdullah Abdullah). Instead, he was originally offered the Ministries of Mining, Industry and Agriculture. Dostum referred to this decision as “humiliating,” and boycotted the interim government by both refusing to enter Kabul and refusing the government access to the oil and gas resources in the six provinces under his control in northern Afghanistan.

On December 24, 2001 in an effort to appease Dostum and avoid an almost certain, debilitating crisis in the interim Afghan government, Dostum was appointed to the post of Deputy Defence Minister under the interim Defence Minister, and Masood’s successor as the Northern Alliance’s commander, Qasim Fahim. After being appointed to this post, Dostum promised his support to the interim government. He also said that he was prepared to deploy his six Northern Alliance affiliated divisions—by Dostum’s count, almost 50,000 men—as part of the new Afghan national army.

Dostum’s ambitions and Afghan Uzbek involvement in the future Afghan government remain unclear. Some believe that despite his recent declaration of support for Karzai and the interim government, Dostum remains a “potentially destabilizing force,” and that he is interested only in establishing his own authoritarian rule over the northern Uzbek areas of Afghanistan. Others believe Dostum will support an Afghan government, as long as it is a loose federal system that would allow him extensive power in northern Afghanistan.

## Cultural Attitudes

### *Self*

For the most part, Afghan Uzbeks are organizationally cohesive, territorially concentrated and closely aligned with their kin to the north in Uzbekistan. Despite this organizational cohesion, there are differences in the way Uzbeks perceive one another. Identity within the Uzbek ethnic group is determined in great part by the geographical place where an individual was born. In Afghanistan, this could mean the valley in which an Uzbek lives, or it could mean the city from which an Uzbek's immediate family hails.

Uzbeks are known for their strong sense of independence and self-reliance. The independent nature of Uzbeks is reflected by the fact that in Turkic the term Uzbek (or *oʻzbek*) can be literally translated to mean "his own self."

### *Group/Tribe/Clan*

The tribal organizations of the Uzbeks have long since disappeared in the settled communities of Afghan Uzbeks. Some nomadic Uzbeks do still identify themselves by their old tribal names. Settled populations tend to identify more with their village. Uzbek social structure is strictly male dominated. Considerable authoritarian power is granted to leaders. These leaders are referred to as *begs*, *arbabs* or *khans*.

### *Modern Nation State*

The relationship of the Uzbek populations in Afghanistan to the modern Afghan state, like all the non-Pashtun ethnic groups, is complex. Afghan Uzbeks generally have sought to be as independent as possible from central Afghan governments.

General Dostum supported the Soviets and Najibullah primarily because they allowed him to establish a 'fiefdom' in northern Afghanistan in exchange for his support. Each of Dostum's subsequent alliance shifts were designed to ensure that he was able to maintain control over Mazar-e-Sharif and his portion of northern Afghanistan. Dostum can be expected to use his position in the interim government to continue to protect Afghan Uzbek autonomy in the north.

### *United States*

US efforts have been praised by Dostum who openly admits that without US support, the Northern Alliance would never have been able to defeat the Taliban. Dostum and the Afghan Uzbek community, however, will only continue to praise US aid and assistance as long as this assistance corresponds to the overall Afghan Uzbek agenda: increased autonomy for Uzbek communities in northern Afghanistan. As soon as US interests in Afghanistan appear to clash with the objective of Uzbek autonomy within a broader, federal Afghan government, this generally favorable view of Americans can be expected to rapidly erode.

### *Pashtuns*

Uzbeks feel a considerable amount of resentment towards the Pashtuns. Most of this is rooted in the long history of Pashtun domination of Afghanistan, and the perception on the part of Afghan minorities that Pashtuns have used their power to aid the economic, social and political well-being of other ethnic Pashtuns at the expense of the Tajiks, Hazara and Uzbeks.

This antagonism towards Pashtuns is seen and felt at several levels among the Uzbeks. While Uzbeks prefer to marry within their own ethnic groups, Uzbeks will intermarry with Tajiks. Uzbeks will rarely, however, intermarry with Pashtuns.

Uzbek resentment toward Pashtuns has been tragically expressed in waves of large ethnically motivated killings in Mazar-e-Sharif since 1997.

### *Ethnic Groups: Tajiks*

The relationship between the Uzbeks and the Tajiks is marked by a series of conflicts and alliances. The relationship between these two ethnic groups is generally not, however, as confrontational as that between the Uzbeks and Pashtuns.

Tajiks and Uzbeks live side by side in some of the same villages in the north and northeast of Afghanistan. Intermarriage between the two, while not particularly common, does occur. Uzbeks do not look upon such Tajik-Uzbek unions with the same disdain as they would a Pashtun-Uzbek marriage.

Politically, the relationship between General Dostum and his Tajik Northern Alliance allies is profoundly uneasy. The loose coalition of ethnic groups that formed the Northern Alliance are not natural allies. They were united by their mutual opposition to the Taliban. Without a common enemy, Tajik and Uzbek leaders have again begun to compete with one another for power and influence in the ethnically diverse regions of northern Afghanistan.

This tension was seen throughout the war with the Taliban. For example, in the battle for Mazar-e-Sharif in November of 2001, General Dostum and the Tajik commander Osted Atta initially refused to coordinate their attacks on the Taliban positions in and around the city. The two were, in fact, racing and competing to be the first to take the city and therefore claim it as their own. On January 21, 2002, after the fall of the Taliban, General Dostum's forces even clashed with Tajik forces around the town of Konduz, although both sides were quick to minimize the importance of this conflict.

### *Neighboring States: Uzbekistan*

There is a formal tie between the Afghan Uzbeks and the government of Uzbekistan. It is not clear, however, how strong that tie is between Afghan Uzbeks and the population of Afghanistan.

Uzbeks in Afghanistan do feel an ethnic kinship with the 20 million Uzbeks in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan—“literally, “Land of the Uzbeks”—is the cultural center of all Central Asian Uzbeks. To many Uzbeks in Afghanistan, familial and cultural ties to Uzbekistan are still very much alive.

Uzbeks in Uzbekistan, however, tend to view Afghan Uzbeks with ambivalence. While they feel an ethnic link with Afghan Uzbeks, they feel that Afghan Uzbeks have “left” (the word “Afghan” in Uzbek actually means “someone who has left”) and that they are part of a country that is much different than their own. Many Uzbeks in Uzbekistan fear the anarchy of Afghanistan.

The government of Uzbekistan has demonstrated considerable support for Dostum and his Afghan Uzbek followers. Until the fall of Mazar-e-Sharif in August of 1998, Uzbekistan supplied Dostum’s Junbish militia with arms, ammunition and fuel. The garrison town of Termez, home of a former major Soviet base, served as the main base for this assistance. From there, supplies were transferred across the Amy Darya river mainly to Mazar-e-Sharif. In addition, Dostum’s fixed wing and rotary aircraft received maintenance and servicing in Uzbekistan.

The motivations of the Uzbekistan government for providing this aid were primarily two-fold. First, there was the genuine concern for the plight of Uzbeks in Afghanistan. Second, Uzbekistan wished to weaken the Taliban and stem the tide of Islamic fundamentalism before it reached Central Asia. In the late 1990s, a new extreme Islamic movement—the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)—was threatening the secular regime of Uzbekistan President Karimov.

After the fall of Mazar-e-Sharif to the Taliban, the Uzbekistan government could no longer deliver supplies to Dostum via Termez. Instead Uzbekistan focused on fortifying the Uzbek-Afghan border and pursuing a diplomatic solution to the conflict in Afghanistan.

After the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, the Uzbeks were quick to join the US alliance against terrorism and the Taliban. The government of Uzbekistan agreed to host 1,000 US troops. Shortly after Dostum and his Northern Alliance allies took Mazar-e-Sharif in November of 2001, Uzbekistan also agreed to reopen the Friendship Bridge across the Amu Darya River connecting Termez to Mazar-e-Sharif. The re-opening of the bridge has made possible the quick delivery of supplies—both military and humanitarian—to Afghan Uzbeks and the Northern Alliance.

### *Regional Power: Turkey*

The Uzbeks are a Turkic people, and therefore have a natural, historic relationship with Turkey. Turkey provided some support for the Uzbeks throughout its war with the Taliban. Turkey also hosted General Dostum when he fled Afghanistan in 1997, and again in 1998. Dostum's family still resides in Turkey.

In January of 2002, Dostum returned to Turkey, this time as the Deputy Defence Minister of Afghanistan, to meet with Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem. Dostum called upon Turkey to provide assistance in establishing a new national regular army for Afghanistan. Dostum also sought the aid of the Turkish construction industry to, literally, rebuild his country. He also expressed his gratitude to the Turkish people and government for their extensive support throughout the long struggle with the Taliban.

Turkey remains interested in supporting a new government in Afghanistan.

### *Regional Power: India*

Uzbeks have a generally positive view of India and of Indian involvement in the establishment of a new Afghan government, and their help in rebuilding the country's badly damaged infrastructure. Afghan Uzbeks see India as a good 'balancer' against the potential influence of Pakistan—a state with a large Pashtun population that provided extensive support for the Taliban throughout the 1990s.

In January 2002, Dostum traveled to India to meet with Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes and Foreign Secretary Chokila Iyer. The discussions focused mainly on future Indian assistance in health-care, education, agriculture, and police and military training support. Dostum was the third Afghan minister to visit New Delhi since the interim Afghan government was chosen in Bonn on December 6, 2001.

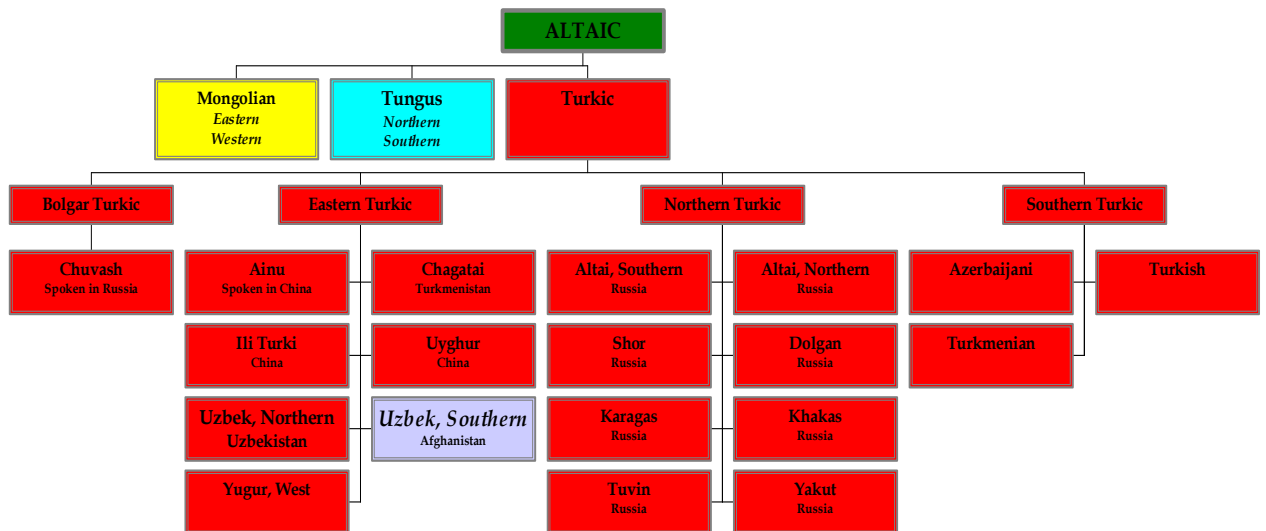
## Language

### *Language*

The Afghan Uzbeks speak a language of the Turkic branch of the Ural-Altaic family known as Southern Uzbek. This language is related to, but distinct from, the Uzbek language spoken in Uzbekistan, which is known as Uzbek or Northern Uzbek. There are significant differences in grammar and vocabulary between the languages, and Southern Uzbek speakers have limited understanding of Northern Uzbek. Southern Uzbek contains many Persian words. Southern Uzbek, like the other Turkic languages of Afghanistan and unlike the Turkic languages of Central Asia, use the Arabic script.

The majority of Afghans, particularly non-Pashtun Afghans, speak Dari, a language belonging to the Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family. Dari is very similar to Farsi, which is spoken in Iran. Because of the prominence of Dari in Afghan society, many of the Turkic Uzbeks, mainly the urban Uzbeks, are bilingual in Dari. Tribal Uzbek village dwellers and Uzbek nomads have limited ability in Dari.

### The Altaic-Turkic Language Tree





## Religion

Afghan Uzbeks are Sunni Muslims of the Hannafi School. Central Asian Uzbeks are not generally strict Muslims. Many traditional secular beliefs have been woven into their Islamic practices. The Islamic faith, however, remains an important part of Uzbek cultural identity. Afghan Uzbeks are thought to be somewhat more religious than the Uzbeks of Uzbekistan.

### *Sunni and Shia*

The split between Sunni and Shia Islam began to occur immediately after Prophet Mohammad's death, with the



**Kabul Mosque**



**Blue Mosque in Mazar-i-Sharif**

**Legend says Caliph Ali, leader, of the Shia division of Islam, was killed and is buried here. Both Shias and the Sunnis come to this mosque in large numbers as pilgrims, especially at the spring equinox, March 21, the Muslim New Year.**

followers of Abu Bakr, one of Mohammad's early disciples, forming the Sunni branch and the followers of Ali, the Prophet's cousin and husband of his daughter Fatima, forming the Shia branch.

The historical divide of Islam into Sunni and Shia branches was originally caused more by political disputes over successors, than by doctrinal differences. Over time, the differences between Sunni and Shia Islam has gradually assumed theological overtones. Shia Muslims attach great value to the intercession of saints and clerical hierarchy, while Sunnis do not have a clerical hierarchy.

Today, 85% of the Muslim world is Sunni, while only 15% is Shia. The invasion of Afghanistan by Sunni Arab invaders, and the establishment of the Sunni-based Ghaznavid Empire in Afghanistan around 1000 A.D., checked the spread of the Shia Islam of the Iranian Empire into Central and South Asia.

### *Schools of Islamic Law or Shariah*

Both Sunni and Shia Islam have four major *Shariah* or schools of theological law. In Afghanistan, the dominant school of the Sunni Muslims is the Hanafi. The Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence was founded by Abu Hanifa, one of the earliest Muslim scholar-interpreters to seek new ways of applying Islamic tenets to everyday life. He died in Iraq in AD 767. Abu Hanifa's interpretation of Muslim law was tolerant of differences within Muslim communities. He also separated belief from practice, elevating belief over practice.

The Hanafi school provides a flexible framework for the practice and interpretation of Islam. Several of its attributes are particularly appealing to Uzbeks:

- It is of non-Arab origins.
- It allows for the performance of prayers in languages other than Arabic.
- It allows for the incorporation of pre-Islamic Central Asian traditions.

### *Ithna Asharia Shia*

The *Ithna Asharia Shia* or *Imami* or *Twelvers* recognize twelve successive *Imams* or religious leaders, beginning with Ali and ending in AD 874 with the disappearance of the twelfth who will return as a messianic figure at the end of the world. The *Ithna Asharia Shia* consider the *Ismailis* to be heretical Shias.

### *Ismaili*

The *Ismaili Shia* are also known as *Seveners* because in the eighth century their leaders rejected the heir designated by the sixth *Imam*, Jafar al Sadiq (who died in 765 A.D.), whom the Imami accepted. The new group instead chose to recognize Jafar's eldest son, Ismail, as the seventh *Imam*. Ismaili beliefs are complex and syncretic, combining elements from the philosophies of Plotinus, Pythagoras, Aristotle, gnosticism, and the Manichaeans, as well as components of Judaism, Christianity, and Eastern religions.

*Ismailis* are found primarily in and near the eastern Hazarajat, in the Baghlan area north of the Hindu Kush, among the mountain Tajik of Badakhshan, and amongst the Wakhi in the Wakhan Corridor. The *pir* or leader of Afghan *Ismailis* comes from the Sayyid family of Kayan, located near Doshi, a small town at the northern foot of the Salang Pass, in western Baghlan Province. During the Soviet-Afghan War this family acquired considerable political power.

### *Sufi Brotherhoods*

Sufism began in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and is a monastic tradition that seeks personal communion with God through mystic moments of union brought about by various methods, including meditation, recitation of sacred phrases, breathing exercises, dancing, hymn singing, music, and physical gyrations.

### *Muslim Duties*

Each Muslim is responsible for abiding by the duties and rituals commonly referred to as the Five Pillars of Islam. These include the recitation of the creed (*shahadah*), daily prayer (*salat*, *namaṣ* in Afghanistan), almsgiving (*ṣakat*), fasting (*sawm*, *ruṣah* in Afghanistan), and pilgrimage (*haj*).

- The *muezzin* is the call to prayer five times a day, at daybreak, midday, mid-afternoon, sunset, and nightfall. Prayers are recited in the direction of Mecca, the holy center of Islam and are accompanied by a set of requisite body movements, including genuflection and prostration. Prayers may be performed wherever a person may be at the required time, but congregational prayers in the central mosque on Friday are usual. In many Muslim societies, women may also worship at mosques where they are provided segregated areas, although most prefer to pray at home.

Daily prayers are regimented and include the opening verse and other passages from the Quran. They are invariably concluded with the recitation of the *shahadah*. Prayers seeking aid or guidance in personal difficulties are offered separately.

- *Zakat*, or almsgiving, is the second Pillar of Islam. Alms may be given individually, though in some cases they are collected for distribution by governments, again demonstrating the lack of separation between religious and political life.
- The ninth month of the Muslim calendar is Ramadan (in Arabic), a period of obligatory fasting that commemorates the Prophet Mohammed's receipt of the Quran. Fasting, the third Pillar of Islam, is an act of self-discipline that leads to piety, and expresses and reinforces submission and commitment to God. All but the sick, weak, pregnant or nursing women, soldiers on duty, travelers on necessary journeys, and young children are to refrain from eating, drinking, sexual activity or smoking from sunrise to sunset. Official work hours often are shortened during this period.

Because the lunar calendar is eleven days shorter than the solar calendar, Ramadan does not fall at the same time every year. When Ramadan falls in the summertime, a fast imposes considerable hardship on those who must do physical work. *Id al Fitr*, a three-day feast and holiday, ends the month of Ramadan and is the occasion for new clothes and much visiting between family members.

- The conclusion of Ramadan brings about the beginning of the *haj* pilgrimage season during the twelfth month of the lunar calendar. At least once in their lifetime both Muslim men and women should, if economically able, make the *haj* to the holy city of Mecca. Pilgrims, dressed in two white, seamless pieces of cloth (*ihram*), perform various traditional rites expressing unity and harmony with the worldwide Muslim community (*ummah*) by affirming obedience to God, and their intent to lead a righteous life following the path directed by God. Returning pilgrims are entitled to use the honorific "hajji" and enjoy a respected status in their communities. *Id al Adha*, the feast of sacrifice, marks the end of the *haj* month.
- The permanent struggle for the triumph of God's word on earth, *Jihad*, represents an additional duty. This concept has been interpreted to mean "holy war" by many radicals and fundamentalists. In its basic sense, though, *Jihad* describes the efforts made by individuals to live a virtuous life that overcomes all forms of evil.

Aside from specific duties, Islam imposes a code of ethical conduct encouraging generosity, fairness, honesty, tolerance, respect and service for the benefit of the common welfare of the

*ummah*. It forbids the shedding of human blood, thieving and lying. It also gives explicit guidance on proper family relations and forbids adultery, gambling, usury, and the consumption of carrion, blood, pork, and alcohol.

#### *Political Influence*

While many Uzbeks are devoutly Muslim, and religion does play an important role in the day to day lives of Afghan Uzbeks, it does not play a decisive role in the political life of Afghan Uzbeks. Some of this is due to the Uzbek focus on cultural tradition as opposed to religion, but much of this is due to the connections between Afghan Uzbeks and the atheist Soviets over the past thirty years.

## Customs

### *Greeting*

A handshake is a standard greeting among men. Familiar participants will often embrace. Uzbek male handshakes are usually vigorous. Always shake hands with the right hand. Among Uzbeks, the handshake is often accompanied by placing your left hand over your heart. Do not shake hands with your left hand. The left hand is seen as unclean. To offer it is a grave insult.

Women either embrace or shake hands. Women friends embrace and kiss three times on alternating cheeks. A man does not shake hands with or otherwise touch a woman in public, though he may greet her verbally in an indirect way.

### *Gestures*

It is impolite to show or point the bottom of one's shoe or foot at another person. It is also improper to point or beckon with one's finger. Uzbeks point with the whole hand. It is considered unclean to eat or drink with the left hand.

### *Visiting*

Visiting between family, friends, and neighbors provides the mainstay of social life for Uzbeks. Tea is almost always served, usually along with some sort of snack, generally flat bread or fruits and vegetables.

The ability of an Afghan to generously receive guests is a sign of social status.

### *Displays of Affection*

Physical contact with the opposite sex in public is not acceptable, even between spouses, significant others, family members or good friends.

### *Gifts*

If you are given a gift, plan on giving something in return in the near future. Gifts from your city or country will be treasured. Postcards or other small cultural items are appropriate.

### *Cultural Do's and Don'ts*

- If you step on someone's foot, an apology is required.
- Do not use your left hand for exchanges—money, food, gifts, shaking hands. It is considered unclean. Great offense will be taken if it is offered.
- Dress modestly.
- Ask permission before taking photographs of people.

- Men and women should not touch one another in public.
- Blowing your nose in public is considered unacceptable.

Other Afghan superstitions include:

- Don't click the scissors. It will bring about a fight.
- If you draw lines in the ground, you will be in debt.
- If you shake a bunch of keys, it may bring about a fight.
- If water is shed or found, it is a good omen.

## Lifestyle

### *Role of Family*

Families play an important role in the social and political life of Uzbek communities in Afghanistan. However, Uzbek identity is more associated with geography—villages and towns, mainly, but also valleys—than with family or clan affiliation. Of all of Afghanistan's tribes, it is the Pashtuns that most define their identity through their family.

The structure the Uzbek family is traditional and conservative, influenced by both cultural and Islamic history. Afghan Uzbek families are strictly hierarchical and are based on the concept of male authority. Men are the central figures of authority and elder members of the family are afforded a higher level of respect than younger members of the family.

### *Role of Women*

The Uzbek family—and social and political life—is strictly patriarchal. Economic and political decisions are made by men, and the role of women, particularly in the rural Uzbek communities, is restricted for the most part to the traditional duties of domestic work. There is some evidence that the situation for women is better in the cities of the north of Afghanistan. Under General Dostum's rule in Mazar-e-Sharif, women attended school and universities, worked in public offices, and were allowed to hold jobs without significant restrictions. Such liberties were eliminated during the rule of the Taliban (August 1998–November 2001) in north and central Afghanistan. In December of 2001, after General Dostum drove the Taliban from Mazar-e-Sharif, schools for girls reopened.

### *Role of Men*

Uzbek families are strictly patriarchal. This focus on male authority also extends to social and professional roles at large. Men make the economic, political and familial decisions in Afghan Uzbek communities.

### *Dating and Marriage*

Traditional Afghan Uzbeks do not date. Marriages are arranged by families and usually are accompanied by a bride price (a gift paid by the groom and his family to the family of the bride) or, occasionally, a dowry (the price paid by a bride's family to the groom's family). According to Uzbek tradition, Uzbek women marry at a very young age (early and mid-teens). Uzbeks, like most ethnic groups in Afghanistan, greatly prefer that individuals marry within their own ethnic group. This does not always happen. In parts of north Afghanistan where Uzbeks, Tajiks, Hazara and Pashtuns have lived side by side for generations, intermarriage with Tajiks does occur. This intermarriage is generally looked upon by Uzbeks as acceptable. Intermarriage between Uzbeks and Pashtuns is very uncommon, and is unacceptable to most Uzbek families.

## Clothing

### *Headwear*

Uzbek men wear *doppilars* or *doppi*, the black, four-sided skullcaps with white embroidery that they have worn for generations. The hats can fold up to fit in the pocket of its wearer.



**An Uzbek Doppi**

### *Clothing*

According to traditional Uzbek dress, Uzbek men usually wear muted colors, except for the bright-colored sash that older men use to tie their long quilted coats. Uzbek women are fond of dresses of “sparkly cloth,” often worn as a knee length gown with pants of the same material underneath. In some Uzbek communities, one or two braids in the hair of a woman indicates that she is married

while more braids indicate that she is single.



## Diet

Bread and tea are staples of the Afghan diet across the range of Afghan ethnic groups. Uzbeks prefer green tea to black tea. Both are a large part of the Uzbek diet. In particular, Afghan Uzbeks are known for their large, round and flat breads. The Uzbek diet also rests significantly on rice dishes (*pilaf*), as well as many pasta dishes brought to Central Asia by Italian or Chinese traders traveling along the silk road. Two favorite Uzbek pasta dishes are *ash* (a noodle dish sometimes mixed with yogurt) and *ashak* (an Uzbek-style ravioli).

### *Role of Alcohol and Drugs*

Islamic law forbids the consumption of alcohol. Most Afghans comply with this prohibition, although urban Afghan Uzbeks do not hold as closely to this regulation as many other ethnic groups in Afghanistan.

Among the entire Afghan male community, including the Uzbeks, a potent, pungent hashish is sometimes smoked from dinner until midnight.

## **Cultural Economy**

The cultural economy of the Uzbeks can be divided into the categories of rural and urban. Rural Uzbeks work primarily as farmers of cotton, fruits, vegetables and grain or as stockmen (herders). Uzbek herders are well known for breeding the karakul sheep, a fur-bearing breed of sheep, and a highly regarded type of Turkmen horse. Some of these more rural, agricultural-based Uzbek groups live semi-nomadic lives.

Uzbeks in the towns and cities of north Afghanistan are businessmen, merchants, artisans, silver and goldsmiths, leatherworkers and craftsmen. Uzbek women are renowned for making excellent carpets and rugs. The urban Uzbeks are typically well off by Afghan standards.

## Cultural Geography

Afghan Uzbeks are primarily located in northern Afghanistan. Afghanistan is divided by the Hindu Kush mountain range. The south of Afghanistan forms a part of the Iranian plateau, and is mostly populated by Pashtuns and Baluchis. The north of Afghanistan is associated with the Central Asian steppes, and is primarily populated by Uzbeks and Tajiks. Afghan Uzbeks are most heavily concentrated between the Faryab Province and Faizabad, the capital of Badakhshan Province

This region has the highest concentration of arable land in Afghanistan, and traditionally has been the most productive agricultural region. However, like the rest of the country, it has been hit hard by a combination of a prolonged drought and 23 years of near constant war.



The main Uzbek city—and the center of Dostum’s administration of north Afghanistan—is Mazar-e-Sharif in the northern portion of the Balkh province, 35 miles from the Afghan-Uzbek border.

## Culture's Effect on Warfare

There is no particular style of Afghan Uzbek warfare, although many people associate Afghan Uzbeks with the methods of war embraced by General Dostum and his Uzbek militia.

General Dostum and his Uzbek militia were originally trained by the Soviets in opposition to the *Mujahideen*. The Uzbeks were trained as an elite force to meet the highly unconventional, guerilla tactics of the *Mujahideen*. Most notably, he gave his troops free reign to terrorize the local populations that supported the *Mujahideen* in this part of Afghanistan. This ruthless style of warfare, which includes a willingness to inflict high levels of civilian casualties, continues to characterize Afghan Uzbek militias in northern Afghanistan.

The Afghan Uzbek reliance on brutality, though, did not translate into a reliance on guerilla tactics. The Soviet style of warfare was considerably more conventional—a reliance on centralized command and control, and an emphasis of force on force conflicts—than that of the *Mujahideen*. This conventional Soviet influence is also still very much a part of the Uzbek style of warfare in Afghanistan as is demonstrated by the sorts of battles Dostum's militia fought in the last several stages of the Afghan Civil War: a 1994 siege of Kabul, “strategic bombing” raids of the city of Herat after he had broken ranks with the Taliban, and the 2001 frontal assault on Mazar-e-Sharif.

Beyond military tactics, Dostum appears to have taken the traditional Uzbek emphasis on independence and self-reliance to an extreme by repeatedly shifting alliances in order to ensure he ends up on the winning side of a given conflict. Although this opportunism is common in Afghanistan and by no means unique to Uzbek culture, it is particularly prevalent among the Afghan Uzbeks.

## Urban vs. Rural Culture

There are notable distinctions between the lives and cultures of the urban and rural Uzbeks. The rural Uzbeks work primarily as farmers of cotton, fruits, vegetables and grain or as stockmen (herders). Uzbek herders are well known for breeding the karakul sheep and a highly regarded type of Turkmen horse. Some of these more rural, agricultural based Uzbek groups live semi-nomadic lives. Rural Uzbeks are considered the most traditional of the Afghan Uzbek population in terms of family structures, marriage, religion, authority and gender roles.

Urban Afghan Uzbek are businessmen, merchants, artisans, silver and goldsmiths, leatherworkers and craftsmen. Under General Dostum's rule, city dwelling Uzbek women have been allowed to attend schools and universities. They also have been allowed to hold jobs with few if any restrictions. The income earned from selling the excellent carpets and rugs crafted by Uzbek women has provided urban Uzbek families with an economic advantage.

### *Cultural or Major Urban Area: Mazar-e-Sharif*

Uzbeks inhabit several towns and cities in the north and north central provinces of Afghanistan—including Meymaneh, Kholm, Samangan, Feyazabad—but the city that is the most important for Afghan Uzbeks is Mazar-e-Sharif.



**The Blue Mosque of Mazar-e-Sharif**

Mazar-e-Sharif is the capital of the Balkh province. It is situated about 35 miles south of the Afghan-Uzbek border town of Termez and 200 miles north of Kabul, located in one of the most fertile regions of the country. Heavily irrigated by the Balkh River, the areas around Mazar-e-Sharif are known for producing cotton, grain and fruit. The town's industries include flour milling, and the manufacturing of silk and cotton textiles. Literally, the name Mazar-e-Sharif means 'Tomb of the Saint.' It is purported to be the home of the tomb of the caliph Ali,

son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammed. A blue-tilted mosque and shrine mark the location of the tomb, which is venerated by all Muslims, but particularly the Shi'ite Muslims (Uzbeks are Sunni Muslims). Due to this religious significance, many Hazaras also see Mazar-e-Sharif as a spiritual home, though most of the Hazara population live in Afghanistan's Central Region, south of Mazar-e-Sharif.

Mazar-e-Sharif came under Afghan rule in 1852, and became the political hub of Afghan Turkistan in 1869. The city still serves as the central city in the political and social life of the Afghan Uzbeks. It served as the main administrative center of General Rashid Dostum's

northern Afghanistan 'fiefdom' before he was unseated by the Taliban. Now that General Dostum has returned and the Taliban has disappeared, Mazar-e-Sharif is again controlled by Dostum.

## Holidays

Religious holidays in Afghanistan are celebrated according to the lunar calendar, and other holidays such as Independence day, and New Year's Day are celebrated based on the solar calendar. During many holidays, Afghans usually visit friends and families, prepare lavish meals, and attend special prayers.

### *Secular Holidays*

The Victory of the Muslim Nation is April 28, Remembrance Day for the Martyrs and Disabled is May 4, and Independence Day (*Jeshen*) is August 19. Independence Day marks the end of the Third Anglo-Afghan war and the grant of independence from Britain. Although Afghanistan was never a formal British colony, Afghanistan's foreign policy was governed by Britain.

New Year (*Nowroze*), is the first day of spring. The Taliban repressed celebration of New Year, although it has reappeared in post-Taliban Afghanistan.

### *Islamic Holidays*

The ninth month of the Muslim calendar is Ramadan (in Arabic) a period of obligatory fasting that commemorates the Prophet Mohammad's receipt of God's revelation, the Quran. Because the lunar calendar is eleven days shorter than the solar calendar, Ramadan revolves through the seasons over the years. Fasting is an act of self-discipline that leads to piety and expresses submission and commitment to God. During this period, Muslims cannot eat from sunrise until sundown.

*Id al Fitr*, a three-day feast and holiday, ends the month of Ramadan and is the occasion for new clothes and much visiting between family members. Many start out the festival by wearing new clothes, and going to prayer at the mosque. Afterwards, people visit or entertain their friends and families. Children usually receive gifts or money called "Eidi."

Ramadan is followed by the beginning of the *haj* pilgrimage season during the twelfth month of the lunar calendar. At least once in their lifetime both men and women should, if economically able, make the *haj* to the holy city of Mecca. The beginning of the *haj* is marked by the holiday of *sawab*. The *sawab* is a day for seeing off pilgrims who are leaving on the *haj*. On the *sawab*, hostilities are frequently suspended to allow people to cross factional lines to see off friends and relatives. As pilgrims embark on the *haj*, they are usually driven to their points of departure in highly decorated vehicles.

*Id al Adha*, the feast of sacrifice, marks the end of the *haj* month. This holiday occurs on the tenth day of the twelfth month of the Islamic (Hijra) calendar. The day commemorates the Prophet Abraham's devotion to God. According to the Muslim tradition, Abraham was willing to slay his son Ismael as a sacrifice. Ismael was never killed, however, as Allah provided a lamb for the sacrifice. Muslims who perform the *Haj* sacrifice a lamb, and the meat is given out to the poor.

## Recreation

### *Buzkashi: Afghanistan's National Sport*

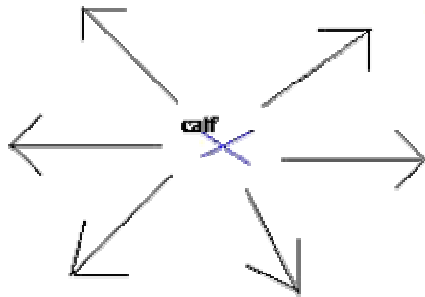
Buzkashi, which literally translated means “goat grabbing,” is the national sport of Afghanistan. Many historians believe that Buzkashi began with the Uzbeks and their Turkic-Mongol ethnic cousins, and it is indigenously shared by the people of Northern Afghanistan. There are two main types of Buzkashi, Tudabarai and Qarajai. Tudabarai is relatively simple compared with Qarajai, even though they share similar objectives.

In Buzkashi, a headless calf (or, sometimes, goat) carcass is placed in the center of a circle and surrounded by the players of two opposing teams. The object of the game is to get control of the carcass and bring it to the scoring area. Although it seems like a simple task, it is not. Only the most masterful players (called *chapandaz*) ever even get close to the carcass. The competition is fierce, and the winner of a match receives prizes that have been donated by a sponsor. These prizes range from money, to fine turbans and clothes. In order for someone to become a *chapandaz*, one must undergo a tremendous amount of difficult training. In fact, the best *chapandaz*, are usually over the age of forty. Buzkashi, is definitely not a game for the weak.

The players are not the only ones who undergo arduous training; the horses that participate in buzokashi must train for five years before ever making it to the playing field. Buzkashi is indeed a dangerous sport, but intensive training and excellent communication between the horse and rider can help minimize the risk of injury.

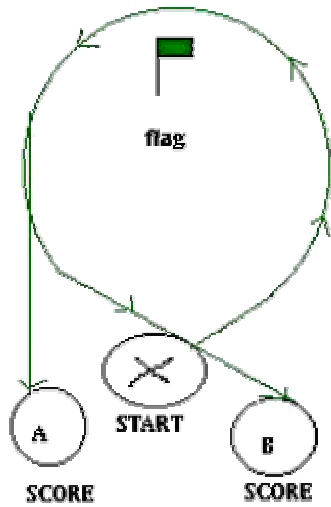
### *The different types of Buzkashi: Tudabarai & Qarajai*

In Tudabarai, in order to score, the rider must obtain possession of the carcass and then carry it away from the starting circle in any direction. The rider must stay free and clear of the other riders.



In Qarajai, the task is much more complex. The player must carry the calf around a marker, and then return the carcass to the team's designated scoring circle.





In each version of the game, points are awarded for successfully completing the task of getting control of the carcass, and getting it to the proper scoring area. The winner of each match receives prizes, which have been put up by a sponsor. The top prizes are usually money, or fine clothes.

To many Afghans, Buzkashi is not just a game, it is a way of life; a way in which teamwork and communication are essential to being successful.