



RAZIA'S
RAY OF HOPE
FOUNDATION



About Afghanistan

Geography

Afghanistan is a landlocked country located in South-Central Asia. The country is 249,935 square miles in area (647,500 square kilometers), which is slightly smaller than the state of Texas. Afghanistan is bordered by Iran in the west, Pakistan in the south and east, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan in the north, and China in the far northeast. The country is mountainous, with plains in the north and southwest. The highest point is Mount Nowshak, at 24,557 feet (7,485 meters) above sea level.

Afghanistan forms a crossroads between the East and West and was an ancient focal point of migration and trade. Because of Afghanistan's central location connecting South and Central Asia and the Middle East, the country has long held strategic importance and has been the target of various invaders and conquerors, as well as a path through which local powers invaded surrounding regions to form their own empires.

Climate

The climate varies considerably by region and tends to change rapidly. Large parts of the country are dry, and fresh water supplies are limited. The Sistan Basin is one of the driest regions in the world. Winters are severe in the central highlands, the glacierized northeast (around Nuristan), and the Wakhan Corridor, where the average January temperature is below 5°F (-15°C). Summers are especially hot in the low-lying areas of Sistan Basin in the southwest, the Jalalabad Basin in the east, and the Turkistan plains along the Amu River in the north, where temperatures average over 95°F (35°C) in July.



History

Afghanistan, often called the crossroads of Central Asia, has a long history of turbulence. In 1747, Ahmad Shah Durrani unified the disparate Pashtun tribes and created the Durrani Empire, which is considered the beginning of modern Afghanistan. Subsequently, the capital was shifted to Kabul and most of its territories ceded to former neighboring countries. In the late 19th century, Afghanistan became a buffer state between the British Indian Empire and the Russian Empire. On August 19, 1919, following the third Anglo-Afghan war, the country regained full independence from the United Kingdom.

A brief foray into democracy ended in a 1973 coup and a 1978 Communist counter-coup. The Soviet Union invaded in 1979 to support the frail Afghan Communist regime, sparking a long and destructive war. Under relentless pressure from internationally supported anti-Communist mujahedin rebels, the USSR withdrew in 1989. After a subsequent series of civil wars, in 1996 Kabul fell to the Taliban, a hard-line Pakistani-sponsored movement that emerged in 1994 to end the country's civil war and anarchy. Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, a US, Allied, and anti-Taliban Northern Alliance military action toppled the Taliban for sheltering Osama Bin Laden. The UN-

sponsored Bonn Conference in 2001 established a process for political reconstruction that included the adoption of a new constitution.

In December 2004, Hamid Karzai became the first democratically elected president of Afghanistan. The National Assembly was inaugurated the following December. Despite gains toward building a stable central government, a resurgent Taliban and continuing provincial instability—particularly in the south and the east—remain serious challenges for the government of Afghanistan.

Afghan People

Afghanistan has an ethnically and linguistically mixed population. Because of the country's geographic centrality across historic trade and invasion routes between Central Asia and South and Southwest Asia, its peoples are diverse. The Middle Eastern influences brought by Persian and Arab invasions have defined modern Afghanistan, while the Greek, Central Asian nomadic, and Zoroastrian/Pagan/Hindu/Buddhist elements of its past have long since vanished.

According to 2009 estimates, the population of Afghanistan is approximately 33,610,000. While population data is unreliable for Afghanistan, Pashtuns make up the largest ethnic group at 38-44% of the population, followed by Tajiks (25%),

Hazaras (10%), and Uzbeks (6-8%), with the remainder comprised of Aimak, Turkmen, Baloch, and other small groups. The most common languages spoken in Afghanistan are Eastern Persian (also known as Dari; roughly 50%) and Pashto (roughly 35%). Smaller groups throughout the country speak more than 70 other languages and numerous dialects.

Afghanistan is an Islamic country. Approximately 80% of Afghans are Sunni Muslim, and the remaining 20% are predominantly Shia Muslim. Islamic practices pervade all aspects of life. The religious traditions and codes of Islam, together with traditional tribal and ethnic practices, have an important role in personal conduct and dispute settlement. Afghan society is largely based on kinship groups, which follow traditional customs and religious practices, though somewhat less so in urban areas.

Afghanistan: At a Glance

Location: South-Central Asia—borders China on the northeast, Iran on the west, Pakistan on the southeast, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan on the north

Area: 653,000 sq. km = 252,000 sq. miles (slightly smaller than Texas)

Geography: Land locked; mountains dominate the central and eastern part of the country covering $\frac{3}{4}$ of the landscape; desert covers the southern and western parts. The two main rivers are the Hilmand and the Amudarya

Climate: Arid to semi-arid; cold winters and hot summers (similar to Wyoming)

Population: Approximately 33.5 million

Languages: Dari and Pashto are the main languages with over 30 others spoken throughout the country

Ethnic Groups: Pashtun 42%, Tajik 27%, Hazara 9%, Uzbek 9%, Aimaks 4%, Turkmen 3%, Baloch 2%, and other 4%

Religions: Sunni Islam 82%, Shia 18%

Government Type: Islamic Republic

Provinces: 34

Districts: 397

Capital: Kabul

Economy: Agriculture employs 85% and produces $\frac{2}{3}$ of the national income; the main crops are wheat, corn, and rice; livestock breeding is a major branch of agriculture. Exports are carpets, textiles, and natural gas

Currency: Afghani

National Holiday: August 19—Independence Day, celebrating freedom from United Kingdom in 1919

Sources: US Department of State; CIA World Factbook; Embassy of Afghanistan, Washington DC; NationMaster.com; Wikipedia.

Afghanistan: Demographic Data *US figures are provided for comparative context.*

Metric	Afghanistan Rate	Afghanistan International Ranking	US Rate	US International Ranking
Infant Mortality Rate	159/1,000 (600 children under 5 years of age die every day)	3 of 226 countries	6.3/1,000	185 of 226 countries
Maternal Mortality Rate	1,900/100,000 (50 women die every day from complications in pregnancy and childbirth)	2 of 166	17/100,000	136 of 166
Life Expectancy	44 years	213 of 225	78 years	46 of 225
% Population age 0–14	44.7%	19 of 226	20.4%	168 of 226
Literacy — Male	43%	191 of 194	99%	32 of 194
Literacy — Female	13%	195 of 195	99%	19 of 195
% Using Adequate Sanitation	12%	144 of 144	100%	14 of 144
% Using Adequate Drinking Water	13%	150 of 150	100%	1 of 150
Tobacco Consumption	98%	103 of 106	N/A	

