Handbook for Support to Religious Engagement in Afghanistan

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Cover Photo: Members of a government affiliated provincial *ulema* council meet with NATO forces to discuss culture sensitivity training. *Source: Patricio Asfura-Heim*

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Executive summary

(U) Religious leaders and institutions play a central role in the day-to-day life of many Afghans. In the rural areas of the country, they perform a number of important civil society functions including mediation and education. While their influence has waxed and waned over the last few decades, they remain trusted advisors at the local level and are capable of affecting public perceptions and modifying community attitudes. In fact, according to a recent poll conducted by the Asia Foundation, religious leaders received the highest vote of confidence and optimism of the Afghan people among local governance institutions.[1]

(U) A deep and nuanced understanding of the Afghan religious landscape has immediate bearing on the international community's ability to successfully sway the population away from the insurgency and facilitate the implementation of security, development, and governance initiatives. In recognition of the population's deep adherence to Islam, and the importance of religious leaders as influencers and civil society actors, the international community has begun to engage in the religious sphere.

(U) Unfortunately, today most clerics remain neutral; either wary of a government whom they feel has ignored them or paralyzed by Taliban intimidation. Nevertheless, many Afghan religious leaders believe that under the right circumstances, they could positively contribute to the state-building agenda.[2]

(U) Properly scoped objectives for engaging the religious space will facilitate clerical participation and help prevent unintended consequences. Religious leaders' roles as civil society actors suggest engagement objectives are most appropriately confined to a limited subset of counterinsurgency missions. Broadly, these are: (1) facilitating communication with the Afghan public, (2) promoting reconciliation with and reintegration of anti-government groups, (3) countering the influence of extremist narratives, and (4) increasing the legitimacy of the Afghan government.

(U) An examination of current and past religious engagement initiatives as well as recommendations from Afghan clerics and government officials suggests best practices for engagement include: Sanctioning their independent status, consulting as opposed to co-opting, ensuring their safety, utilizing Afghan interlocutors when possible, developing engagement strategies in conjunction with district officials, bolstering the capacity and credibility of Afghan religious outreach institutions, and identifying true religious influencers at the local level.

I. Introduction

(U) As the international community seeks to promote security and stability in Afghanistan, it faces the challenge of understanding important cultural forces that shape the decision-making of the population. For most Afghans, Islam plays an important role in regulating behavior and facilitating collective action. As the dominant belief system in a fractured tribal society, Islam acts as a unifying force in times of conflict. While the influence of religious leaders in national politics has waned over the last few decades, many clerics continue to provide valuable civil society functions at the local level. As such, they remain capable of affecting public perceptions, modifying attitudes, and under certain circumstances, mobilizing the population in ways that promote or detract from security and stability.

(U) The success or failure of the international intervention will, in large part, depend on the international community's ability to operationalize cultural knowledge and leverage respected interlocutors and civil society actors to gain the trust of the Afghan population, resolve legitimate local grievances, deliver basic services, and reduce public support for the insurgency.

(U) This handbook provides an overview of the Afghan religious landscape with a special concentration on religious leaders and institutions. It is specifically designed to assist deployed personnel to better understand, respect, and leverage religious authority in support of counterinsurgency and development objectives. The following chapters explain the role of religion in Afghan society, Afghan Islamic beliefs and practices, the use of religion in messaging, and the functions and influence of various religious figures, institutions, and networks that may be encountered by international personnel in the field. In addition, key relationships between religious leaders, insurgent groups, government institutions, and foreign influencers are assessed.

Methodology

(U) This study utilizes a methodological approach that combines elements of socio-cultural anthropology, and institutional and social

network analyses to assess the observable (e.g. religious practices and networks) and cognitive (e.g. religious identity and popular ideology) traits of the Afghan Muslim population. Specifically this analytical framework allowed us to map Afghan religious sects, assess the influence of religious leaders, and clarify the complex relationships between civil society actors, insurgents, and government institutions.

Research Goals

(U) The goal of this study is to provide deployed personnel with a detailed, relevant, and highly accessible guide to the Afghan religious landscape. The sponsor's statement of work outlined overarching guidance for the scope of the study. In particular, the sponsor wanted a study that would facilitate engagement and outreach activities by providing information and analysis on:

- The role of religion in war, revolution, and peacemaking
- The influence of religion in daily life
- The significance of religious practices and observances
- The influence and roles of religious leaders in society
- The use of religion by the insurgency
- The activities of religious networks and foreign influencers
- The activities of Afghan government religious outreach institutions
- Potential objectives and opportunities for international engagement in the religious sphere
- Best practices for partnering with religious leaders in the field

Approach

(U) This study relied upon a three-step approach to draw defendable inferences about the role of religion and religious influencers in Afghanistan and the potential for successfully leveraging such knowledge in counterinsurgency and development operations. First we conducted a comprehensive literature review using ethnographic and cultural studies, historical accounts, and media sources to provide an in-depth understanding of religion and religious actors in Af-

ghanistan. In order to better understand the nature of state-cleric relations, we conducted short historical case studies.

(U) Second, we carried out field interviews in Kabul and Helmand province to gather perspectives from clerics and government officials on how to best promote constructive partnerships between the government and the religious community, and to collect first-hand accounts of active religious engagement activities and best practices from deployed coalition personnel. In addition we employed the Peace Training and Research Organization (PTRO) to provide field research on religious leaders and government religious outreach institutions in Balkh, Nangahar, Kandahar, and Kabul.

(U) Third, to add further depth to our understanding and to validate our initial findings from the literature review and field interviews, we reached out to U.S. based subject matter experts. Specifically, we collaborated closely with an Afghan born cultural advisor with experience working with aid agencies and the U.S. military, and consulted a U.S. government strategic communications expert with prior experience working with Afghan religious leaders.

Sources

(U) The sources utilized in this study consisted mainly of open-source material. We relied heavily on media reporting and academic literature, including ethnographies, area and cultural studies handbooks, ethno-linguistic and religious maps of Afghanistan, and scholarly journal articles. We made use of a variety of unclassified reports prepared by coalition forces, including various products on religion in Afghanistan produced by the Human Terrain System. We utilized material from our interviews with Afghan clerics and government officials, deployed military personnel, intelligence analysts, and diplomatic personnel. Finally, we included material from field interview transcripts provided to us by PTRO.

Study Organization

(U) This study begins with a background chapter, which provides the reader with a general overview of the historical role of Islam in Afghan politics, warfare, and peacemaking. The subsequent core chapters focus on the role of religion in Afghan daily life, the sectarian

landscape, religious leaders and networks, religious facilities and institutions, religious education, religion and the law, Islam and the insurgency, Afghan government religious outreach, religious etiquette for deployed personnel, and international engagement in the Afghan religious sphere.

Islam in Afghan politics, warfare, and peacemaking

(U) This section provides a brief history on the role of religion in the legitimation of political authority, the use of religion by rulers to mobilize the population against both external and internal threats, and the role of religious leaders in peace making.

The role of religion in Afghan daily life

(U) This section explains the role or religion as a normative system in society, the dynamics between religious beliefs and tribal customs, and variations in practice between rural and urban populations. This section also provides a brief overview of Islamic tenets, significant lifecycle rituals, and important religious holidays which deployed person should be aware off.

The religious landscape

(U) This sections maps out the majority and minority religious communities and belief systems, and highlights the significant sectarian divisions and fault lines in Afghanistan.

Religious leaders and networks

(U) This section identifies the various types of religious leaders found in Afghanistan, examines their roles and functions in society, and assesses their level of influence. In addition, this section provides a brief overview of religious networks (such madrasa alumni networks and Sufi orders) and the influence of foreign governments over Afghan religious leaders.

Religious facilities and structures

(U) This section identifies and explains the significance of the various religious facilities (such as mosques, shrines, Sufi lodges, and *takyakhanas*) that may be encountered by deployed personnel in the field.

Religious education

(U) This section briefly examines the role of religious education in Afghanistan and attempts by the Ministry of Education to reform private madrasa curricula.

Religion and the law

(U) This section briefly examines the relationship between religious, tribal, and secular law. In addition, the importance of religious edicts (*fatwas*) in Afghanistan is explained.

Islam and the insurgency

(U) This section explores the use of religion by the Taliban for its political and recruitment activities. It provides insights into the Taliban's religious doctrine, its co-option of religious leaders, and its use of religious institutions and facilities for recruitment and weapons storage. Finally, this section examines the use of religious messaging in Taliban propaganda.

Afghan government religious engagement

(U) This section examines the relationship between the afghan government and the religious community. Here we assess engagement strategies (such as co-option, integration, accommodation, and suppression) tried by various Afghan rulers. In addition, this section describes the activities of modern day government ministries and outreach institutions that deal with the religious community (such as the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs, the *Shura-e Ulema*, and the ANA's Religious Cultural Affairs Officer Corps).

Religious etiquette for deployed personnel

(U) This section provides tips for deployed personnel to avoid religiously offending Afghans and to showcase respect for Islam. In addition, this section provides clear instructions for the handling and disposal of religious documents and materials.

International engagement in the religious sphere

(U) This section explains the rational for the international community's engagement with religious leaders and proposes four overarching objectives that align counterinsurgency goals with the traditional civil society functions of religious leaders. These are: (1) facilitate com-

munication with the Afghan public, (2) facilitate reconciliation with and reintegration of anti-government groups, (3) reduce the influence of extremist narratives, and (4) increase the legitimacy of the Afghan government. This section also highlights some general guiding principles for international personnel partnering with religious leaders in the field, derived mainly from an examination of ongoing religious engagement activities as well as suggestions from Afghan clerics and government officials.

II. Islam in historical context: The role of religion in Afghan politics, warfare, and peacemaking

(U) In Afghanistan, Islam has historically served important functions in politics, warfare, and peacemaking. As the dominant belief system, it has served as a rallying point capable of unifying otherwise antagonistic ethnic communities and other groupings.[3] Historically, rulers have co-opted religion to legitimate their political authority and to mobilize tribes in defense of the state. Conversely, Islam has played a central role in regulating the behavior of government leaders and moderating the expansion of secular institutions into local communities.[4] Significantly, Islam has traditionally served as a universally accepted platform for reconciliation and peacemaking, and has been repeatedly invoked to quell the fire of discontent between warring tribes or to bring rebellious groups to the negotiating table.[5]

(U) While the influence of religious leaders as political actors, military commanders, and peacemakers, has waned over the last several decades – particularly since the fall of the Taliban regime – many continue to provide valued civil society functions and retain the ability to mobilize followers and color perceptions of the government. Given their authority at the local level, religious leaders will contribute to the outcome of the current conflict, and will play a significant role in state-building enterprises.

Islam and the legitimation of political authority

(U) The tenets of the Islamic faith have always had a stronger hold over the population than any secular ideologies expounded by the state.[6] Because of its wide appeal across tribal and ethnic lines, every Afghan national government – with the exception of the People's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (PDPA; 1978-1992) – has sought to proclaim an Islamic character in order to legitimize itself.[7] Traditionally, legitimate governments were the ones that were considered pious and just, or that were directly engaged in the defense of Islam

and the nation (and notably, had a monopoly on the use of force).[8] By contrast, popular opposition arose when the personal integrity and piety of the ruler and his officials were questioned, and when the sincerity and ability of the government to defend Islam were in doubt.[9]

(U) The legitimation of political authority was also contingent on the ability of the sovereign to retain the backing of religious leaders, particularly Sunni *ulema* (the educated class of high-level Islamic scholars). A lack of hierarchy among the ulema meant that a claimant to the throne always found a way to ensure his recognition by some group from among them.[10] In return for their blessings (often in the form of religious decrees legitimizing the rule of the government), clerics were often put on the state payroll and given positions as official advisors.[11] In order to better organize clerical support - and to prevent them from forming an independent power base – a number of Afghan rulers established national ulema councils and incorporated religious notables into their governments. During the reign of King Nadir Shah (1929-1933) members of the influential Mujaddidi family - who were the hereditary leaders of the Sufi Naqshbandiyya brotherhood and had led the opposition against King Amanullah (1919-1929) - were awarded cabinet posts in exchange for their fealty.[12] Religious leaders justified their cooperation with the government in religious terms as the act of rebellion against an established Muslim ruler is deemed illegitimate under Islam if it creates a state of *fitna* (disorder, sedition, or civil war).[13] Their duty, as they saw it, was to ensure that the government worked for the defense of Islam and that its policies were in accordance to Islamic law, also known as sharia law.[14] Historically, religious leaders who supported the government would perform a benediction on behalf of the ruler during their weekly *Khutbah* (Friday sermon) – a tradition that still exists today.[15] Dropping the ruler's name from the sermon was often a sign of rebellion.[16]

(U) The use of religious symbolism and rhetoric has also been a common way for Afghan leaders to bolster their religious credentials and legitimize their policies. Amir Abdul Rahman Khan (1880-1901) used Islamic terminology in the introduction of new taxes in order to make them more comprehensible and conceivably more acceptable to the population.[17] President Mohammad Najibullah (1987-1992) frequently invoked Qur'anic verses in his public speeches to counter

the PDPA's atheist image and supplant its Marxist discourse. Afghan rulers have also often attempted to propagate a narrative of "divine intervention" to sanctify their accession to power.[18] For example, King Nadir Shah was quick to publically attribute his rise to the "exclusive help of the Almighty God" when he captured Kabul in 1929 and claimed the throne.[19] Taliban leader Mullah Omar justified his leadership of the group on the basis of a dream in which the Prophet Muhammad ordained him.[20] Appropriating a ritual used by both King Dost Muhammad Khan and Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, Omar further cemented his religious legitimacy by wrapping himself in legendary cloak of the Prophet Muhammad housed in the Khirfka Sharif shine in Kandahar, during his declaration of jihad against the Rabbani government. An Afghan legend decreed that whoever retrieved the cloak from the chest would become Amir al-Mu'minin (Commander of the Faithful).[21]

(U) When a leader failed to maintain an image of piety or espoused reforms that threatened the role of religion in public or cultural affairs, he frequently faced popular opposition, often instigated by religious leaders themselves. For example, during the post-independence period, King Amanullah's modernization reforms and in particular his focus on women's rights was seen by many Afghans as anathema to Islamic values. Opposition by influential religious leaders and their declaration of jihad, or holy war, against the state ultimately brought down the king. In the 1970s, the aggressive atheism of the Communist government, including the purging of Islamic symbols such as the *Mirhab* and *Minbar* from the national flag, cost the Communists all credibility with most Afghans. Ultimately, however, it was the PDPA's persecution of religious elites that finally sparked a revolt that evolved into the mujahideen insurgency.[22]

(U) Today, religious leaders have been largely sidelined from politics by the current government.[23] As a result, their relationship with the state has become highly contested. Some moderate, pro-government clerics see it as the role of the clergy to support the government and its policies; others – more traditionalist religious leaders – believe the *ulema* should be independent of the government, and view government attempts at outreach activities as blatant attempts to control them.[24] In addition, frequent insurgent attacks on pro-government clerics have contributed to widening the gap between religious actors and the state.[25]

Islam and mobilization

(U) While Islam has never been the basis for permanent, formal and hierarchical political organization in Afghanistan, it often has been invoked to temporarily unite Afghans against a common enemy.[26] Historically, religious leaders have used their authority to associate existing local grievances with the cause of Islam, and to induce cooperation between groups that might have otherwise been in opposition.[27] Even in circumstances where the reasons for opposition were nonreligious, Islamic sanction often proved critical to political mobilization.[28]

(U) A declaration of jihad has frequently been the mechanism used by Afghan rulers and spiritual leaders to rally the tribes to fight on behalf of a national cause.[29] For most Afghans, fighting and dying for Islam is a much more worthy cause than, for example, a tribal squabble. Those who take part in jihad can either gain the status of *ghazi* [Islamic warrior] or the honorific title of *shahid* [religious martyr]. Both are highly desirable: the first gains blessing and respect in this world, and the second earns an eternal place in Heaven.[30] The state has traditionally relied on clerics, as interpreters of religious law, to issue *fatwas* to call on believers to undertake jihad.[31]

(U) Religious justifications for political mobilization have been used frequently against foreign invaders but have also been used to oppose Afghan monarchs who were deemed *kafirs* (disbelievers). Examples of the successful employment of Islam as a mobilizer are most clearly found in the Durrani Empire's expansionary wars into northern India, resistance against the encroaching Sikhs and the British in the 1830s, the revolt against reformist King Amanullah in 1929, and the mujahideen insurgency against the Communist government and its Soviet backers in the late 1970s and 1980s.[32]

(U) Afghan rulers have also used religious pretexts to justify violence against domestic enemies. In 1892, for example, Abdur Rahman Khan declared a jihad against the Hazara Shi'a in order to pacify central Afghanistan. By labeling them as "infidels" he was able to raise a large army which ultimately killed and displaced a large segment of their population. The emir also forcibly converted the peoples of Kafiristan, the only remaining non-Muslims in Afghanistan, and renamed the territory Nuristan in 1896. In the 1990s, the Taliban

declared jihad on the Hazara Shi'a, massacring thousands. The use of Islam by Afghan rulers to justify their suppression of minority groups has been one of the principal causes of fragmentation of Afghan society and increased politicization of ethnic identities.[33]

(U) Today, jihad is still a core rallying factor that Taliban insurgents use to join the highly heterogeneous and mixed insurgent groups into a coherent opposition force capable of challenging the Afghan government and its foreign backers.[34]

Islam and peacemaking

(U) Perhaps the most valued role that religious leaders have played in Afghanistan is that of peacemaker and conflict mediator. Their ability to transcend factionalism and their relative independence from the state has historically enabled them to act as interlocutors between tribal groups, rebels, and the government. In particular, Sufi *pirs* and figures of holy descent such as *sayyeds,* have received respect as neutral mediators.[35] Those religious leaders that excelled in mediation have often been able to improve their social and political standing. In 1999, for example, Afghanistan's Sufi leadership, under the Mujaddidi and Gailani families, created the Peace and National Unity Party to mediate between the Taliban and their opponents.[36]

(U) In a society where the maintenance of honor and the avoidance of shame influences all decision-making, the introduction of religious mediators into a conflict has customarily served to entice concessions from otherwise recalcitrant parties. Acquiescence to a religious leader's appeal for peace has provided useful cover for compromise between hated enemies. Religious leaders involved in peacemaking are always quick to remind people that the values of mercy, benevolence (*ihsan*), compassion (*rahmah*), and tolerance are all heavily emphasized in both the Qur'an and the Prophet's tradition.

(U) In addition to bringing combatants to the negotiation table, religious leaders have also traditionally helped facilitate the reintegration of rebel fighters into their communities. Indeed, Islam has specific procedures for dealing with Muslim secessionists and rebels.[37] According to Islamic principles, if the rebels' underlying motivation is ethical (*ta'wil*), lenient treatment must be given to those who surrender or are defeated and they should not be executed, tortured, or

imprisoned.[38] Moreover, for those rebels who agree to lay down their arms, Islam provides a protected status known as *bughah*.[39]

(U) Religious leaders have also helped reduce public support for opposition movements by discrediting their underlying justification for violence. In 2008, for example, the Darul Uloom Deobandi madrasa in India – the school said to have influenced the thinking of the conservative Taliban movement – issued a *fatwa* rejecting the use of all forms of terrorism. The seminary's rector went further by saying that the Taliban's attacks were un-Islamic and should not be considered a true jihad.[40]

(U) Today, some members of the clergy as well as spiritual leaders, such as Sufi *pirs* and *sayyeds,* remain engaged in peacemaking and reintegration initiatives, both as individual members of their communities and as representatives of the Afghan government. Their ability to mediate between groups, invalidate the use of violence in religious terms, and ostracize hardline irreconcilables could help the current Afghan government facilitate a political solution to the current conflict.

III. The role of religion in Afghan daily life

(U) In Afghanistan, Islam permeates all aspects of daily life and virtually no activity is separate from it. Islam tells the Afghan the purpose of his creation and existence, his ultimate destiny, and his place in the world.[41] Religious observances such as prayers, holidays, and pilgrimages punctuate the rhythm of the day and season.[42] Birth, coming of age, and death – the most pivotal events in the human experience – are all governed by Islamic life-cycle rituals.[43] Indeed, the first things an infant hears, even before receiving its name, is the recitation of the call to prayers whispered into its ears.[44]

(U) In addition to providing meaning and spiritual enlightenment, religion in Afghanistan is also a normative system that regulates all human relationships, structures day-to-day interactions, and ensures economic and social justice.[45] Any act, properly done, may have religious significance, including the most trivial and mundane actions. What outsiders may consider manners or customs also has religious meaning. For example, greetings and everyday conversation, clothing, and meals – both what is eaten and how it is eaten – have religious significance. As the official religion under the constitution, Islam informs the legal system, the educational curriculum, and even banking practices.

(U) Religious leaders and institutions play a central role in the day-to-day life of Afghans. In most communities, especially those in rural parts of the country, imams and mullahs are seen as religious functionaries but also as civil society actors and trusted sources of guidance and news on issues of the day. Religious facilities, such as the ubiquitous mosque, serve not only as places of worship, but also as places for social interaction, political activism, education, and dispute resolution.

The Afghan Muslim identity

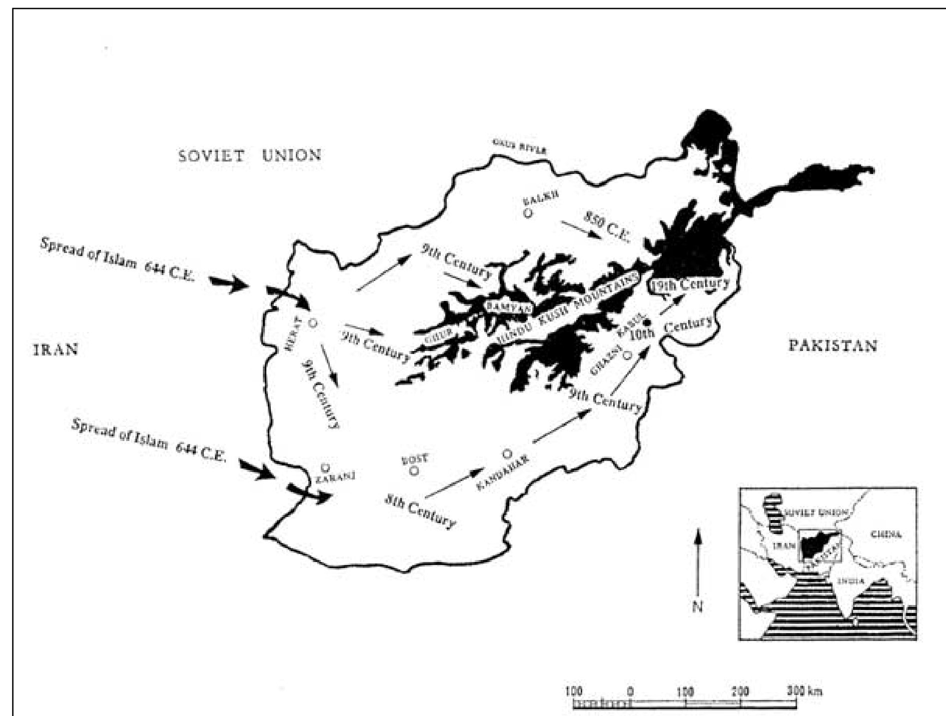
(U) The Muslim identity is shared by most Afghans: 99 percent adhere to one Islamic denomination or another. The self-identification of Afghans as being primarily Muslim has strong roots. Historically,

most of the population has seen itself as part of a larger Sunni Muslim entity.[46]

(U) Afghanistan has had a long-established tradition as defender of Islam on the subcontinent. For example, in the 19th century when India (including present-day Pakistan) was under the rule of the British Raj, the Turkish Ottoman Empire controlled large portions of the Arab world, and Iran was helpless in the face of Russian and British domination – Afghanistan was one of the truly independent Muslim countries in the world.[47] The use of the Muslim identity by Afghan rulers as a way to mobilize the masses contributed to the conflation between religion and national identity. Indeed, all conflicts with the outside powers have been seen as clashes between Muslim believers and infidel outsiders. [48]

(U) While most Afghans are devout, being Muslim is not the only identity that Afghans feel is important, nor necessarily the most dominant. For many Afghans, other identities related to clan, ethnicity, geographic origin, language, or profession may compete with or supersede religion as the primary sense of identity.[49] Moreover, for most Afghans, the question of identity is further clouded by the fact that Islam is inseparable from both ethnic codes such as *Pashtunwali* and superstitions stemming from Sufism and other pre-Islamic beliefs.

Figure 1: The spread of Islam in Afghanistan.[50]



Islam in practice

(U) Few Muslim peoples in the world observe the rituals and the piety of Islam with such regularity and emotion as the Afghans.[51] Yet, like in any society, the observance to daily religious practices in Afghanistan varies greatly from person to person and from community to community. Some Afghans strictly follow Islamic principles and prescribed practices, such as the faith's dietary restrictions; others are more relaxed, praying to themselves rather than at specific times and dressing less conservatively.[52] As shown by the cultivation of poppies, which is forbidden by religious law, Islam's role within Afghanistan is neither strictly fundamentalist nor completely uniform in its interpretation and application.[53]

(U) In terms of variations in religious practice, there is a clear divide between urban and rural areas.[54] In rural areas, and in the more remote villages (which compose nearly 70 percent of the country), Afghan Muslims tend to be more devout, conservative, and dogmatic in their religious practices and beliefs.[55] The mosque remains the center of village life, and the local mullah, despite his general lack of education, retains a good degree of influence, as the mostly illiterate popu-

lation has little ability to question his interpretations.[56] Moreover, relative to their coreligionists in the cities, rural Afghans display a greater tendency to mix religion with local traditions and tribal codes such as *Pashtunwali*.[57] Many villagers view the cities with suspicion and disdain, and consider them a source of corruption and inequality.[58] The Taliban regularly play on this belief and use it for propaganda purposes, calling city dwellers "infidels" in order to justify attacks on them.

(U) In Afghan cities such as Kabul, Heart, Jalalabad, and Mazar Sharif, Afghans tend to adhere less strictly to religious practices, to follow more moderate interpretations of Islam, and, because of their access to universities, to have political Islamist leanings.[59] Moreover, religious leaders in urban areas tend to be affiliated with the central government – through institutions such as the National Ulema Shura or the court system – at a far higher rate than the village mullahs.[60]

Overview: Tenets of Islam

(U) Islam is based on monotheism and shares much of its history with Judeo-Christianity. Muslims believe that God (*Allah*) revealed his final message in the form of the Qur'an through the angel Gabriel to the prophet Muhammad. In Islam, prophets are men selected by God to be his messengers and are not divine, though some are able to perform miracles. Islamic prophets include Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, but central to Islam is the belief that Muhammad was God's final prophet.

(U) According to the Qur'an, Islam is based on six articles of faith: belief in one God, angels as messengers, sacred texts as the literal word of God, prophets divinely selected, the afterlife and Day of Judgment, and predestination.[61]

Table 1: Quick reference: Islamic Articles of Faith

The Islamic Articles of Faith	
Belief in Allah as the only god	Strict belief in monotheism (*Tawheed*).
Belief in the angels	Angels, such as Gabriel, are the messengers of *Allah*.
Belief in the sacred text	The Qur'an is the literal word of *Allah*.
Belief in the prophets	Muhammad was the last in a line of prophets.
Belief in life after death	The promise of reward for a life of faith and one of punishment for the unfaithful.
Belief in predestination and divine decree	While everything happens according to the will of *Allah*, the individual is still responsible for their actions

(U) Afghan concepts of morality are derived from the teachings of *Allah* (the Qur'an) and the practices (*sunnah*) and sayings (*hadith*) of the Prophet Muhammad.[62] Islamic principles also dictate the proper comportment of Afghan Muslims, and, alongside tribal customs such as *Pashtunwali*, form a strict code of social behavior. These principles provide the guidance necessary to lead a balanced and purposeful life, to avoid hell, and to earn a place in heaven. Broadly, Islamic morals include concepts of honesty, frugality, generosity, virtuousness, piousness, fairness, truthfulness, tolerance, modesty, and respect for others.

Islamic Commandments (the ahkam pentad)

(U) Every action undertaken by a Muslim is judged according to the Islamic commandments as determined by Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*).[63] These commandments apply to both the individual and the community, and may have situational variance in times of duress. Termed the *ahkam pentad*, actions are grouped into five categories: (1) obligatory (*fard*), (2) recommended (*mustahabb* or *fadilah*), (3) neither obligatory nor recommended (*mubah*), (4) undesirable (*makruh*), and (5) forbidden (*haraam*).[64]

Table 2: Quick Reference: Obligatory and Forbidden Acts under Islam

Type of Act	Notes	Examples
Obligatory (*fard or wajib**)	Rewarded behaviors that if not performed, are punishable in this world and the hereafter. Two kinds of *fard*: those required of every person, and those considered fulfilled when undertaken by a sufficient number of the community.	Individual obligations: daily prayer, fasting, Hajj, almsgiving (see Five Pillars of Islam), participation in jihad* Communal obligations: funeral attendance by a certain number to complete rites
Recommended (*mustahabb*)	While there is no punishment for neglect, these are favored actions to be rewarded.	Marriage, extra prayers, additional fasting, charitable acts, document debts in writing, honoring family.
Neutral (*mubah*)	All actions are *mubah* at baseline, but Muslims should strive to elevate its performance to a level of *mustahabb*	*Halal* (permitted) food, common courtesies.
Disdained (*makruh*)	Avoidance of these acts is preferable; however, there is no punishment.	Divorce, excess use of water during ritual washings, certain foods.
Forbidden (*haraam*)	Both sinful and criminal; avoidance is rewarded. Two types of *haraam*: actions harmful to oneself and those that are not.	Harmful to oneself: Premarital sex, theft, killing, gambling, acquiring wealth through unjust means, drug use, tattoos, food and drinks (such as pork and alcohol), poppy cultivation[65] Not intrinsically harmful: eating *halal* food during a fast, daily prayers performed on illegally obtained land

*Hanafi *fiqh* considers *wajib* actions merely recommended

(U) Although there is widespread concordance on the morality of most day-to-day activities, Afghan clerics have disagreed on the legality of several controversial acts under religious law. For example, while the use of opium by Muslims is widely regarded as *haraam*, some Afghan clerics condone its cultivation for use by non-Muslims.[66] Conversely, jihad (Muslim duty of waging religious war against non-

believers) is generally considered *fard*. However, much debate exists on the definition of jihad (a Muslim's internal struggle, the struggle within the Islamic community, or Holy war against foreigners) and whether it is a personal versus a communal obligation.

(U) Since individual, family, and tribal status depends on the proper observance of *ahkam*, elders constantly apply pressure to their children and tribesmen to ensure no violations occur.[67]

Religious duties: the Five Pillars of Islam

(U) Every Afghan Muslim is responsible for carrying out the duties and rituals commonly referred to as the "Five Pillars of Islam." These include the commitment to the oneness of God (via the recitation of the *shahadah* creed), daily prayer (*namaz*), almsgiving (*zakat*), fasting (*ruzah*), and pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca (*hajj*).

(U) **1. The Islamic creed** *(shahadah)* **-** *Islam* means "surrender or submission to the will of God;" one who submits is a Muslim. The basic creed or profession of faith, the *shahadah* (also referred to as *kalima*), states: "There is no god but Allah (God), and Muhammad is His Prophet/Messenger." This creed is recited at the end of every daily prayer. Under the right circumstances, the recitation of this creed is sufficient to make one a convert to Islam.

(U) **2. Daily prayers** *(namaz)* **-** Afghans pray five times each day: dawn (*sahar*), noon (*gharma*), midafternoon (*mazdigar*), dusk (*makham*), and at nightfall (*maskhotan*). Prayer times are usually announced by the *muezzin* at the mosque. Before each prayer, Afghans perform ablutions called *wudu*. These obligatory cleansing rituals consists of washing the hands, mouth, face, arms up to the elbows, and feet. In the absence of water, clay or sand may be used. Prescribed body movements, including genuflections and prostrations, accompany the prayers, which the worshiper recites while facing toward Mecca, the holy center of Islam. Daily prayers consist of specified prayers, including the opening verse and other passages from the Qur'an. At the end, the *shahadah* is recited.

(U) *Namaz* may be performed individually and wherever a person may be at the required time. It is not seen as an interruption to stop what one is doing to pray. An Afghan who misses his prayers while

earning a livelihood is not considered less devout, and like other Muslims, he may make up a prayer he has missed earlier in the day.

Farmers take time out from tending their fields to conduct noontime prayers.
Source: Patricio Asfura-Heim

(U) Congregational prayers are most common during the weekly Friday noon prayer (*jama'a*), where the local imam provides sermons and men socialize. Collective prayer is regarded as having greater spiritual value than individual prayer, and thus attendance at the *jama'a* is treated as more obligatory. Although most Afghan women pray at home, in some areas they are allowed to worship at mosques, where they are provided segregated areas.

(U) **3. Alms-giving** *(zakat)*– *Zakat* is the annual giving of a percentage of a Muslim's negotiable, debt-free wealth to the poor. In Afghanistan, the traditional amount is 2.5 percent. It fulfills the individual's obligation towards the welfare of the community and is considered a purifying act. In Afghanistan, *zakat* collection is theoretically the responsibility of the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs (MoHRA) – though in recent years the Afghan government has prohibited the ministry's involvement due to corruption. Most Afghans give *zakat* directly to the needy, or rely on their local mullahs to dispense the money.[68]

(U) Beyond the obligatory *zakat*, Muslims are encouraged to voluntarily give to those in need—a practice called *sadaqa*. The Shi'a of Afghanistan believe it is a religious duty to tithe one-fifth (*khums*) of their wealth to their religious leaders. Finally, charitable giving is also associated with religious holidays such as Eid al-Fitr.

(U) **4. Fasting** *(ruzah)* - The ritual fasting during the holy month of Ramadan usually occurs around November (see Afghan Religious Festivals and Practices section below). From sunrise to sundown, no food, liquid, tobacco, or other foreign bodies, even spittle, may pass the lips of the true believer. Exempted from *ruzah* are suckling children, travelers, soldiers in the field, sick people, and pregnant women. All but children, however, must make up lost days of fasting at other times of the year.

(U) **5. Pilgrimage** *(hajj)* - Pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia is obligatory for all Muslims who are physically and financially able to do so once in their lifetime. It is undertaken at the beginning of the month of Dhu al-Hijja. A male who has gone on pilgrimage may be called "Hajji" in recognition that he has fulfilled his obligation.[69] The cost of pilgrimage prohibits most Afghans from making the trip, so calling someone a "hajji" who has not gone on the Hajj would embarrass that person.[70] The Ministry of Hajj and Islamic Affairs is responsible for organizing the Hajj for Afghans. A limited number of spaces are allocated for Afghans and selection for the Hajj usually involves a lottery system. Today, many Afghans annually fly to Mecca, primarily with the national airlines, Ariana Airlines. In some provinces, returning pilgrims are welcomed with a Hajji Chaqirdi celebration.

Table 3: Quick Reference: The five pillars of Islam

Five Pillars of Islam		
First	***Shahadah*** Declaration of faith	A person becomes Muslim after reciting the *shahadah*, a set statement professing the declaration of faith: "I testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is a messenger of Allah." Typically made in Arabic, this statement is also used in daily prayer and other occasions.
Second	***Namaz*** Prayer	Formal, ritualized prayers with a series of set positions are performed five times day facing the Ka'bah in Mecca: *Fajr* (morning dawn), *Zuhr* (noon), *Asr* (afternoon), *Maghrib* (after sunset), and *Isha* (late evening).
Third	***Zakat*** Alms-giving	There is an obligatory practice of donating 2.5% of one's wealth each year to the poor.
Fourth	***Ruzah*** Fasting	Used as a spiritual renewal, Muslims must abstain from food or drink from dawn to dusk during the month of *Ramadan.* Groups excluded from fasting include pregnant or breastfeeding women, prepubescent children, the elderly, and those with medical conditions.
Fifth	***Hajj*** Pilgrimage	Both men and women are required to make the pilgrimage at least once in their life to Mecca during the month of *Duh al-Hijjah*. Pilgrims perform specific rituals during the week of the Hajj and after completion are given the honorific title of "Hajji."

The concept of Taqiyya

(U) *Taqiyya* (*dorough ba maslehat,* in Dari) is a practice in Islam that allows for the denial of one's religious beliefs to prevent persecution. A literal translation of the term is "concealing or disguising one's beliefs, convictions, ideas, feelings, opinions, and/or strategies at a time of eminent danger, whether now or later in time, to save oneself from physical and/or mental injury."[71] It recent times, the concept of *taqiyya* has also been interpreted by some to include deception operations in warfare, or as a means of garnering support for a political cause.[72]

(U) Although commonly associated with the Shi'a, who practiced *taqiyya* when living under hostile Sunni rulers in early Islam, the practice was also endorsed in medieval Sunni Islam. In Afghanistan today, *taqiyya* is most directly associated with the Ismaili Shi'a who in the past suffered extreme persecution by Afghan rulers and other religious sects.

(U) The issue of support or condemnation of *taqiyya* in Islamic scripture is largely one of interpretation, with references from the Qur'an and *hadith* both allowing and forbidding the practice.[73] Most Muslims today, whether Sunni or Shi'a, do not consider *taqiyya* an integral part of their faith. It is important to note that *taqiyya* is not synonymous with lying, and Muslims are not more or less prone to lying than non-Muslims. If one senses that an Afghan is lying, he or she should presume it is for mundane reasons rather than religious motives.

Afghan religious observances

(U) Islam is a central, pervasive influence throughout Afghan society; religious observances punctuate the rhythm of each day and season. The pattern of life for most Afghans will change during these holidays and festivals. Understanding religious observances, and anticipating activities associated with them is of the utmost importance for international forces and development organizations working alongside their Afghan counterparts.

Important Islamic holidays

(U) **Ramadan** (Pashto: *Rojay*), the month of Muslim fasting from sunrise to sundown, comes at a different time each year because it is on the lunar calendar. Large meals are eaten before dawn and after sunset, and prayers at the mosque will usually be longer. The *iftar* meal, which breaks the fast at sunset, is often an occasion for hosting one's friends, family, and the poor.

(U) In Afghanistan, the first day of Ramadan is a national holiday during which government offices are closed. It falls on the day after the sighting of the new moon marking the beginning of the month. Yogurt, pancakes, *shurba* (a kind of oatmeal), coffee, and tea are typically consumed before sunrise, and after sunset the fast is typically

broken with dates and other dishes. Non-Muslims are often invited to the *iftar* meals.[74]

(U) During Ramadan, it is impolite to consume food and drink or smoke in front of observant Muslims during daylight hours. Schedules can change dramatically, with people staying up late and ending work early. In Afghanistan, one can anticipate large crowds gathering at mosques and homes during times of prayer and *iftar* meals. Some Afghans celebrate the end of Ramadan with gunfire.[75]

(U) Militant Muslim groups sometimes use Ramadan to launch new campaigns since Muhammad fought his first major battle during this month. In Afghanistan, the Taliban do not avoid killing during Ramadan, and often increase their propaganda.[76]

(U) **Laylat al-Qadr**, The "Night of Power" is observed during one of the final days of Ramadan and commemorates the night that the Qur'an was first revealed to Muhammad. Muslims will recite the Qur'an and say extra prayers during this night, as they believe that pious acts performed on this night receive a heightened spiritual reward.

(U) **Eid al-Fitr** (Pashto: *Kamkay akhtar* or *Kuchnay Akhtar*), "The Festival of Breaking [the Fast]," marks the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting. During the three days of Eid al-Fitr, there are congregational prayers, celebrations, and the exchange of gifts between family members and others in their household. People also give charitable donations to the poor.[77]

(U) In Afghanistan, "*Eid Mubarak*" (or "Happy Eid") is a common greeting during the celebration. On the evening before Eid, women commonly paint their hands and feet with henna. Muslim governments will sometimes free prisoners on Eid.[78]

(U) **Eid-e-Qurban**, (or *Eid-al-Adha*), "The Festival of Sacrifice" or "Greater Eid" lasts for three days and marks the end of the pilgrimage (Hajj). Muslims kill a camel, sheep, goat, or cow, and one-third goes to the poor, one-third to the family, and one-third to one's relatives. People also exchange gifts.[79] The slaughtering of the sacrifice often takes place outside compounds or in a communal area in the village. There are reports that insurgents use the holiday to collect *zakat.*

(U) **Mawlid Al-Nabi**, The "The Festival of the Birth," is a celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. It is commemorated on the 12th of Rabi` I. It is followed by a commemoration of the Prophet's death on the following day.[80] On the Prophet's birthday, mosques give food to the poor.

(U) **Ashura**, the tenth day of the month Muharram, is when Shi'a commemorate the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson, Hussein. Some Sunnis in Afghanistan also commemorate the event.[81] Some Shi'a will travel to Karbala, Iraq, during this time to pray at the shrine of Hussein.

(U) The Shi'as' increasingly boisterous assertion of cultural pride during Ashura celebrations in Kabul is seen as an effort to force other Afghans to adjust to their presence and is causing some consternation among the majority Sunnis population. These processions have recently been attacked by the Pakistani-based group Lashkar-I-Jhangvi.[82]

(U) **Nowruz** (new day), is the first day of the vernal equinox (March 21) and is celebrated as New Year's Day across Afghanistan. It is recognized as an official state holiday. Celebrations last for several days, in which there are communal family meals, visits to the homes of family and friends, exchanges of presents, and praying at the local mosque.

(U) Shi'a in Afghanistan believe that the Prophet's son-in-law and first imam, Ali, became caliph on Nowruz, so thousands of them gather every year for festivities at his shrine (the Blue Mosque) in the northern city of Mazar-i Sharif, where they believe he is interred.[83]

(U) In the 1990s the Taliban government banned Nowruz as because of its roots in pre-Islamic traditions and its association with music and other entertainments that the Taliban view as forbidden. Today, Taliban insurgents target Nowruz celebrations and have released statements condemning the practice.

(U) **Shab-e-Barat** This religious observance is celebrated in some urban areas of Afghanistan. According to Islamic beliefs, on the night of Shab-e-Barat, Allah determines the destinies of all humans by taking into consideration the deeds of the previous year. Afghans may serve elaborate meals and spend the night praying and worshipping,

asking and requesting Allah for things that they desire. Firecrackers are part of the celebration.[84]

Table 4: Quick reference: Calendar of Afghan Islamic holidays

Holiday	Date	Sect	Comments
Mawlid Al-Nabi	January 24, 2013	All	A celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday
Nowruz	March 21/22, 2013	All	Largest and best-known festival. Pre-Islamic lunar new year's day (disapproved of by some sects)
Isra' wal Mi'raj	June 6, 2013	All	Ascent of Prophet Muhammad
Shab-e-Barat	June 24, 2013	All	Night of forgiveness, freedom. Future year to be decided on this night.
Start of Ramadan	July 9, 2013	All	One month of fasting.
Martyrdom of Imam Ali	July 29, 2013	Shi'a	Shi'a believe he was the first Caliph. Central figure in the Shi'a/Sunni split.
Laylat al-Qadr	August 3, 1013	All	Celebrates the night the first verses of the Qur'an were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.
Eid al-Fitr	August 8, 2013	All	Breaking the fast of Ramadan, begins 3-day festival.
Beginning of the Hajj	October 13-16, 2013	All	Pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Religious duty of all Muslims.
Eid-e-Qurban (Eid-al-Adha)	October 15, 2015	All	3-day festival commemorates willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son Ishmael. Marks the end of Hajj
Eid e-Ghadir	October 23, 2013	Shi'a	Day that Muhammad returned from a pilgrimage in Mecca and designated his cousin and son-in-law Ali as the next leader.
Muharram	November 4, 2013	All	Islamic new year
Ashura	November 13, 2013	Shi'a	Commemoration of the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson, Hussein.

Life-cycle rituals

(U) Islamic rituals, as well as spiritual and superstitious practices, are present throughout an Afghan's life and are particularly important during life-cycle stages such as birth, the coming of age, and death.

Strict observance of these rituals is common among Afghans. Life-cycle rituals naturally vary from region to region and, and from sect to sect. The information presented below gives only broad picture that is generally applicable to most Afghan Muslims.

Birth rites

(U) Shortly after birth, every Afghan Muslim child, male or female, will be brought to the mosque, or will be visited by the local mullah in order to receive the *Adhan* (Islamic call for prayer).[85] The mullah (or in some cases the father or family elder) will whisper the prayers into both ears of child – first in the right ear, then in the left. After the *Adhan* is given, the child is considered a Muslim and will be given a name.

(U) In addition to orthodox Islamic rituals, many Afghans follow superstitious practices designed to guard newborns from evil spirits *(jinn)* or the evil eye. In fact, so strong is their belief that, after giving birth, an Afghan mother's chief concern is to protect her child from these supernatural forces.[86] Before the third day of life, Afghans often refer to the baby by a substitute name to prevent spirits from stealing the infant by calling its name. In addition, many well-to-do families keep their children dirty or dressed in rags at an early age in order to avoid attracting jealous spirits.[87]

Coming-of-age practices

(U) *Dastar bandi,* or the "turban ceremony," is a celebration for a young man coming of age (around age twelve). The religious ceremony marks the end of a male pupil's religious studies, at which point he is supposed to be able to recite the thirty chapters of the Qur'an from memory. The *ulema* from a madrasa usually ask a well-known mullah from outside the province to preside over the ceremony. During the ceremony, a turban is traditionally tied onto the heads of the graduates.

(U) *Hijab* is the practice of dressing modestly past the age of puberty as instructed by the Qur'an.[88] Generally at about this time, the child is also expected to observe the rules regulating contact and separation among the sexes. No precise dress code for men or women is set out in the Qur'an, and various scholars have interpreted the meaning of *hijab* in different ways. The basic requirements are that when in the

presence of someone of the opposite sex (who is not a close family member), Muslims should dress in a way that does not draw sexual attention to themselves. The Sunni Hanafi school of thought, to which most Afghans subscribe, holds that the entire body of a woman (the hands and face are sometimes excluded) should be covered during prayers and public settings. The opinion that men should cover themselves from navel to knees is also predominant. In Afghanistan, the word *hijab* is also frequently used to refer to a headscarf worn by a woman.

Burial practices and death rites

(U) When a man approaches death, lamentations (Dari: *sugwari*. Pashto:*wir*) begin. Although a few may quietly read the Qur'an, most women scream, moan, cry, and tear their hair and clothing. Neighbors send in food and money as well as sympathy.

(U) The deceased should be buried as soon as possible by family or members of the same sex, ideally on the day of death. The burial must take place before sundown, never at night. If a man dies at night, he will be buried as soon as possible after sunrise. The body is stripped, washed in the full ritual manner (except for miscarriages, martyrs, and badly disfigured bodies), and placed in a white shroud. Prescribed prayers for the dead (*jenazah)* are then said over the corpse and it is carried to the grave on a bier (*charpayi)* by six men. Men usually make up the rest of the procession, which proceeds to the grave in silence. Traditionally (and still the practice outside the more modernized sections of the major cities), a person meeting a funeral profession should follow for forty paces, saying the prayers for the dead.[89]

(U) The body should be placed deep enough to prevent exposure to animals and placed on its right side facing Mecca. Graves *(qabr)* should be about six feet deep, and, in some areas, have an L-shape called *lahad*. A small object of wood or stone is usually used to mark the grave.[90] According to Islam belief, the body of a man or a woman buried without proper Muslim rites will be horribly mangled and its bones crushed by its own grave, thereby robbing the soul of a body for the call on Judgment Day.[91]

A gravesite in rural Afghanistan. *Source: Patricio Asfura-Heim*

(U) It is not uncommon in Afghanistan for a family member or religious leader to perform the *khatam* (full recitation of the Qur'an) one week and then 40 days after a person's death. In addition, relatives will also often provide a form of charity called *isqat* to the poor as a waiver for the deceased's unpaid worldly debts.

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IV. The religious landscape of Afghanistan

(U) Afghanistan is one of the world's most uniformly Muslim states.[92] Figures vary, but it is estimated that 99 percent of the population belong to either the Sunni sect (estimated at 80 percent) or the Shi'a sect (est. at 19 percent).[93] Within each sect there is further variation in schools of belief, and important spiritual influences like Sufism and pre-Islamic superstitions add further complexity to the Afghan Islamic tapestry. The remaining 1 percent of the population follow the Hindu, Sikh, Bahai, Parsee, Christian, or Jewish faith.[94]

(U) Historically, members of the same religious sects have concentrated in certain regions. Sunni Muslim Pashtuns dominate the south and east. The homeland of the Shi'a Hazaras is in the Hazarajat, the mountainous central highlands around Bayman province. Northeastern provinces traditionally have Ismaili populations. The smaller minority religious groups are largely found in Kabul.[95]

Figure 2: Religious sects and Sufi orders

Sunni

(U) At 80 percent of the population, Sunnis constitute the vast majority of Afghans. Aside from a piece of territory in the center of the country, Sunnis can be found in nearly all provinces of Afghanistan. By far most Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbaks, Turkmen, Baloochs, and Aimaq are of the Sunni faith, as are a small number of ethnic Hazara.

(U) Nearly all Sunnis in Afghanistan (approximately 80-90 percent) subscribe to the Hanafi[96] school of jurisprudence, the oldest and most widely followed in the Muslim world.[97] Hanafism emphasizes consensus, analogy, reason, and intellect in legal decisions and thus is said to be the most liberal of the four Sunni schools of legal thought as well as the most compatible with local traditions, customs, and cultures.[98]

(U) In the northeastern parts of the country, a small percentage of the population adhere to the Hanbali school of jurisprudence, a far more conservative school of Sunni Islam that does not accept consensus, private opinion, or analogy in the dispensation of legal matters.[99] While not native to Afghanistan, small pockets of ultra-conservative Wahhabi and Salafi adherents (the two are often conflated by Afghans) exist in the provinces of Nuristan and, in particular, Kunar.[100] Salafis advocate a return to the beginnings of Islam but believe that Islam is inherently adaptable, and has been debilitated by the rigid structure imposed upon it by later generations. Salafists, importantly, do not reject the authority of the state or even of secular government. Wahhabists, on the other hand, interpret much of what is currently practiced as un-Islamic and advocate a much more literal interpretation of the Qur'an.[101] Wahhabis are critics of both Shi'a Islam and Sufism.

Shi'a

(U) The second largest religious sect is the Shi'a. While Shi'a can be found throughout Afghanistan, most reside in the central highland of Hazarajat, in urban centers such as Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Mazar-i-Sharif, and in pockets in the northeast. The vast majority are Hazara, followed by the Farsiwan (a Tajik ethnic subgroup), and then the Bayat and Qizilbash (Turkic populations of Iranian origin).[102] Urban Shi'a are successful small business entrepreneurs; many have gained from the development of education that began in the 1950s.

(U) The two major Shi'a schools of jurisprudence are the Jaffarite, or Twelvers, also called Imami, and the Ismaili, also called the Seveners. The larger Twelver community (mainly ethnic Hazara and Farsiwan), recognize, as do most Shi'a in the Muslim world, twelve successive Imams, 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. Until that day, clerical leaders with titles such as the Mujtahid, Hujjat al-Islam, and Ayatollah lead the community.

(U) Ismaili communities in Afghanistan are far less populous than the Imami; they make up about 1 percent of the population.[103] They take their name from Isma'il, the seventh Shi'a Imam and son of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq. Unlike the Twelvers, Ismai'lis believe that the line of the Imamat has continued unbroken to the present and that the world cannot function even for a day in the absence of the Imam. They belief in the authority of Karim Aga Khan IV and consider him to be the 49th Imam. The Ismaili community is largely composed of Hazaras, Tajik, and Wakhis.[104] Ismailis are found primarily in and the eastern Hazarajat, in the Baghlan area north of the Hindu Kush, among the mountain Tajik people of Badakhshan, and along the Wakhan Corridor.

Religious minorities

(U) A negligible number of non-Muslims are currently found in Afghanistan. They include a few tens of thousands of Hindus, Sikhs, and perhaps a miniscule number of Jews, Christians, Bahais, and Parsees.[105] According to self-estimates from these communities, there are currently approximately 3,000 Sikhs, more than 400 Baha'is, and 100 Hindu believers. There is a small Christian community; estimates range in size from 500 to 8,000. There is one known Jewish Afghan.[106] Most are scattered in the larger cities or urban areas. These groups have never wielded political influence.[107] But until 1992, Hindus, Sikhs, and Jews did play a significant role in the country's economy. Traditionally, they controlled the money market in urban centers and when Afghan kings went to war, they often borrowed money from them.[108] Under the Taliban, non-Muslim religious minorities were forced to wear a yellow badge on their clothing to distinguish themselves from the rest of the population. Many minority religious groups, particularly the Jews and Christians, have emigrated while others are forced to hide their religious affiliations. Bahais, for ex-

ample, live a covert existence, as the Afghan government has ruled that their faith is a form of blasphemy.[109] Local Hindu and Sikh populations, although allowed to practice their religion publicly, continue to encounter problems obtaining land for cremation or jobs within the government.[110]

Table 5: Quick reference: Religion and ethnic groups

Ethnic Group	Branch of Islam
Pashtun	Hanafi Sunni; except the Turi who are Shi'a
Tajik	Hanafi Sunni; some are Ismaili Shi'a
Farsiwan	Imami Shi'a
Qizilbash	Imami Shi'a
Hazara	Imami or Ismaili Shi'a; some are Hanafi Sunni
Aimaq	Hanafi Sunni
Moghul	Hanafi Sunni
Uzbek	Hanafi Sunni
Turkmen	Hanafi Sunni
Kirghiz	Hanafi Sunni

Spiritualism and superstition

(U) In addition to organized religion, popular belief in Afghanistan has been based on a mixture of superstition, spiritualism, saint worship, and mysticism. According to Afghanistan scholar Louis Dupree, the type of Islam that was practiced in Afghan villages, nomad camps, and most urban areas would be almost unrecognizable to a sophisticated Muslim scholar. Aside from faith in Allah and in Muhammad as the Messenger of Allah, most beliefs relate to localized, pre-Muslim customs.[111]

Sufism

(U) In addition to belonging to the more orthodox Islamic sects discussed above, large numbers of Afghans (mostly Sunni) practice Sufism, a mystical form of Islam concerned with the internal spiritual journey of the individual.[112] Sufism has been part of Afghanistan almost as long as Islam itself. It does not rival formal religion, but rather provides a more spiritual dimension for Afghan religious life.[113] Sufism embodies a far more personal connection with God.[114] Sufis

achieve this momentary union with God through self-hypnotic rituals called *dhikr* which involve meditation, the repetition of prayers and chants, the use of drugs, and physical gyrations.[115] Sufis have an intense spiritual life, and shun materialism.[116]

(U) The growth of Sufism has been important in the history of Islam in Afghanistan, and Sufi mystics have been an integral part of the life of the people and in politics for centuries. Afghanistan has fostered many world famous Sufi poets, such as Ansari (11th century), Sanayi of Ghazni (12th century), Rumi of Balkh (13th century), and Jami of Herat (15th century). Rumi's collection of poems, the Mathnawi', is considered by many to be the greatest poetry ever written in Dari. Today, Sufism continues to flourish in Afghan in both rural and urban settings, and especially among the middle classes of larger villages, towns, and cities. Many Afghans are attached to a Sufi order or *taqira* (brotherhoods), discussed in depth below. The great centers of Sufism are Kabul, Herat, Jalalabad, and Ghazni, but the whole of the north country and the region of Kandahar have been traditional centers of Sufi belief.[117]

Superstitious beliefs

(U) Superstitions such as the belief in spirits, miracles (*kiramat*), and restorative effects of talismans persist among the population, particularly among women and those living in rural communities. In fact, many Afghans may know these superstitions better than they know Islamic rights.[118] Little distinction is made between superstitious and religious beliefs, and many assume that their belief in superstition derives directly from the Qur'an.[119]

(U) Afghans believe in evil spirits and supernatural beings that they call by various names, such as *jinns*, *shishak ather-e-all*, and *ghool-e-biaban*.[120] These spirits are believed to have power over a person's destiny and to be the primary cause of disease, insanity, and bad luck. There are two categories of *jinn*: white and black. The white *jinn* are seen as benevolent; the black, as violent, wrathful, and cruel.[121] Thus, anyone possessed by a black *jinn* must be exorcised.[122] The wearing of small amulets or pieces of paper called *tawiz*, which often including verses from the Qur'an, are believed to cure illness and protect against misfortune.[123] In Afghanistan, snake bites and scorpion stings are invariably attributed to the activities of malicious spirits. For this

reason, the treatment of such wounds always includes supernatural, as well as natural, remedies.[124] Often village religious leaders such as mullahs, *pirs,* and *malang* will serve as a Shaman to heal the sick or counter black magic.[125]

(U) In addition to their belief in supernatural beings, Afghans are deeply influenced by dreams, which they consider to be prophetic. Afghans thus seek to interpret dreams as a means of making significant decisions in their lives or justifying their actions.[126] Dreams may be interpreted by the dreamers themselves, by a close relative or friend, or by professional dream interpreters.

Sectarian tensions

(U) While religion has often acted as a unifying force among an ethnically and tribally fractured society – particularly when it faced an external threat – so too has it acted as a divisive force that has led to conflict and bloodshed. There have been periods of tolerance towards minority religious groups; however, in the past, sectarian and inter-religious fissures have been exploited for political purposes – specifically, for rallying the mainly Sunni base.

(U) The current Afghan constitution proclaims, "Followers of other religions are free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites within the limits and the provision of the law." Yet, there are still serious obstacles for religious freedom, which stem largely from the residual effects of years of jihad against the USSR, civil strife, Taliban rule, suspicion of outside influence and the motivations of foreigners, and weak democratic institutions.[127] While sectarian divisions have not been a defining feature within the current insurgency, they do manifest in localized conflict and in national politics.[128] The following are examples of important religious cleavages that continue to cause tension between groups and may prevent or limited cooperation among Afghans today.

Sunni vs. Shi'a

(U) As in the rest of the Muslim world, the most important religious cleavage in Afghanistan is between the majority Sunni and minority Shi'a populations.[129] Until recently, Sunni-dominated governments in Afghanistan have subjected the Shi'as to the Sunni legal system, de-

prived them of their basic rights and equality before the law, forbade their religious practices, and generally treated them as second-class citizens. As a result, the Shi'a minority has always been far removed from the centers of power.[130] Hazaras – the largest Shi'a ethnic group – have been considered outsiders and connected to the Shi'as of Iran, an assumption bolstered by the fact that many Hazara clerics have studied in Iran. During the Taliban regime in the 1990s, the Shi'a population was brutally persecuted.[131] While tensions continue, the current Afghan government has given the Shi'as rights under the constitution and has made additional attempts to accommodate their beliefs.[132]

(U) Despite having played little role thus far, international observers should consider the instigation of sectarian violence between Afghan Sunnis and Shi'as as a potentially destabilizing development in the current conflict. Across the border in Pakistan, for example, Sunni Wahabbi groups have intentionally provoked tensions with the Shi'a Tori tribe, and belief that sectarian warfare will benefit them politically. The response by the Shi'a has been equally alarming: they have formed two militant groups of their own, the *Mahdi* Army and *Hezbollah* (names that echo the more well-known Shi'a groups in the Middle East).[133]

Sufi vs. Wahhabi

(U) An important religious fissure that first manifested during the jihad against the Soviets is the conflict between traditional Afghan spiritualism and Wahhabi/Salafi fundamentalism brought by foreign fighters coming from the Arabian heartland.[134] Sufism is considered apostasy to the Wahhabists, who claimed they had a superior vision of Islam.[135] Indeed, one of the founding principles of Wahhabism was a discarding of all "medieval superstitions." During the 1980s, in Kunar and Kunduz provinces, there were regular clashes between the Afghan population and the Arabs, who took to making periodical denunciations of Afghan Sufi beliefs they regarded as popular superstitions.[136]

(U) When the Taliban came to power it banned all practices relating to "sorcery" and it closed down the Blue Mosque in Mazari-e Sharif because it was used to observe pre-Islamic festivals. Despite the Taliban' initial rejection of Sufism and other forms of folk-Islam, Afghans

nevertheless continued to make pilgrimages to the shrines of saints and used magical charms to ward off the evil eye.[137]

(U) Today the 'Sufi vs. Wahhabi' divide has caused problems between the Afghan Taliban and its remaining Arab allies. Some Taliban commanders blame the Wahhabis for alienating the local population whose support they count on for daily survival.[138] Among other things, hardline Wahhabis like Al Qaeda mock local customs as un-Islamic and attempt to prevent villagers from praying at the shrines of Sufi saints.

Ismailis vs. everyone else

(U) Both Afghan Sunnis and Shi'a Twelvers consider the Ismailis heretical. Afghans believe Ismailis are devil worshipers because of their use of the peacock to symbolize the hidden Imam. The peacock represents the *shaytan* (devil) in the non-literate iconography of many Muslim areas.[139] Because other religious groups view the Ismailis with suspicion, for the most part their economic status is very poor. Persecution has led many Ismailis, particularly those in northeast Afghanistan, to practice in secrecy and utilize the concept of dissimulation or *taqiyya.* (See the "Other Afghan Religious Practices" section below.) *Taqiyya* is a socio-religious practice that allows Shi'a practitioners to deny their religious affiliation if they need to protect themselves against sectarianism, as long as they continue to believe and worship in private.

Orthodox vs. Maraboutistic Sufi Orders

(U) Within Sufism in Afghanistan, there is a schism between the more orthodox clerical Sufi orders in the non-tribal zones and the non-clerical orders in the more tribal areas of southern Afghanistan. Orthodox Sufism scrupulously respects Islamic dogma and the sharia. Orthodox Sufi orders, found mostly in the north, recruit members from the cultured bourgeoisie, craftsmen, officials, as well as peasants living around the great cultural centers such as Herat, Kabul, Maymana, and Mazar-i Sharif. There are few Sufi leaders in these areas whom are not also traditional Islamic leaders such as mullahs or *maulawis.*[140] In *Maraboutistic* orders, whose followers are mainly found in Pashtun tribal areas or among nomadic populations, Sufi leaders are never mullahs or *maulawis. Maraboutism* is, in fact, strongly anti-clerical. Instead, orders in these areas are led by a family of "saints"

endowed with hereditary *barakat* who enjoy the collective allegiance of a clan or a tribe.[141]

Religion vs. tribalism

(U) Of course, Islam is not the only institution that regulates everyday affairs in Afghanistan. Islam coexists with other traditional belief systems and social codes that been around since well before the coming of Islam.[142] In particular, the Pashtun population is influenced by a strong tribal code, *Pashtunwali*, that both deviates from and intermingles with Islam. Fundamentally, religion and tribalism each present a different image of social order. The goal of *Pashtunwali* is to maintain a tribe's equilibrium, which is always under threat; sharia law, on the other hand, attempts to transcend specific groups such as tribes.[143] The coexistence of *Pashtunwali* and sharia is often achieved only through the arbitration by mullahs and other *ulema*, whose community stature allows them to bridge the chasm between the two sets of laws.[144]

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V. Religious leaders and networks

(U) As guardians of morality, spiritual guides, and functionaries of daily and life-cycle rituals, religious leaders have traditionally held elevated positions in Afghan society. While their influence has waxed and waned, their large numbers and continued influence at the local level is one of the most persistent features of both urban and rural life in the country.

(U) In addition to their role as religious guides, they perform a number of civil society functions that include mediation, education, and social security and resource distribution (through the collection of *zakat*).[145] They also serve as trusted sources of information to a largely illiterate population as well as interlocutors between their communities and external agents such as the state, aid agencies and NGOs.[146] Traditionally, religious leaders have also played an important political role as backers or detractors of various Afghan regimes. Today, many religious scholars serve as judges or teachers in state courts and schools, and some participate in the insurgency.

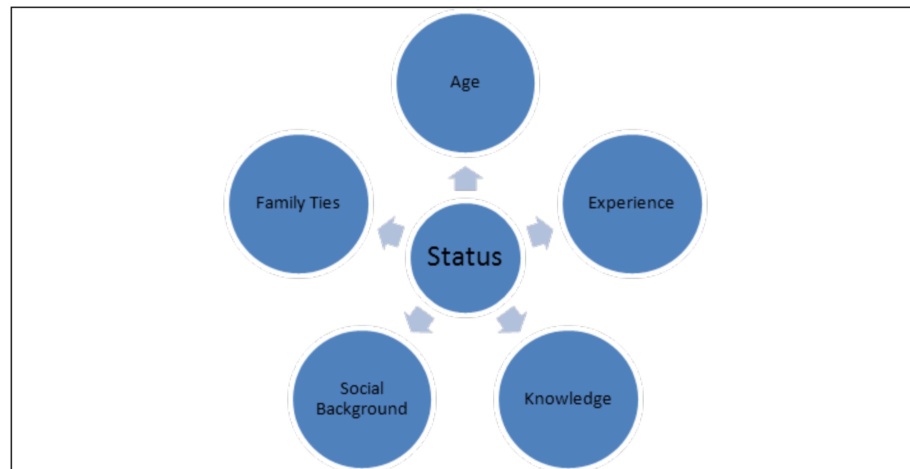
(U) Broadly speaking, there are two categories of religious leaders in Afghanistan: the orthodox Islamic clergy, which includes the local mosque leader or mullah and the religious scholar or *maulana;* and the spiritual leaders, which include mystics and saints such as the Sufi *pir* and the *sayyed.*

Influence

(U) Most Afghans generally display a high level of trust, respect, and support for their local religious leaders.[147] Their role in defining, maintaining and preserving what are considered appropriate moral values gives religious leaders great influence.[148] Their prestige and thus authority over their congregations is largely determined by their level of training, where they received their training, their lineage, their age, oratory skills, and over all reputation. These factors affect and are affected by the size of the respective leader's congregation. A cleric's influence, even in the case of the farmer mullah, is also great-

ly enhanced by his access to a large ready-made audience and his prominence in everyday social life.

Figure 3: Determinants of status and influence of Afghan religious leaders



(U) In a largely illiterate population, clerics remain one of the few sources of trusted information for their congregations. Particularly in rural communities, mullahs can sometimes be the only source in this regard. Consequently, some clerics have significant influence over the political participation and ideological sentiments of their followers. Many Afghans report that religious leaders have the ability to sway whole communities with their message.[149] Thus, religious leaders can serve to legitimize or deligitimize political authority, based on their preaching, positions, and stances on issues of the day.[150]

(U) In terms of influence, religious leaders have been significantly weakened since the collapse of the Taliban regime. Because of the active role that clerics played in the Taliban government, the current administration and the international community tend to view them with suspicion.[151] Many religious leaders are frustrated and feel that the current government has sidelined them.[152]

Orthodox Islamic clergy

(U) The orthodox clergy in Afghanistan is composed of official religious leaders from the Sunni and Shi'a faiths, such as mullahs, *maulanas*, and *ayatollahs,* who involve themselves in the daily and more doctrinal Islamic practices and rituals.

The mullahs

(U) The mullah is the most ubiquitous of the religious leaders in Afghanistan; according to one estimate there are over 150,000 mullahs throughout the country.[153] The mullah is usually attached to a mosque, several of which can be found in any particular village. Mullahs are also often referred to as Imams, connoting someone who is employed as a prayer leader of a mosque.[154] Village mullahs are generally conservative. They represent the "traditionalist" grass roots of Afghan religious civil society. Most have only the most basic training from local or Pakistani madrasas, and some have no training at all and can even be illiterate.[155] Typically they are responsible for leading the daily prayers, presenting a sermon on Fridays, officiating at life-cycle services (such as performance of marriage ceremonies and funerals, and the recitation of the call to prayer (*azan*) into the ears of newborn children), adjudicating disputes, and teaching basic religious beliefs and practices, and teaching appropriate Qur'anic phrases to the village children.[156] Sometimes he provides services which may be best described as on the fringe of religion: dispensing medicine and reciting Qur'anic phrases for healing purposes, preparing amulets and talisman (*tawiz*), and conducting exorcisms.[157]

(U) Generally, the village mullah is the lowest member in the hierarchy of Orthodox Islamic leaders, below that of scholars such as the *maulawi* and charismatic leaders such as the Sufi *pir*.[158] Mullahs usually do not come from the landed elite (*khan*) families. Those who serve as village mullahs are generally poor or come from an insignificant tribe. Many young men view becoming a mullah as one of the few available avenues out of the fixed matrix of kinship and economic circumstances into which they are born.[159] Village mullahs are normally part-time clerics and also work in the communities as farmers or craftsmen. In many ways, the mullah can be said to belong to a professional caste specializing in religious ritual.[160]

(U) Scholars have noted that the mullah himself has little authority to actually command followers in the sense of giving orders. Instead, mullahs tap into tribal psychology to channel behavior in the desired direction. Even though the local mullah may lack any real political power, he wields considerable influence in his community through his moral position and regular contact with the population, and is treated with deference. Mullahs remain one of the few sources of

trusted information for their congregations. In rural communities, mullahs can sometimes be the only source of information, which further increases their influence. Consequently, some clerics have significant influence over the political participation and ideological sentiments of their followers. The power of mullahs is mainly at the grass-roots level and rarely extends outside the villages they work in.

Figure 4: The roles and functions of religious leaders in Afghanistan

(U) Importantly, village mullahs have the ability to ostracize villagers by deeming them to be a bad Muslim or can negatively color a village's perception of a new program of policy by labeling it un-Islamic. Thus, Afghans take great pains to ensure they are not seen to be going against the will of the local mullah. If the mullahs like an idea, everyone will like that idea.[161] This threat is powerful: Afghans who have been designated as bad Muslims can be removed from systems of community support and cut off from access to vital resources.

(U) The village mullah is not a member of an institutionalized body and has scarcely any links with higher-order religious leaders; he is not appointed by them; nor does he depend upon them for his income.[162] Typically mullahs are selected by the congregations of their mosques, usually for their level of education and their reputation for

piety and wisdom, and do not require too much *zirkat* [obligatory religious tax].[163] A mullah earns his income from payment for services and is thus often dependent on his village congregation. Salaries are collected through community contributions.[164] In the past, the government made payments to the most educated mullahs in order bind them to the state and limit their autonomy. Today only a small number of mullahs receive state salaries, reported to be between 3,000 and 4,000 Afs (60-80 U.S. dollars) per month.

The maulana

(U) The title of *maulana* (or *maulawi*) is typically associated with orthodox religious leaders that have achieved advanced religious training at a well-established madrasa. Sometimes the title is also given to a renowned mystic or Sufi master. Unlike the mullah, *maulanas* are considered jurists capable of interpreting sharia law rather than mere technicians or "ritual practitioners," and, as such, they enjoy a higher social status. When a *maulana* acts as judge he is given the title of *qazi*. Because of their education, legal responsibilities, and associations with institutions of advanced learning, altogether they are considered to form the *ulema,* or higher community of religious experts (discussed in depth below).

(U) Most often *maulana* are associated with particular madrasas or serve there as professors. In addition to their teaching duties many also as the religious leaders to the *masjid-i-jum'a* (Friday mosque) in the larger cities. During the Friday sermon, *maulana* will often discuss relevant issues of the day and offer guidance to those in attendance.

(U) *Maulanas*, unlike the more numerous mullahs, tend to be are modernist in approach and closer both to the Afghan (non-Islamist) intelligentsia and the state. In the past, the Afghan government gave state-educated *maulana* salaried government positions in the courts and as civil servants.[165] Although to a much lesser extent, today many *maulana* continue to serve in the judiciary and a few work in the government-affiliated National Ulema Council (discussed in depth below).

Shi'a clergy

(U) Unlike their Sunni counterparts, Afghan Shi'a scholars have a much more rigid leadership hierarchy and, because of their minority

status, remain closely networked. As in other countries with Shi'a populations, senior religious leaders wield considerable influence over decision-making and legal opinions. When a high-level Shi'a scholar makes a legal determination, lesser scholars follow that opinion closely.

(U) Shi'a clerics in Afghanistan are ranked according to their training and influence. *Mullahs* are lower-level clergy who generally have only rudimentary religious education. A *hujjat al-Islam* is more learned than a *mullah* but does not have the authority to issue legal rulings. *Mujtahids* and *faqihs* are jurists with the authority to issue rulings. A higher-level *mujtahid* is a *marja*, the most educated of whom are called *ayatollahs*. For many years, Afghan Shi'a had no leaders with the rank of *ayatollah* and as a result looked to influential *ayatollahs* in Iraq and Iran.[166] This trend has recently changed. Today, several Afghan-born *ayatollahs* provide leadership for the Shi'as of Afghanistan. The most prominent Twelver leaders are Grand *Ayatollah* Mohaqiq Kabuli, an ethnic Hazara, and Grand *Ayatollah* Muhammed Asif Mohensi, an ethnic Tajik/Qizilbash. Afghan *ayatollahs* have established several educational and religious institutions and run Tamadon, a privately owned television station. Most have studied in both Iran and Iraq and maintain connections with those countries, in particular Iran.

(U) The leadership of the small Ismaili sect in Afghanistan is split between two competing factions. The Ismailis residing in Baghlan are led by the Sayyeds of Kayan family currently headed by Alhaj Sayyed Mansoor Naderi. The remainder, along with most Ismaili around the world, follow the leadership of Agha Khan IV (Shah Karim al-Husayni), who lives in France.

Spiritual leaders, saints, and holy men

(U) In addition to the orthodox clergy, most Afghans also follow a number of saints (*awliya*) and holy men. Sufi *pirs*, *malangs*, and *sayyeds*, are thought to be *walis* or "friends of Allah" that possess *barakat*, a form of holiness that brings blessings, healing, and prosperity to those who come into contact with them.[167] Because of their unusual access to the blessings of God, they often receive a level of reverence that goes beyond the respect for a mullah. These spiritual leaders, while fewer in number relative to the orthodox Islamic cler-

gy, have had a disproportionably large impact on Afghan society.[168] Most saints shy away from using their social position for political, or at least materialistic ends, but under certain circumstances they have been able to mobilize their followers to act collectively on public issues. In such cases, these spiritual leaders may avoid becoming personally involved, but nevertheless assign one or several of their disciples to take the lead in the matter.[169]

Pirs

(U) *Pirs* (also known as *kalifas, shaykhs* or *ruhanis*) are spiritual masters usually associated with a Sufi order.[170] They are found throughout the country but are particularly prevalent in Pashtun areas. *Pirs* are endowed with substantial authority and are considered to be religious elites akin to the *maulana*. As they are believed to be channels for divine intervention, they are sought after to heal sickness and prevent calamities such as bad harvests.[171] When they die, a shrine, or *ziyarat*, is often built in their honor.[172] A *pir's* network of disciples and students, which can often be extensive, are referred to as his *murid*. These networks are oftentimes kept confidential and thus may not be apparent, particularly to Westerners.[173] Often, an entire tribal group may follow a particular *pir* or family of *pirs*.[174] Some *pirs* preside over Sufi compounds, called *khanaqa* (also known as *langar*), which function as a combination of a mosque, madrasa, and guesthouse, although this practice appears to be on the decline.[175] Today, a *pir's* influence is usually localized, limited to a village, district, or province, but in the recent past, their authority extended much further.[176] Loyalty to a *pir* has been known to cut across ethnic lines and also supercede loyalty to the state, ruler, and region.[177]

(U) Since the creation of the Afghan state, renowned Sufi *pirs* have played an important role in the legitimization of political power. They have served both as both kingmakers and as opposition leaders in anti-colonialist/anti-government insurgent movements.[178] While guarding their independence, they have served as counselors or arbitrators of the ruler, conferring legitimacy on new sovereigns or adjudicating on whether their actions conform to Islamic principles.

(U) The main Sufi orders in Afghanistan, the Naqshbandiyya and Qadiriyya, are led by the Mujaddidi and Gailani families, respectively. During the war against the Soviets, they led the centrist, pro-

monarchist Jabha-i Najat-i Milli and Mahaz-i Milli-i Islami-I mujahideen parties. In 1999, they created the Peace and National Unity party that attempted to mediate between the Taliban and their opponents.[179] While their involvement in politics, with warring mujahideen factions, and in business ventures during the last thirty years has significantly reduced their religious legitimacy, the heads of both families nevertheless remain influential, particularly in rural areas.[180] They are said to provide moral guidance to Afghanistan's leadership, have been active in recent presidential campaigns, and are said to be engaged in reconciliation efforts with insurgents on behalf of the government.[181]

Sayyeds

(U) The *sayyeds* (also referred to as *Quereish*, *Agha Khail*, or simply as *Agha*) are reputed to be descendents of the Prophet Muhammad. *Sayyeds* can be Sunni or Shi'a and often belong to a Sufi order.[182] Because of their bloodline connection to the Prophet Muhammad, they generally hold a higher social status and are treated with deference. While they do not perform any formal religious function, they are sought after for their blessings, spiritual advice, and guidance on everyday matters.[183] Villagers may ask a *sayyed* to live among them in exchange for gifts in order to benefit from his *barakat*.[184] The *sayyeds*' status throughout Afghanistan varies greatly: in the Hazarajat, and in the south and southwest, they are highly influential, while in the east the title has tended to hold less prestige.[185] The position of those claiming descent from the Prophet in general is more important in Shiism than in Sunni Islam.

(U) Because of their ancestral connection to the Arabian Peninsula, *sayyeds* are typically set apart from other segments of Afghan society. They form their own *qwam,* or tribe, and are still largely considered Arabs rather than members of the groups among whom they live.[186] In Pashtun areas, their position outside of the traditional tribal structure has made *sayyeds* valued mediators. In some cases, *sayyeds* have been able to take advantage of their status to obtain local political influence.[187] Some Afghans believe that those who bring harm upon a *sayyed* will endure the wrath of God for hurting those of his bloodline. As a result, *sayyeds* are often capable of traveling into insurgent-riddled areas without fear of being attacked.

Malang

(U) *Malangs* (also commonly known as *qalanders*) are holy men and vagabond preachers thought by Afghans to be "touched by the hand of Allah."[188] Imbued with the power to perform miracles and predict the future, they are honored, and at times feared by the local population, or at least held in awe.[189] In order to better connect with the divine, many *malang* embrace poverty and seek to detach themselves from materialism. They tend to live on the fringe of society and are largely dependant on villagers for food and clothing. Some travel from mosque to mosque, often garbed in colorful creative clothing, selling charms, working as story tellers and healers, preaching and offering blessings. Others attach themselves to a Sufi brotherhood and take permanent positions as caretakers of shrines or other holy places. *Malangs*, unlike other Sufi functionaries such as *pirs*, are not themselves leaders and do not tend to have an organized clientele.

Wandering Sufi *malang*[190]

(U) Some *malang* acquire their powers after spontaneously suffering "supernatural madness," a state known as *jalali shudan*. Others use drugs to achieve their supernatural powers. Yet others become apprenticed to a practicing *malang* for several years, after which they acquire their powers through the performance of a special initiatory ceremony.[191]

Table 6: Quick reference: Afghan religious leaders

Title	Sect	Description
Mullah	Sunni/Shi'a	Mosque/prayer leader and religious officiator. Lowest on the leadership hierarchy but nevertheless influential in shaping mass opinion in his village. Generally conservative.
Maulana (Maulawi, Maulvi)	Sunni	Advanced religious scholar, a title typically associated with those who have received religious training in India or Pakistan. Jurists, sometimes employed as civil servants or as members of government affiliated Ulema Councils. Generally more modernist.
Pir	Sufi	Masters of a Sufi order. Are considered to hold mystical powers (*barakat*) and the ability to heal. Have very intimate relationships with followers that form intricate networks spanning generations and communities. Historically have wielded considerable political power. Traditionally pro-government.
Alim	Shi'a	Religious scholar, similar to *maulana*.
Shayhk	Sunni/ Shi'a/ Sufi	Used either as term of respect — to address older men, for example — or for a formally trained scholar. Among Sufi Muslims, *sheik* holds a more exclusive status that is reserved for highly trained scholars and heads of Sufi orders.
Imam	Sunni/ Shi'a	Sunnis call prayer leaders *imams*, while Shi'as reserve title to refer to any of the 12 descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.
Malang	Sufi	Minor Sufi mendicant, thought to be touched by the hand of Allah. Some attach themselves to, or swear loyalty to, a particular brotherhood, but others wander alone, often garbed in colorful creative clothing.
Ayatollah	Shi'a	Highest religious leader in Shi'a faith.
Mujtahid	Shi'a	Islamic scholar and jurist who is competent to interpret sharia. Leaders of community in matters concerning the particulars of religious duties. Lesser members of the clergy follow *mujtahids* in all matters pertaining to religion. A higher-level *mujtahid* is a *marja*, the most educated of whom are called *ayatollahs*.
Hujjat al-Islam	Shi'a	More learned than a *mullah* but does not have the authority to issue legal rulings.
Sayyed	Sunni/Shi'a	Supposed descendants of Muhammad. Have no official religious function but many wield considerable influence among Afghans who seek their prayers, guidance and blessings. May obtain local political influence by adopting a mediator position. Can be influential in shaping public opinions.
Talib ul-elm and Charai,	Sunni	Refers to religious students.
Murid	Sufi/ Sunni	Refers a Sufi *pir* network of disciples and students.
Qazi	Sunni	Typically part of the government judicial system responsible for the application of shariah law.
Mudaris	Sunni	Teachers of religious subjects at mosques, madrasa, paid either by the government or privately.
Muezzin	Sunni/ Shi'a	Calls the congregation to prayer. Any male Afghan, however, can give the call to prayer. Government-paid muezzin work only in the cities and larger towns, functioning as an assistant to the imam.
Qar'i Sahib	Sunni/ Shi'a	Can recite the Qur'an well
Mufti	Sunni	An expert in Islamic law qualified to give authoritative legal opinions (i.e., *fatwas*).
Hafiz	Sunni/ Shi'a	Anyone knowing the Koran by heart (often blind men). Often associated with Sufi brotherhoods and work at important shrines.

Religious networks

(U) Despite the popular belief of a unified Afghan Islamic polity, in reality, religious groups, their leadership, and their institutions largely operate independently. The Sunni religious leadership, the largest sect in Afghanistan, for example, remains essentially nonhierarchical and decentralized.[192] That said, there is a degree of cooperation and communication that occurs at the local level, usually via a variety of religious institutions. These networks aid the orthodox clergy and spiritual leaders in maintaining and building political and economic alliances, and in times of conflict have facilitated military mobilization and coordination. Currently, the most important religious networks in Afghanistan include madrasa alumni connections, the community of the *ulema*, the Sufi brotherhoods, and the *Jamaat Tablighee* propagation organization.

Madrasa networks and alumni connections

(U) Madrasas, like any other center of learning across the world, operate as hubs for alumni networks and for maintaining relations between students and their instructors.[193] Mullahs and *maulanas* that graduate from a madrasa will maintain relations with their former classmates and form their own networks of mosques. Some religious leaders can become quite influential because of their association with classmates who have become judges, well-known scholars, or imams in mosques.[194] Afghan religious networks established in Pakistani madrasas have been particularly enduring. Upon returning to Afghanistan, these graduates have gone on to teach or to establish their own schools. In some instances, these networks extend beyond Afghanistan and Pakistan into the Gulf States.[195]

(U) The connection between teachers and students is also strong and lasting. Religious students in Afghanistan regularly perform services on behalf of their teachers such as collecting *zakat*, looking after the animals, preparing food, and so forth.[196] Religious scholars often have an extensive communication network, via their madrasa students, who travel throughout the area without attracting attention[197] Mullahs and *maulanas* remain faithful to the master who had given him his *ijaza* (license to teach). Many students often go back to their teachers after graduation to keep them up to date and to ask for advice.[198]

The ulema community

(U) *Ulema* (literally, "the learned ones") is a term that describes the body of scholars (but not necessarily an organized group) who have acquired advanced religious learning. The *ulema* community in Afghanistan is composed largely of *maulana* but also includes other religious leaders, such as the *mufti, qadi, fiqh, or muhaddith,* who have acquired advanced degrees in Afghan madrasas and Islamic universities abroad.[199] They are considered religious specialists, and as the "higher clergy," are viewed as separate from the average village mullahs. The *ulema* have played a key role in the establishment of centralized governance by assisting Afghan rulers with the interpretation of Islamic law.

(U) Because of their position as arbiters of morality and their influence over the masses, the *ulema* community has been a prime target for cooption by Afghan leaders attempting to legitimize their rule. Throughout most of Afghan history, the *ulema* had no formal body, no hierarchical or centralized structure, and no national-level organization. Since 1931, successive Afghan regimes, including the current government, have sponsored a semi-formal national Shura-e Ulema (described in detail below), to advise it on religious and ethical matters, bolster its religious credentials, and facilitate its communication with the population.

(U) In addition to the government-backed national Shura-e Ulemas, informal and localized *ulema shuras* have also traditionally existed in Afghanistan. Much more prevalent before the war, these *shuras* still operate in the north of the country, in places such as Kunduz, Takhar, and Mazar-i-Sharif provinces. Some of these informal *ulema shuras* maintain connections that reach across provinces as well as international borders.[200] Because of the insurgency in the Pashtun areas, and the threat this has presented to religious leaders (from both the Taliban and suspicious Afghan officials), far fewer informal *ulema shuras* are active in the east and in the south than existed in the past.[201]

Sufi orders (Tariqat)

(U) Some of the most cohesive, influential, and far-reaching religious networks in Afghanistan belong to the Sufis. The Sufi orders, called *tariqat,* were first established in Afghanistan in the twelfth century.

The *tariqat* organization is centered on the intense and intimate relationship between the Sufi *pir* (discussed in detail above) and their networks of pupils or disciples, called *murid*. In most instances, *pirs* will eventually send their disciples away to train students of their own, but they forever remain connected.[202] These chains (*silsila*) of *pirs* can trace their affiliation back over generations.[203] Thus, *pir-murid* networks may encompass a few dozen people in a village or thousands of people across the country, and can even claim members in Pakistan and India.[204] The leaders of Sufi orders often maintain schools and devotional centers called *khanaqah*, financed by donations from their *murid*, which serve as meeting places and hubs for their networks.[205]

(U) The two most prominent Sufi orders found throughout Afghanistan, are the Naqshbandiyya and the Qadiriyya brotherhoods. In the past, these extensive orders were deeply involved in Afghan political life. During the war against the Soviets, for example, their leaders played an important role by heading two mujahideen political parties. Currently, the leadership of both the Naqshbandiyya and Qadiriyya orders are heredity rather than religious scholarship. A third and smaller brotherhood, the Chishti, maintains outposts of devotees in western and northern Afghanistan.[206] In addition to these well-known and established orders, independent Sufi networks also exist. In the eastern provinces of Afghanistan, for example, familial networks composed of disciples of Mulla Najmuddin Akhund, one of the famous "mad mullahs" who fought against the British, are still well known.[207]

- **The Naqshbandiyya order:** The order was founded in Bokhara, Uzbekistan. In Afghanistan, many Naqshbandiyya members are linked with the Mujaddedi family. Sibghatullah Mujaddedi, the former leader of the mujahideen Jabha-I Melli party, became the head of this order when his predecessor, along with 79 male members of the family, were executed by the Communist regime in 1979. The brotherhood is prominent in Kabul and around Mazar-i-Sharif.

- **The Qadiriya order:** The order was founded in Baghdad, Iraq. Hazrat Naqib Sahib, father of Sayyed Ahmad Gailani Effendi, the present *pir* of the Qadiriya, established the family seat in Afghanistan on the outskirts of Jalalabad during the 1920s. *Pir* Ahmad Gailani is the former leader of Mujahideen Mahaz-I

Melli Islami party. The Qadiriya are found mainly among the eastern Pashtun of Wardak, Paktia and Nanagarhar, including many Ghilzai (Ghiljai) nomadic groups. Other smaller groups are settled in Kandahar and in Shindand, Farah Province.

- **The Chishtiya order**: The order was founded by Abu Ishaq Shami ("the Syrian") who introduced the ideas of Sufism in the town of Chisht, some 95 miles east of Herat in present-day western Afghanistan. The Chishtiya brotherhood, concentrated in the Hari Rud valley around Obe, Karukh, and Chisht-i-Sharif, is very strong locally and maintains madrasas with fine libraries. Traditionally the Chishtiya have kept aloof from politics, although during the resistance they were effectively active within their own organizations and in their own areas.

The *Jamaat Tablighee* network

(U) The *Jamaat Tablighee* is a vast, transnational Islamic propagation and re-pietization organization with a strong following in Afghanistan. The group is an offshoot of the Indian Deobandi movement and was created to promote individual Islamic purification. They are not known to promote militant or political Islam and instead teach jihad as personal purification rather than as holy warfare.[208] Thousands of Afghans attend the annual *Jama'at Tablighee* meeting in Riwand, Pakistan. Many also participate in *Tablighee* "lecture tours," whereby small groups (approximately five to ten individuals) travel from village to village to speak to congregations at the mosques after prayers. The movement is largely considered "deviant" by the conservative Saudi Wahhabis and the fundamentalist Jamiat-al-Ulema al-Islami Pakistani political party.

(U) The current leadership of the group include Mawlana Sa`d al-Hasan, Zubayr al-Hasan, and Izhar al-Hasan. It is noteworthy that the most influential *Jammat Tablighee* personality is the group's *emir* in Pakistan, Hajji Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab, who, according to Oman's Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, is the sixteenth most influential Muslim on the planet.[209] Although the group is adamantly non-political and pacifist, terrorist organizations have occasionally infiltrated the group and/or posed as members as cover. Currently, the presence of Pakistanis as part of *Tablighee* groups is banned by the Afghan government.[210]

Foreign influences on religious leaders and networks

(U) Convinced they are natural-born Muslims, Afghans cede precedence to no one in matters of religion.[211] Most consider their brand of Islam to be among the purest and are loath to take religious advice from outsiders; however, in reality, foreign influences have played a major role in shaping belief in Afghanistan.

(U) Afghans have always been linked to foreign religious figures and institutions. Because there has never been a madrasa capable of offering a first-rate education, Afghan scholars have traditionally traveled abroad to acquire advanced religious knowledge and have maintains connections abroad. Decades of civil war and the arrival of Islamic groups from the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia established further links between the Afghan's Islamic institutions and religious establishments outside Afghanistan.

(U) In addition, because of their influence over the masses, foreign governments seeking to meddle in Afghan domestic affairs have often sought to co-opt religious leaders. Today, the Pakistani, Iranian, and Saudi governments continue to engage in efforts to co-opt and influence Afghan religious leaders. Most of these efforts involve support for religious schools and institutions, and humanitarian aid (such as food distribution, shelter, seed distribution, and vaccination campaigns).

Foreign seminaries

(U) Most Afghan scholars are educated in Afghanistan. But, aside from Herat, Ghazni, and Kandahar, historically there have been few reputable places for advanced religious training in Afghanistan.[212] As a result, the most gifted scholars have, for centuries, traveled abroad to receive their degrees.[213]

(U) In past, Sunni scholars traditionally journeyed to the Mir Arab and Diwan Begi madrasas in Bukhara, Uzbekistan, and the Darul Uloom Deoband and Darul Uloom Aminiyya in India.[214] For those who could afford it, the al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, also became a destination.[215] Al-Ahzar, in particular, was central to the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood on both the Afghan *ulema* and national politics in the 1960s and 1970s. After the partition of the Indian subcontinent, many Sunni scholars (particularly from the

south and east) began to attend various Deobandi madrasas across the border in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province.[216] During the 1970s and 1980s, a large percentage of the students in Pakistan's madrasas were Afghans.

(U) Today most Afghan Sunni *ulema* are products of the Pakistani Deobandi madrasa system.[217] The most influential Pakistani seminaries are the Jame Darul Uloom Haqqania[218] in Akora Khattack, Jamia Ashrafia in Lahore, and Darul Uloom in Karachi.[219]According to some religious leaders interviewed, while edicts that come from Al-Ahzar and Darul Uloom Deoband are still respected, the schools themselves now hold less sway in Afghanistan than do the Pakistani madrasas that most scholars are familiar with.[220]

(U) Shi'ia scholars, like their Sunni counterparts, have also had to travel abroad due to lack of educational facilities in Afghanistan. They have historically traveled to universities and seminaries in Qom and Mashhad in Iran and schools in Najaf, Iraq.[221] Shi'ia religious leaders in Afghanistan who have graduated from these schools are often well respected. *Fatwas* (religious edicts) emanating from these schools are followed closely by the Shi'ia community in Afghanistan.

Pakistani government influence

(U) The Pakistani government has considerable influence over religious leaders involved in the insurgency. The Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) agency has been tied to various Afghan insurgent groups – most notably, the Haqqani network, which operates a number of madrasas in Pakistan. Afghan officials and community leaders have claimed that the ISI also funds madrasas inside Afghanistan and pays Afghan religious leaders to work on their behalf.[222] The Pakistani fundamentalist political party Jamiat-al-Ulema al-Islami (JUI), is also said to have strong connections to Afghan religious leaders. In the past, the JUI recruited for the insurgency from among the students of its own madrasas.[223]

Iranian government influence

(U) The Iranian government has historically shared a strong connection to the minority Shi'a Hazara community in Afghanistan. During the 1980s, the Iranian government backed the Shi'a mujahideen parties fighting the Soviets.[224] The Iranian bid for influence in Afghani-

stan rose dramatically after the end of the Iran-Iraq war, largely to thwart Saudi interests.[225] Many of today's prominent Hazara leaders have spent time in Iran as students or as political refugees.

(U) The Iranian government continues to aid the Afghan Shi'a (as well as other non-Shi'a groups) in the hopes of influencing the course of events in Afghanistan.[226] Iran has provided support to top Shi'a religious leaders such as Ayatollah Asif Mohensi – most notably funding his Shi'a-centric Tamadon television station.[227] Iranian funds also paid for the massive, three-acre Khatam-al Nabyeen madrasa in western Kabul.[228] Iran has also been investing heavily in curriculum development in the schools in western Afghanistan, especially in the provinces on the border with Iran, with a goal of shaping the curriculum to present a more pro-Iranian view of history.[229]

(U) Much of the Iranian religious outreach is managed through the Supreme Leader's office: specifically through the Ahl al-Bayt society, a Shi'a NGO that is managed by a cleric handpicked by the Supreme Leader. Another key organization is the Ministry of Guidance. Within the ministry is an organization called the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO), whose prime mission is to disseminate the Iranian government's version of Shi'ism among Shi'a worldwide.

(FOUO) Iranian attempts at building influence have not always been successful and, in some cases, have backfired.[230] As Shi'a leaders have become more prominent in Afghan society, they too have criticized Iranian leaders and attempted to distance themselves, possibly indicating a desire to integrate more fully into Afghan society.[231]

Saudi and Gulf Arab influence

(U) While gaining notoriety in the 1980s as the chief backers of the mujahideen, Arab involvement in Afghanistan, began decades earlier. In the 1950s, Wahhabi adherents from Saudi Arabia founded a number of madrasas in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province. Later, in the 1970s, small groups of Wahabbis from the Gulf States settled in Afghanistan's northeastern provinces and married into the local tribes. These Arabs attempted to create mini-Islamist principalities in Nuristan, Badakhshan, and Kunar.[232] During the war with the Soviets, this small following began to grow as additional madrasas were built in Pakistan, and Saudi arms and money began to flow to Wahhabi leaders among the Pashtuns.[233]

(U) Today, second-generation Arabs, whose fathers had fought in the jihad and married into the communities, have become commanders in the current insurgency and continue to support the flow of new *jihadists* into the country. They maintain strong connections on both sides of the border.[234] However, they have had little luck spreading their radical message among an Afghan population who consider Wahhabism to be a foreign creed.[235]

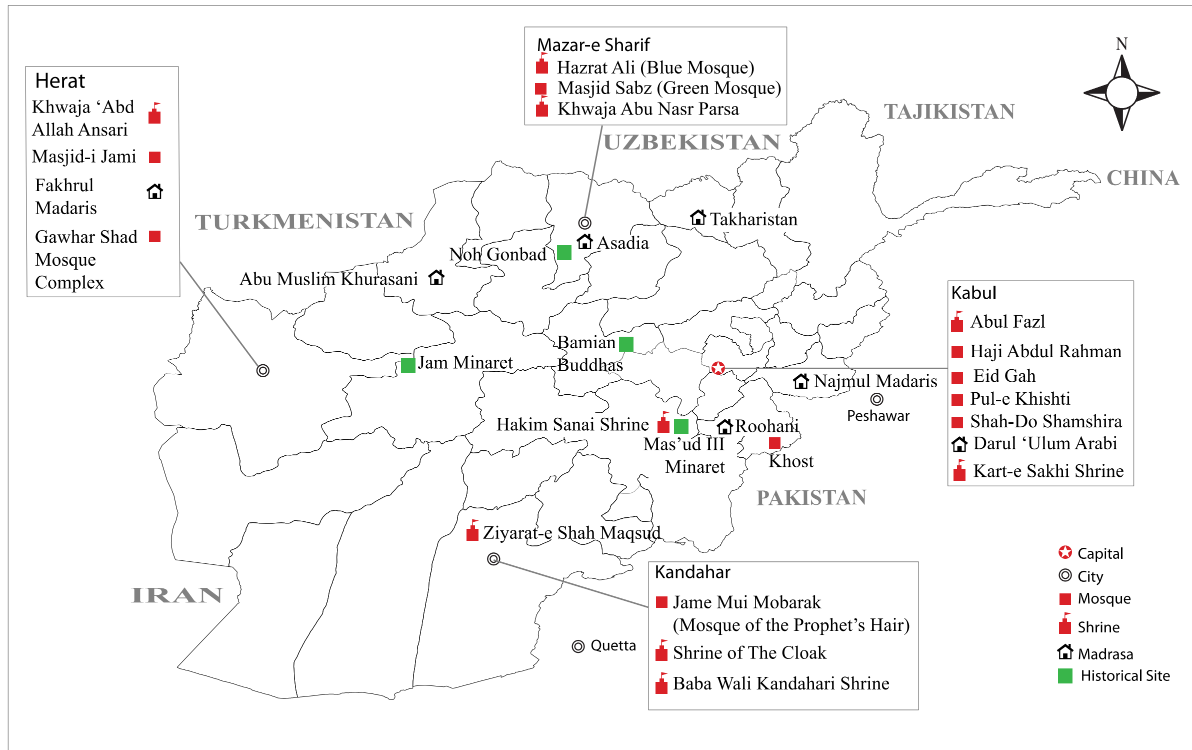
(U) In particular, Saudi Arabia is determined to extend its influence in Afghanistan. While the Saudi government no longer supports groups such as the Taliban, it has continued to fund religious institutions, largely to counter Iranian influence in the region. The Saudis have funded (or have agreed to fund) a madrasa at Kabul University as well as an Islamic Research Center at the Sharia Law Faculty. In addition to the Saudis, other Gulf nations such as the UAE have built mosques in Afghanistan.[236]

VI. Key religious facilities and structures

(U) In Afghanistan, there are a variety of religious facilities and structures that serve as places of worship and religious education. They are common in both urban and rural areas and are found in the tens of thousands. Religious structures such as the ubiquitous mosque, the madrasa, shrines, and other congregation centers play a central role in daily life and provide a focal point for religious observances and life-cycle rituals. In rural areas, where there is little public space and few state services, religious facilities serve as the principal locations for social interaction, political activism, education, dispute resolution, and social welfare for the poor. Every Islamic sect and minority religious group maintains their own type of religious facilities.

(FOUO) Notably, religious facilities are not immune to insurgent activity. Insurgents are fully aware of the protected status that religious facilities have under international law, and exploit the fact that the ANSF and ISAF face difficulties operating inside them. On occasion, they are often used to store weapons, distribute propaganda, and recruit fighters.[237]

Figure 5: Quick reference: Key Afghan religious facilities and sites



Mosques

(U) The mosque is one of the most central institutions in an Afghan village. It is a communal place for worship and ritual, but it also serves as a location for social, educational, and political activity. The sacred character of the mosque gives it status and significance beyond that of any other institution in the village.[238] Most villages have one, if not several. In rural areas, most mosques only serve a few compounds or families. The mosques where the Friday prayers are held tend to be the most important within the community and house the most influential clerics. Though women usually pray at home, they may attend communal prayer, though segregated from the men.

A typical mud-built village mosque in rural Afghanistan with *mihrab* facing Mecca. *Source: Patricio Asfura-Heim*

(U) Typically, mosques consist of a single large room. Almost all mosques share certain characteristics, including a wall facing Mecca (running southwest in Afghanistan) and a prayer niche (*mihrab*), often protruding against the external wall. A pulpit (*minbar*) is often near the *mihrab* and offers a place for sermons to be delivered. Towers, known as *minarets*, attached to or directly adjacent to the mosque, are used to project the call to prayer, or *Adhan*, five times a day. Their absence does not mean that the building is not a mosque; some communities can only afford a single loudspeaker. Village mosques may be little more than mud and brick buildings. Urban mosques tend to be more ornate, with a dome, intricate tile work, and a courtyard used for ablutions. While Shi'a mosques usually have a cemetery nearby, Sunni cemeteries are usually not located near their mosques.

(U) Along with the occasional community hall (*hujra*), the mosque is one of the few public spaces in the village. Consequently, beyond religious purposes, it functions as a place for communal gatherings. Community members attend mosques to socialize, discuss politics, share news, or simply gossip. Elders also use it as a venue to mediate conflicts. Agreements from such mediations are not official until they are announced at the mosque. The mosque also provides a place of rest and lodging for travelers when there is no man in the village rich enough to provide hospitality.[239] Sometimes travelers arrive in large

numbers, as was the case with mujahideen during the 1980s and early 1990s, and is again the case now with the Taliban.

Central mosque of Lashkar Gah, Helmand Province
Source: Patricio Asfura-Heim

(U) Mosques are also used as primary or elementary schools, distinct from madrasas.[240] Most Afghan males have studied at a mosque at some point in their youth; for many, it represents the only education they have ever received.

Madrasas

(U) After mosques, madrasas represent the most important element of the Afghan educational system. The term madrasa (plural, *madrasas* or *madaris*) is the Arabic word for school, but in Afghanistan, it is primarily used to describe an Islamic seminary. Madrasas vary from place to place, with substantial differences in size, curricula, and resources. Most offer instruction in Islamic subjects including the Qur'an, the *hadith*, and *fiqh*. Recently, a minority have begun to offer secular subjects such as geography, history, science and math. Traditionally, madrasas are led by mullahs or more formally educated scholars (*ulema*) who specialize in theology and religious law.[241] Some madrasas act as boarding schools for underprivileged Afghan boys and provide free food and lodging.

(U) Broadly speaking, there are two types of madrasas: private, and government operated. The vast majority of madrasas are privately run and managed by local communities; most are neither registered nor receive funds from the government.[242] A traditional method for the sustainment of private madrasas is called *wazifa* – a practice by which religious students collect for money and food door to door.[243] State-run madrasas were first established during the 1930s and 1940s, in an attempt to gain control over religious education. Government madrasas provide a basic secular education as well as traditional religious instruction. These madrasas fall within the administrative purview of the Ministry of Education (MoE). Today, most are still found only in provincial capitals. At the local level, they are administered by the Provincial Education Office. While its functions are not clear, the Ministry of Hajj is also apparently involved in the operation of government madrasas.[244]

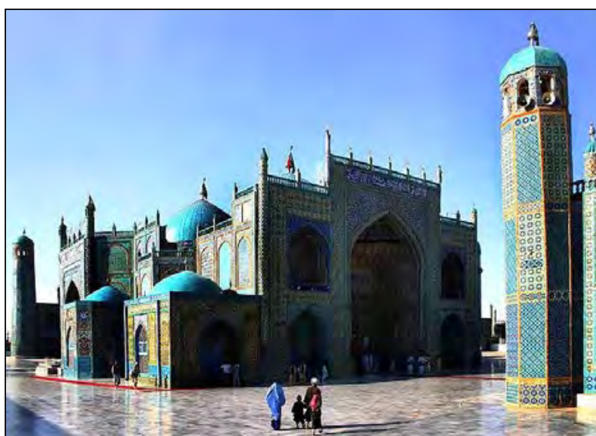
Shrines

(U) Shrines (*ziarats*) are found throughout Afghanistan, and are highly revered by the population. *Ziarats* usually mark the graves of venerated holy men, saints, Sufi *pirs*, or fallen heroes (*shahid*). In some instances, they contain religious relics; for example, the cloak of the Prophet Muhammad is found in the Khirfka Sharif shine in Kandahar. *Ziarats* are found in both rural and urban places, atop mountains, and in the midst of bustling cities. Many of Afghanistan's oldest villages and towns were built up around shrines.[245] Because *ziarats* may not be moved or demolished, they are sometimes found in the middle of major thoroughfares.[246] Shrines vary in form from simple mounds of stone or mud to ornately decorated complexes. They are often marked by cloth flags flying on poles, and many also have goat horns on the flagpoles, on their own poles, or on the ground.

A *ziarat* in Lashkar Gah, Helmand Province.
Source: Patricio Asfura-Heim

(U) Though the veneration of shrines is technically prohibited under Islam, Afghans undertake pilgrimages to the *ziarats* to pray and receive blessings, particularly in times of crisis.[247] No Afghan will pass a *ziarat* without raising his hands in prayer and asking the blessing of the buried saint.[248] Women are particularly devoted to activities associated with shrines.[249] Fugitives also use *ziarats* as sanctuaries as provided for by the code of *Pashtunwali*. Afghans believe that *ziarats* possess special powers (*barakat*) to heal or grant favors. For example, Ziarat-i-Meally-Sahib in Jalalabad is famed for its power to expel demons and cure insanity; another shrine near Charikar cures mad-dog bites; and forty-odd shrines in the valley of Paiminar, just north of Kabul, are all dedicated to fertility.[250]

(U) Afghans visit *ziarats* most commonly on Thursday evenings, a night when it is said that God allows spirits and ghosts to roam the earth. On arrival, individuals will tie a ribbon around a tree or leave an object on the shrine as a reminder to the person buried there of the request made of them. Pilgrims will also leave money behind for the *ziarat* guardian (*muwajer*) to help support the upkeep of the shrine.[251] Before leaving, visitors frequently take mementos, such as bits of dust or leaves from a nearby tree, for future use as charms and potions against evil spirits and illness.



The Shrine of Hazrat Ali ("The Blue Mosque") located in Mazar-i-Sharif. [252]

(U) Annual festivals celebrated at the larger shrines attract thousands of pilgrims. The most important and well-attended shrines in Afghanistan include the Shrine of Hazrat Ali (also known as the "Blue Mosque") in Mazar-i Sharif, which is believed to be the burial place of the Prophet's son-in-law `Ali, and the Khirfka Sharif in Kandahar, which is believed to contain the cloak of the Prophet Muhammad.[253]

Khanaqa

(U) A *khanaqa* is a Sufi lodge that serves primarily as a spiritual retreat where followers may go to receive advice or religious education, or to pay homage. *Khanaqas* are also known to provide food and lodging to travelers and care for the sick. *Langar*, the free distribution of food to the needy, is also a regular practice. The complex itself typically contains a mosque, a madrasa, a library, guest rooms, a kitchen, and a stable, and is often adjoined to shrines of Sufi saints. The funds to support the *khanaqa* are usually derived from donations by the followers and students (*murid*) of the *pir* who administers it. In addition to money, items offered by followers may include goats, sheep, or any other gifts they can afford. Due to several decades of warfare, the numbers of active *khanaqa* have declined from their heydays in the late nineteenth century.[254]

Takyakhanas

(U) As in other Shi'a communities around the world, Afghan Shi'as commonly patronize religious congregation halls called *takyakhanas*

(also commonly known as *Hussainias*). A *takyakhana* differs from a mosque in that it is primarily intended for cultural activities and ceremonies rather than for holding daily prayers. *Takyakhanas* are also used to house travelers and orphans, support rural students, enshroud the dead, hold academic classes, and rent out rooms for meetings and holidays. There are currently seventeen *takyakhanas* in Kabul (and undoubtedly many more in Shi'a areas throughout the country). Half of them have opened since 2001.[255]

(U) *Takyakhanas* take on a special significance during the Mourning of Muharram – the Shi'a holy period that commemorates the murder of Imam Hussein. Many of the events associated with the remembrance, such as eulogies and sermons, take place in the *takyakhanas.* During this period they are traditionally decorated with black flags.[256]

Other places of worship

Gurdwaras

(U) *Gurdwaras* are Sikh places of worship. Currently, there are two active *gurdwaras* in Kabul and ten in other parts of the country. There were an estimated sixty-four *guardwaras in* Afghanistan before the war against the Soviets.[257]

Mandirs

(U) A *mandir* is a Hindu temple of worship. There are four Hindu *mandirs* in Afghanistan currently: two in Kabul, one in Jalalabad, and one in Ghazni.[258]

Ziyaratgah and nazargah

(U) Hazara Shi'as have two other places of worship, the *ziyaratgah* and the *nazargah.* A *ziyaratgah* is the burial site of a renowned religious man or *sayyed* (a descendent of Muhammad). In contrast to other Muslim countries – Iran, in particular – few Imams travelled to Afghanistan. Therefore, there are few *ziyaratgahs* for Afghan Hazaras. A *nazargah* is a site believed to have been visited by an Imam's descendant.[259]

VII. Religious education

(U) There are several levels of religious education in Afghanistan. Small children learn the basics about Islamic rites and beliefs from the local imam or from students attending nearby madrasas. Some of these children go on to study the Qur'an in the *dar al-hifaz* (memorization school) or pursue broader religious studies in a seminary (madrasa) or *dar al-ulum* (sciences school, a seminary that also teaches secular subjects). Madrasas are typically private institutions that offer secondary and higher education and are often locally funded, although there are some government-run madrasas.[260] Many students study at both madrasas and government-run secular schools. Often, the primary determinant for choosing a madrasa is its proximity to one's home and the desire for the prestige that comes from having a family member receive a religious education.[261]

(U) The number of private madrasas in Afghanistan is unknown and difficult to calculate because most are not registered with the government and there is no coordinating body.[262] Since the early 20th century, there have been numerous attempts to bring the madrasas under government control.[263] Most recently, the government of Afghanistan required that all madrasas register with the Ministry of Education by March 2011. The government also tried to standardize the madrasa curriculum,[264] but these efforts failed because the mullahs who run the schools prize their independence from the state.[265] The mullahs are not against coordination per se, but they prefer to do it like their counterparts in Pakistan, who established their own coordinating bodies that interface with the state.[266]

Many madrasas are not necessarily hostile to the idea of offering secular subjects such as math or science; indeed, *dar al-ulums* include both religious and secular subjects, and many madrasa students are interested in studying secular topics because it makes them more employable. Nevertheless, the primary purpose of madrasas is to prepare students to take up religious occupations upon graduation.[267]

(U) The curriculum in the madrasas is usually that of the *dars-e nizami*, a centuries-old curriculum that draws heavily on the dominant

Hanafi legal tradition in South Asia. (Hanafism is one of the four legal schools in Sunni Islam.) Subjects include instruction in Arabic; reading the Qur'an; Islamic law; principles of Islamic jurisprudence; Islamic etiquette; Islamic inheritance; biography of the prophet Muhammad in the history of Islam; Aristotelian logic; and theology.[268] Most of the madrasas in Afghanistan draw on the Deobandi version of the *dars-e nizami*.[269] Students who complete lower-level degrees at madrasas are called mullahs, many of whom go on to take up the position of imam in a village, where they conduct the rites of Islam.[270]

(U) If the student completes the madrasa education through the equivalent of the fourteenth grade in the government-run schools, he may call himself *mawlavi* or *mawlana* and receive a turban is a sign of his attainment. However, he may not take a government job that requires religious training until he passes an exam.[271] Seminarians trained in government madrasas do not need to take the exam.

(U) Because there are few institutions of higher Islamic learning in Afghanistan, and even fewer that are prestigious, ambitious Afghan students will seek education from one of the more famous Pakistani Deobandi madrasas, located around Peshawar. Most of them are affiliated with the JUI, a Pakistani political organization that helped fuel the rise of the Taliban and has close ties to the TTP.[272] Many of the older generation of Afghan madrasa graduates also pursued their secondary seminary education in Pakistan because of the poor state of education in Afghanistan during the 1980s and 1990s. In contrast, many of today's graduates have remained in Afghanistan.[273]

(U) In areas they control, the Afghan Taliban has allowed private schools (non-state and non-madrasa) to operate as long as they adopt the Taliban's curriculum. The Taliban especially works to cultivate its ties with the madrasas by donating money and textbooks, in return for which they expect support for its educational program and political agenda. As for state schools, Taliban attitudes towards them vary. The Afghan Taliban tends to be more tolerant of state schools than foreign Taliban. Recently, the Taliban has opted for co-opting state schools rather than attacking them.[274]

VIII. Religion and the law

(U) Afghanistan is a society with a pluralistic legal tradition composed of three competing parts: the state legal code, Islamic religious law (*sharia*), and local customary practice. The role of religion in the law has been particularly profound. Both the customary and state legal systems are heavily influenced by Islam and depend to some extent on religious clerics. As opposed to the highly localized systems of customary law, sharia is believed to be universally applicable to all times and places.[275]

Muslims believe the sharia (which literally means "the way to God of the fountain and spring source of goodness") to be both divinely inspired and universal. *Fiqh* is the body of applications of sharia to society—a commentary developed over a thousand years by trained religious scholars. In Afghanistan, this has largely meant Hanafi *fiqh*, the school of jurisprudence to which all Afghan Sunni Muslims adhere.[276] Although Shi'a *Ja'fari* jurisprudence plays no role at the national level, it does influence the legal systems in Hazarajat. The sharia code refers to obligatory acts (*fard*), the omission of which constitutes a sin; forbidden acts (*haram*), the commission of which constitutes a sin; and to allowed acts (*mubah*), the commission or omission of which does not make a man a sinner. As the situation of Muslims has changed, an amplification of the Islamic legal corpus has also become necessary.[277]

Sharia and the state

(U) Until the introduction of a civil code in 1925, Afghan rulers relied on sharia courts alone or recognized the authority of local communities to resolve their own problems.[278] Sharia law was seen by the Afghan monarchy in the nineteenth century as a useful basis for cementing the society into a governable unit.[279] In attempting to centralize the state, co-opting religious scholars capable of interpreting the sharia became a paramount concern of Afghanistan's rulers.[280] The Afghan constitutions of 1923, 1931, 1964, 1977, and 1987 all recognize Islam as the official religion.[281] Today, Afghanistan is an Islam-

ic republic and sharia law continues to plays an important role in the formal state justice system.[282]

(U) In the past, attempts by rulers to secularize the legal system have provoked revolts.[283] Today, the Afghan constitution dictates that the laws of Afghanistan cannot be against Islamic principles – but stops short of declaring Sharia law.[284] The repugnancy clause, article 3 of the constitution, states that no law can be contradictory to the tenets of Islam. Article 130 empowers the judicial system to enforce the repugnancy clause and to apply Hanafi sharia jurisprudence where there is no other applicable law. Article 149 of the constitution prohibits any amendments that would be contrary to the "provisions of adherence to the fundamental of the sacred religion of Islam."[285] Afghans who dissent from the prevailing orthodoxy regarding Islamic beliefs and practices are subject to legal action.

(U) Because it is derived from the Qur'an, *hadith* and *sunnah* (the sayings and actions of the prophet, respectively), sharia may be variously interpreted and applied to new situations only by trained Islamic scholars.[286] Currently there are many religious scholars presiding on state courts as judges. In fact, the constitution requires that the chief justice be an expert in Afghan law and Islamic jurisprudence.[287] These scholars were primarily educated in government-supported madrasas in Kabul (most commonly the Abu Hanifa madrasa) and at the Faculty of Sharia at the Kabul University.[288] Often, judges lack knowledge of the state system or have little access to legal texts, so simply apply their version of sharia.[289]

Fatwas (religious decrees)

(U) In Islam, a *fatwa* is a formal legal opinion issued by a qualified religious scholar called a *mufti* (also pronounced *mapti* in eastern Afghanistan). Typically, the *mufti*'s qualification is an advanced degree in Islamic law. The *fatwa's* authoritativeness and enforceability is determined by the addressee: individuals, state judges, or rulers.[290] In other words, the ruling is enforced only to the extent that its addressees want to enforce it and are able to do so. In recent years, Muslims and non-Muslims have applied the term "*fatwa*" to general religious condemnations issued by religious scholars or those who aspire to religious leadership.[291] But an author applying the term to his statement risks criticism if he does not have the requisite credentials. Thus, Mul-

lah Omar nullified Bin Laden's 1998 *fatwa* against Americans because Bin Laden and his co-authors were not *muftis*.[292]

(U) In Afghanistan today, there is some confusion among Sunni religious leaders over the types of *fatwas* that they themselves can issue. As in other parts of the Muslim world, most Afghan clerics believe that *fatwas* can only be issued by those with a very high level of Islamic education. However, some believe that the severity of the decree should determine who can issue it; for example, the ability to issue a general decree about virtue should be available to any cleric, but decrees requiring knowledge from the Qur'an or *hadith* have to be disseminated by a leader with a substantial knowledge of Islam. Still, other Afghan clerics believe that no single religious figure can issue a *fatwa*, and that any decree would only be valid in a religious sense once a group of scholars had approved it. This confusion has often resulted in competing and sometimes-contradictory *fatwas* issued by various Sunni religious leaders, as well as a "battle of decrees" between pro-government and Taliban-affiliated clerics.[293] This confusion does not extend to the Afghan Shi'a, whose clerics unanimously agree that *fatwas* should only be issued by the most exalted scholars, such as Ayatollahs Sistani or Khameni in Iran.[294]

(U) The Supreme Court maintains a General Directorate of *Fatwa*s and Accounts. Staffed by Islamic scholars and imams, the body advises the court on state and religious questions by issuing *fatwa*s.[295]

Pashtunwali vs. Islamic law

(U) Pashtuns do not consider tribal customary law, or *Pashtunwali*, and sharia to be separate or contradictory.[296] Particularly in rural areas, tribal law and Islamic law are often viewed as mutually supportive. That said, conflicts often do exist between the two.[297] Pashtunwali aims to reconcile conflicting parties; sharia aims to give individuals their rights under Islam. In particular, *Pashtunwali* stands contrary to sharia on issues such as *badal*, the generational blood feuds among Pashtun tribes, and in the treatment of women. For example, women in Pashtun society are not allowed to inherit property because it would contradict the principle of strict patrilineage, which is the very basis of the tribal system. The Qur'an, however, provides that the woman shall inherit half the share of the man. Also in *Pashtunwali*, a woman whose husband dies may be remarried to the man's brother

or another close relative. This is justified by the payment of bride wealth, which gives right of possession. But in Islam, a woman cannot be remarried without her consent and her husband's family has no right of possession over her.[298]

(U) Where there is a contradiction between religious and tribal laws, *Pashtunwali* usually wins out.[299] For the rural Pashtun restoration of honor, and in order to not give the impression of being weak, redress is preferable when it is in accordance with *Pashtunwali* rather than Islam. However, in non-Pashtun areas, Islamic decisions often override local customs.[300] The coexistence of *Pashtunwali* with the sharia is often achieved only through arbitration by mullahs and other *ulema*, whose community stature allows them to bridge the chasm between the two sets of laws.[301] *Pashtunwali* specifically allows for mullahs to intercede in order to modify the code in special instances.[302]

IX. Islam and the insurgency: The Taliban's use of religious concepts, leaders, and institutions

(U) The ability of the Taliban to co-opt local religious networks and tap into Afghan Islamic sentiments has been critical to their influence campaign in rural areas. Historically, the Taliban's image as defenders of the faith has helped legitimize its claim to power and has facilitated its recruitment and propaganda activities.[303] During its rise to power in the 1990s, the Taliban narrative depicted the movement as "a moral force fighting corruption and anarchy" – a message that resonated with Afghans tired of the bloody civil war and abusive warlords. Today, the Taliban continues to justify its actions against the current government as religiously sanctioned *jihad* and maintains that supporting the insurgency is synonymous with supporting Islam. The movement has attempted to maintain a close hold over religious leaders and institutions, and regularly uses Islamic concepts and symbolism in its messaging.

(U) To a certain extent, the Taliban's use of religion as a means of mobilizing support and as political cover for unpopular tactics has been effective among segments of the Pashtun population.[304] Some Afghans consider the Taliban to be a credible Islamic organization; as proof, they point to the decreased lawlessness and generally more devout behavior in the country during the Taliban's time in power.[305] The organization is still able to recruit foot soldiers from a network of mosques and madrasas.[306] Its religious credentials are bolstered by the fact that many senior members studied at religious seminaries and retain the title of mullah or *maulawi*. Today, in an effort to increase their credibility with the population, district-level sub-commanders on the frontlines of the insurgency also often refer to themselves as mullahs, even if they lack any significant religious education.

(U) Given the movement's prior support for traditionalist clergy, a small minority of religious leaders continue to see the Taliban as their best hope of re-establishing themselves in Afghan society. Nevertheless, despite the Taliban's pious image, fundamentally most Afghans

and religious scholars alike differ in their interpretations of Islam and reject the Taliban's extremist doctrine.[307]

The Taliban's religious ideology

(U) While the organization has evolved since it lost power, at its root the Taliban is a rural, political-religious movement based on a network of neo-Deobandi madrasas with connections to Pakistan.[308] In the 1990s, religious leaders affiliated with the traditionalist clerical Haraqat Inqelab and Hezb-e Islami (Khales) mujahideen parties created the movement in response to the lawlessness and *fassad* (moral corruption) that followed the collapse of the Communist government.[309] Initially, the Taliban recruited mainly among students of madrasas situated between Ghazni and Kandahar, which, well before the war, had been linked to Pakistani Deobandi educational institutions in Pakistan. Under the influence of Saudi benefactors and Pakistani fundamentalist political parties[310] and intelligence services, this cross-border network of madrasas became politicized and militarized, and its Deobandi curriculum become *Wahhabised*.[311]

(U) Because the quality of the education in these schools was so poor, and the curriculum was so focused on *jihad*, Taliban leaders who emerged from these institutions had a very limited understanding of the Qur'an and very little knowledge of sharia jurisprudence. Consequently the Taliban leadership has never produced a manifesto or scholarly analysis of Islam.[312] Its ideology is often described as a crude and idiosyncratic mixture of Salafism, Wahhabism, Deobandism, and Pashtunwali that rejects any modern or individual interpretation of Islamic scriptures.[313] During their time in power, often to the dismay of Islamic scholars from abroad, the Taliban became fixated on outward, puritanical expressions of religious devotion (such as growing beards, banning music, and cloistering women) and had difficulty formulating rulings backed by theological evidence.[314] Its rigid ideology also supported the principle of *takfir,* which makes possible the excommunication of fellow Muslims who do not follow their practices.[315] In particular, the Taliban was hostile towards Sufism and the veneration of saints and shrines.

(U) The Taliban's religious beliefs clashed with the popular traditions and folk Islam that most Afghans followed, alienating much of the population during its time in power. According to scholars, the Tali-

ban's adoption of a puritanical strain of Salafi Wahhabism debased the mainstream Hanafi and reformist Deobandi tradition taught by religious scholars before the war.[316]

The Taliban's use of local religious leaders

(U) The Taliban views local religious leaders as both an entrée into communities as well a potential threat to its own religious legitimacy, and has attempted to control them through a systematic campaign of co-option and coercion. The Taliban has used payments (usually coming from the religious taxes it levies on the population), promises of positions of power, and intimidation and assassinations to bring religious leaders to their side – or, at the very least, to neutralize their influence. The Taliban has used mullahs to transmit messages and build political and material support for the insurgency.[317]

(U) Specifically, mullahs have often been tasked with discrediting the Afghan government through their sermons and inspiring young men to join the armed campaign.[318] Quoting from different religious sources and *fatwas* (Islamic decrees), they describe the international sources as "occupiers" and the Karzai government as their "puppet," and tell the local population that supporting the government or foreign sources at any level is an un-Islamic act, punishable by the "holy warriors."[319] At a tactical level, mullahs have also helped the Taliban by storing weapons and sheltering fighters in their mosques and madrasas. In some districts, the Taliban has used local religious leaders to handle conflict mediation as part of the insurgent "shadow governance" structure.

(FOUO) Another Taliban tactic involves sending religious emissaries – often trained in Pakistan – into communities to gauge support for the insurgency, disseminate messages to Taliban rank-and-file, and negotiate political alliances with elders.[320] These "wandering mullahs" are often used to identify the most vulnerable community leaders for either co-optation or elimination.[321] Tribal elders have often become wary of religious leaders who they feel operate as a virtual "spy network" for the Taliban.[322] In addition, the Taliban's leadership in Quetta uses these traveling mullahs to review the performance of insurgent field commanders and, in order to ensure continued public support, to document grievances the local population may have against them.[323]

The Taliban's use of religious facilities

(FOUO) Religious facilities in Afghanistan, such as mosques and madrasas, are not immune to insurgent activity. Insurgents are fully aware of their protected status under international law and exploit the fact that the ANSF and ISAF face difficulties operating inside them. Insurgents use religious facilities for a number of purposes, including mass communication, weapons storage, hideouts, attack-planning, IED assembly, and recruitment activities.[324] In particular, mosques and madrasas are favorite places for Taliban propagandists who seek to remind the people that under the Taliban, the strict application of Islamic law has eliminated bribery and infighting among the warlords.[325] Taliban district and sub-district leaders also collect the vast majority of their taxes via mosques.

(FOUO) The central region around the capital of Kabul – which includes the highly conservative provinces of Logar, Parwan, and Wardak – has one of the highest numbers of madrasas in Afghanistan. Taliban-affiliated mullahs have made these areas pivotal in terms of recruitment and operational support for insurgency. This well-tended network of mosques and mullahs is also said to provide the insurgency with a vital source of intelligence.[326]

The Taliban's use of sharia law

(U) The Taliban has consistently attempted to use justice delivery as a means of ingratiating the movement with local communities and in its competition with the Afghan government as a provider of essential state services. In its rise to prominence during the civil war of the 1990s, the Taliban's main attraction for the population was its ability – through its base of traditionalist religious scholars trained in sharia law – to solve disputes between rival tribal factions and end the state of *fassad* (moral corruption) that many saw as the root of Afghanistan's troubles. While in power, the dispensing of swift justice was perhaps the only real form of governance that the Taliban regime was able to effectively provide the population.

(U) Today, Taliban "justice" is prevalent only in areas that are controlled by the insurgency. The Taliban court system is staffed by groups of religious scholars who review disputes over land allocation, property rights, petty crimes, and other serious accusations brought

to them by the villagers. In some districts there are permanent Taliban courts; in other places there are roaming Taliban judges or mobile courts (*uttaq*).

(U) The Taliban's legal tradition is an amalgam of sharia law based on an extremist interpretation of *Deobandi* Islam, *Wahhabist* teachings, and the Pashtun social code of *Pashtunwali.* Although the Taliban system justice is quick and bribe-free, it is a control mechanism with harsh judgments that do not reflect Afghanistan's Hanafi-based sharia traditions.[327] The Taliban have traditionally relied heavily on *hudud* punishments that include the amputation of hands for theft, the stoning of women who are believed to have committed adultery, and lashings for someone who has consumed alcohol.

The Taliban's use of religion as a propaganda tool

(U) Historically, Afghan religious leaders as well as political actors have traditionally spread political messages in a religious context. Today, the Taliban relies heavily on religious propaganda to legitimize its actions, recruit members, and malign the Afghan government.[328] In addition to overt religious messaging, the Taliban often utilizes Qur'anic verses as well as narratives of Prophet Muhammad's deeds and sayings, in its information products, in order to appeal to religious sentiments of the public.[329]

(U) The Taliban mainly uses word of mouth (by delivering speeches or messages over loudspeakers, organizing demonstrations, preaching in mosques, and spreading rumors), radio broadcasts, and distribution media (night letters, magazines, videos, DVDs) to disseminate religious propaganda.[330] Increasingly, the Taliban is also using mobile phones as well as *tarannas*—Pashtun poetry and music cassettes—to propagate messages of intolerance and *jihad* and to facilitate its recruitment efforts.[331]

(FOUO) While general direction for the propaganda apparatus flows from safe havens in Pakistan, the propaganda campaign in Afghanistan is largely decentralized and is often an intensely localized effort. This bottom-up approach has frequently given insurgents' information operations greater credibility than those of the Afghan government and the coalition.[332]

Figure 6: Example of Taliban night letter (*shabnamah)*

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د افغانستان اسلامي امارت

د هلمند ولایت

د سنگین ولسوالی

نیټه: / / شماره:

د ټولو ګرانو محترمو ورونو ته خبر د رکوو چه

که چیری کافران درسی ستاسی کلی او یا مسجد ته

تاسی په خپله او خپل هر کس ان د کفارو سره مه دریږی

که د مین د انفجار یا بل حالت کښي ستاسي یو ضائع

سی مسؤلیت سو خپله دی موږ خبر کو یاست

والسلام

Translation: "Attention to all dear brothers: If the infidels come to your villages or to your mosques, please stop your youngsters from working for them and don't let them walk with the infidels. If anybody in your family is killed by a mine or anything else then you will be the one responsible, not us."

The Taliban religious narrative: themes and messages

(U) The Afghan Taliban's *Ulema* Council issues religious decrees from time to time, but most are meant to inform senior level decision-making.[333] Thus, most of the Afghan Taliban's statements against the government of Afghanistan and coalition forces are not, strictly speaking, *fatwas*. They do, however, draw on religious language and themes. For example, Mullah Omar's yearly *Eid* messages portray the United States and its allies as infidel foreign powers who invaded and occupied a justly constituted Islamic state. Working through the pup-

pet regime in Afghanistan, the coalition forces are destroying Islam in Afghanistan and defaming the honor of its inhabitants. Mullah Omar portrays the Taliban as the defenders of the Afghan people, who will restore religion to its rightful place in society and preserve the honor of all Afghans.

(U) Religious themes are found in other modes of communication used by the Afghan Taliban. The Taliban's night letters (messages left anonymously in villages) argue that the conflict between the Taliban and the Afghan government and coalition forces is a conflict between the righteous and the infidel in which every Afghan should fight. The Taliban's enemies are waging a crusade in Afghanistan, intent on destroying Islam and promoting Christianity. They are also impugning the honor of Afghans. Afghans who have given their lives to preserve their honor and save their country are martyrs and join a long line of Afghans who have repelled foreign invaders. Collaborators will not be tolerated.[334]

(U) Religious messages also appear in Afghan Taliban publications such as pamphlets and magazines, all of which are circulated by means of the Internet, DVDs, or printouts. Recent propaganda emphasizes the necessity of jihad against foreign powers in Afghanistan, the inevitability of a Taliban victory, and support for the Taliban in the ranks of the Afghan military and police force.[335] Less frequently, factions of the Taliban upload scholarly sermons to online discussion forums or dedicated websites. In one, a religious scholar connects the American presence in Afghanistan with previous attempts to prevent an Islamic government from being established in Afghanistan. It states that the so-called occupation has unleased the forces of moral corruption in the land, requiring every Afghan to oppose the occupier.[336]

(U) The highbrow disquisitions of scholars are complemented by the more popular poetry and *anashid* (male *a cappella* battle hymns) distributed online and cassette. They emphasize martyrdom for the sake of protecting the pride of the Afghan people and saving them from the foreign invaders.[337]

Table 7: Quick reference: The Taliban's religious narrative

Common INS Messages
Infidels are waging a "war of the cross" usurping Islam in order to force secularism and Christianity on the population; they show clear disrespect for the Prophet and Koran.
GIRoA is a corrupt puppet government that does not have the Islamic and moral authority to rule.
Foreign occupation and moral corruption have abolished adherence to divine law and are the source of all of Afghanistan's maladies.
The Taliban are an incorruptible, devout, and ascetic movement waging a defensive jihad against a puppet government in thrall to foreign influence.
Jihad, religious struggle, is *Fard' ayr* – an individual obligation like praying or fasting.
Anyone who cooperates with NGOs, GIRoA, or ISAF is an apostate, and will be killed.
Allah is on our side because we are winning against a superior enemy.

X. The Afghan government's religious engagement

(U) The relationship between government and religious actors in Afghanistan has always been complex. While religion has frequently been a unifying factor in the face of foreign interference, it has also been a source of internal resistance to the growth of state authority.[338] The secular features of modern state building have, on more than one occasion, incited opposition on the grounds that they were threatening or violating Islam tenets. From the late nineteenth-century onward, Afghan governments have taken measures to gradually subjugate religious leaders to the state while, at the same time, attempting to maintain their much-needed support.[339] Afghan rulers have used a variety of religious engagement strategies, including integration, co-option, coercion, and violence. Approaches relying purely on suppressive tactics have tended to fail, while those employing additional levers, such as co-option and accommodation, have fared slightly better.

Historical religious engagement strategies employed by the Afghan state

(U) Historically, the most common strategy employed by Afghan rulers to control and leverage the clergy has been the reformation of the educational and justice systems – the areas most associated with the authority and power of religious leaders. Through the creation of government-administered educational and justice institutions, the state has weakened the powers of the religious establishment writ large, and simultaneously has created opportunities to integrate select religious scholars (certified and trained in newly built government madrasas and Islamic law schools) into the government as salaried civil servants.[340] Although religious leaders were appeased by the declaration of the Hanafi Islam as the state religion and by the incorporation of sharia law into the legal system, Afghan state teachers (*mudarris*) and judges (*qazis*) were nevertheless required to pass

government-controlled examinations and their curriculum and judgments were made subject to review by secular officials.[341]

(U) Another popular strategy employed by Afghan rulers, aimed at more effectively organizing clerical support, has been the establishment of national-level *ulema* councils. Since the reign of Amir Abdur Rahman, nearly every Afghan government – minus that of the failed Khalqi regime – has, in one form or another, maintained a council of officially recognized religious advisors, and or a department tasked with overseeing religious affairs. Since the Sunni clergy have traditionally constituted a fragmented body lacking in leadership and hierarchy, Afghan rulers have always managed to find scholars willing to work with the state in exchange for patronage.[342] More subtly, some rulers have attempted to draw Sufi networks, such as the influential Mujaddidi family, into their networks of dependence – often by means of marriage, ambassadorial postings, or gifts of land. However, when this strategy of co-option has failed, the state has not hesitated to use violence: on various occasions, Afghan governments have arrested or killed religious leaders it deemed to be threats to their rule. In fact, various Afghan regimes created 'religious police' specifically tasked with checking on the activities of religious leaders.[343]

(U) A third strategy consistently employed by Afghan governments to reduce the independence of religious leaders and to tie them closer to the state, has been the takeover of religious endowments (*waqfs*).[344] In Afghanistan, *waqfs* have traditionally supported mosques, schools, hospitals, or other religiously oriented institutions with income derived from donated land or shops. Until the state took over *waqfs* in the late nineteenth century, clerics used the funds to bolster their influence in their communities and to gain and keep followers. State control of religious endowments, in effect, made clerics clients of the state, dependent on government largess for survival. This strategy was intended to ensure the loyalty of religious leaders and reduce the likelihood of sedition. For example, Amir Abdur Rahman withheld salaries and subsidies from the clergy of the Ghilzai confederation when it rebelled.[345]

Case study on the PDPA (1978-1992): Lessons learned from failed strategies

(U) Two years after its initial takeover, the PDPA instituted several initiatives designed to improve its public image, and, specifically, to win the support of the religious establishment, which by late 1979 had turned against the government and sparked a popular revolt that was threatening to spiral into a full-blown insurgency. Under the leadership of General Secretary Karmal, and then later under Najibullah, the PDPA expanded official patronage for Islam, created national bodies to coordinate religious activities, and paid the salaries of a large number of clerics. Eventually, with the war raging, the government went further by attempting to appropriate the Islamic discourse of the resistance by replacing Marxist theology and atheist propaganda campaigns with religious vernacular and Qur'anic invocations. These measures, together with the Soviet withdrawal, reduced, but did not eliminate, the stigma of unbelief that besmirched the regime.[346] Ultimately, while many clerics accepted material support from the state, the great majority of the clergy remained hostile to the government.[347] Several factors, in addition to its association with the Soviet Union, inhibited the PDPA's ability to form a real alliance with the clerical community. The PDPA's religious engagement strategies and their effects and limitations are described below.

Suppression under Taraki and Amin

(U) During the early years of the Communist takeover in Afghanistan (1978-1979), the PDPA's Taraki and Amin governments viewed religious leaders and institutions as a stumbling block in their efforts to achieve a socialist transformation of the country, and took steps to suppress and neutralize them. In addition to introducing secularization policies, they adopted atheist rhetoric and purged Islamic symbols from the government (including the Afghan flag). Young Party members desecrated mosques and defiled religious sites.[348] Recognizing the threat that the clergy could present to their reformist agendas (as they had vividly shown during the clerical revolt against King Amanullah in 1929), they waged a pre-emptive war on the religious leadership, making arrests, appropriating endowment lands, and killing national figures, such as the charismatic, pro-monarchy leadership of the Sufi Nashqabandiyya order.[349]

Co-option under Karmal and Najibullah

(U) By 1980, the Karmal government recognized that the PDPA's turn toward atheism and its suppression of the religious leaders had cost it the support of the population. At the insistence of its Russian backers, the PDPA began trying to build alliances with moderate Islamic clerics.[350] The government established a General Department of Islamic Affairs within the Council of Ministers (later upgraded to the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowment that answered directly to the Prime Minister), which assumed responsibility for paying mullahs and imams.[351] The Council of Religious Scholars and Clergy (a variant of today's National *Ulema* Council) was given a prominent position in the new National Fatherland Front, an organization similar to trade unions found in the Soviet Union.[352] The secret police, *Khadamat-e Etela'at-e Dawlati* (KhAD), founded the Society of Islamic Scholars and the Promotion of Islamic Traditions for the purpose of co-opting religious figures into recruiting mosque attendants as informants.[353] The KhAD also secretly disseminated instructions for pro-government mullahs' sermons and maintained surveillance over the urban mosques.[354]

(U) In 1981, the PDPA passed laws ensuring state support for pilgrims to Mecca and Karbala, and offered food coupons and firewood to the mullahs as well as exemptions from land reform and military draft. Religion was re-inserted into the school curriculum, and state television stations began broadcasting religious programs in the evenings.[355] The government also made it a point to publicize how much money it spent on religious engagement activities. From 1982 to 1986, for example, the government claimed to have spent more than Af 3.3 billion in support on religious engagement, including millions on building and maintaining mosques, assistance to the *ulema* and clergy, subsidies for the Hajj, and religious education.[356] The regime also sponsored a number of clergy conferences.[357] During this period, several *ulema* were appointed to government positions.[358]

(U) Under Najibullah, the PDPA regime further expanded religious engagement efforts. Unlike his predecessor Karmal, he proved particularly effective in his use of religious rhetoric. His speeches broadcast over Kabul Radio began with Qur'anic invocations and continually referred to the scriptures, the practice of the early caliphate, and to Afghan folk traditions.[359] He went so far as to add the

honorific title *Sayyed* to his name to connote religious lineage.[360] Government soldiers who died fighting were referred to as religious martyrs (*shahids*) and the struggle against the militants became a *jihad* against Pakistanis and Wahhabi Arabs.[361] The mujahideen guerillas were stigmatized in government communiques as *munafiqun*, or hypocrites.[362] By 1990, the PDPA had dropped its Marxist ideology and become an Islamic party, with membership only open to believing and practicing Muslims. The new constitution reaffirmed Islam as the state religion and that sharia, not state law, was the ultimate authority.[363]

Effectiveness of PDPA religious engagement

(U) A number of moderate mullahs (a good proportion of them Shi'a), welcomed government outreach initiatives. By 1985, the Council of Religious Scholars and Clergy had grown to over 10,000 members. The government relied heavily on propaganda from these pro-government mullahs. According to one account, results appeared to have been, to some extent, satisfactory.[364] A certain efficacy of PDPA religious engagement efforts is confirmed by the assassination of several hundred pro-government mullahs by the mujahideen during the war.[365] The adoption of Islamic discourse intended to distance itself from its Communist origins; while it was never enough to affect the outcome of the war, it likely contributed to its continued, if short lived, survival after the Soviet withdrawal.

(U) Despite considerable efforts and the payment of tens of thousands of mullahs, the PDPA's efforts to legitimate the regime were seen as cosmetic and shallow. First and foremost, the government's engagement strategies were employed primarily for the purpose of bringing religious leaders under state control, not for partnering with them as civil society actors capable of contributing to state building and governance.[366] As a result, most religious leaders remained hostile to the government, or stayed neutral, keeping a foot in both camps.[367] Most notably, the government failed to attract well-known *ulema* – who were already engaged on behalf of the mujahideen – and could not extend the influence of its pro-government mullahs beyond Kabul and other large cities.[368] Second, the Afghan religious leaders never forgot the atrocities committed during the early years of Communist rule and could not reconcile the regime's new claims of Islamic fidelity with its continued dependence on the avowedly

atheist Soviet regime. Revealingly, despite outward shifts in its attitudes towards Islam, few changes were made among the PDPA personnel who had perpetrated these anti-Islamic acts.[369]

Current government religious engagement strategies

(U) The current Afghan government is employing a variety of engagement strategies to leverage religious authority on behalf of its counterinsurgency and state-building efforts. Similar to engagement strategies employed by prior regimes, current initiatives involve elements of integration, co-option, and, to a lesser degree, suppression of clerics.[370] Ministries at the national level – such as the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Justice – as well as a variety of national security institutions have been given oversight of religious activities or of subjects considered to be within the domain of religious leaders (see the section on Afghan religious outreach institutions below).

(U) In order to wield greater control over the religious narrative and facilitate public outreach campaigns, the current Afghan government is attempting to create a network of semi-governmental national, provincial, and district-level *'ulema* councils. A related approach has been the co-option of individual mullahs and Friday prayer leaders (*tablighis*), by putting them on the government's payroll.[371] The government has also reached out to a number of national-level religious figures, such as leaders of the Naqshbandiyya and the Qadiriyya Sufi orders, to help facilitate a peace process with the insurgency.[372]

(U) Thus far, the Afghan government's religious engagement activities have achieved some results.[373] The national *Shura-e Ulema* has called on the Taliban to abandon violence and support the Afghan government in the name of Islam. It has also called on the religious scholars of neighboring countries, including Pakistan, to help counter the activities and ideology of the Taliban and other insurgent organizations.[374] At the provincial level, *ulema* councils in Helmand and Kandahar are working to discredit the Taliban's *jihadi* narrative as well as to convince maligned mullahs and low-level fighters to leave the insurgency.[375] Others have participated as spokesmen for government health campaigns, such as vaccine drives, drug awareness seminars, and intervention services for addiction.[376]

Weaknesses of government outreach

(U) Unfortunately, day-to-day interaction between local religious leaders and the government remains quite limited.[377] The main state organs for outreach – namely the Ministry of Hajj and the *ulema* councils, lack capacity and remain under-funded and under-staffed. Worse, in many locations, these institutions lack legitimacy and suffer from a reputation for corruption.[378] Many of the religious leaders involved with these institutions lack religious credentials and are often not influential at the local level.[379] Notably (with the exception of a few district level officials), little has been done by the Afghan government to reach out to influential village or district level religious leaders in with established followings.[380]

(U) Most religious figures remain largely divided in their support for the government, though many feel they have an important role to play in helping stabilize and develop the country.[381] Many clerics feel that the government has ignored and disenfranchised them by reducing their involvement in local governance, and many feel disrespected and persecuted by having been arrested as suspected Taliban facilitators.[382] Indeed, there is a pre-existing tension between religious leaders and government officials (who in many instances are former Communist technocrats and or mujahideen commanders).[383] Many clerics feel that in all previous eras, from Zahir Khan to the Taliban, religious leaders had more influence and respect from the government than they do today.[384]

(U) At the same time, most religious leaders remain protective of their independence and have in many cases, resisted state efforts to co-opt them.[385] Some clerics have said that when the government told them to preach about certain topics, they refused on principle.[386] Many feel that little effort has been made to create space for an autonomous role for clerics within civil society or to establish a genuine dialogue with the government. Most clerics feel their advice is only sought when the government needs it to support government policies (but not on the everyday religious issues that affect the population).[387] Parts of the *ulema* loudly criticize the government for consulting – or using – the *ulema* only when it is convenient for them, and accuse the government of being subservient to foreign pressure and of lacking independence and integrity if they set the sharia aside.[388]

(U) Religious leaders also fear that any overt cooperation with the Afghan government could lead to reprisals from the Taliban. Numerous pro-government clerics have been killed, as the government has not been able to protect them from insurgent murder and intimidation campaigns. In some areas, the Taliban (as well foreign influencers such as Iran and Pakistan) has out-competed the Afghan government for the support of this influential community by offering inducements and, when necessary, targeting them.

Overview: the Afghan government's religious outreach institutions

(U) Today, various GIRoA entities and affiliates are tasked with oversight of religious institutions and activities or are currently conducting engagement activities with religious leaders. These include the Ministry of Hajj Religious Affairs, the semi-governmental *Shura-e Ulema* (and its affiliated sub-national councils), the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Justice, the Supreme Court, the Afghan National Army (ANA), and the National Directorate of Security.

The Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs

(U) The Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs (MoHRA) is the state organ responsible for religious issues in Afghanistan. It was established in 1970 as the Supreme Office of Waqf (endowments) and was primarily charged with managing endowments, shrines, tombs, and mosques.[389] Since then, it has evolved from merely a property management and collections agency to a coordinating and administrative body.[390]

(FOUO) Today, the official responsibilities of the MoHRA include organizing Afghan pilgrims for performance of Hajj and Umrah (the major and minor pilgrimages to Mecca), managing and collecting *waqf* [endowments], registering mosques and madrasas,[391] testing and overseeing mullahs and imams paid by the government, convening religious meetings and ceremonies, and raising public awareness on religious issues at the national level. The MoHRA is also intended to act as a central communication hub for its network of mosques at the provincial and district levels. It propagates moderate Islamic narratives by distributing sermon topics to registered mosques. In recent years, the ministry's remit has been reduced. President Karzai de-

creed that the ministry should no longer collect *zakat*, the Islamic tenet of almsgiving, based on claims of rampant corruption.[392]

(U) At the provincial level, the Director of Hajj and Awkaf is the MoHRA's official representative to the mullah community. Theoretically, provincial directors are responsible for providing for mosque repairs, clarifying government policies, rebutting Taliban propaganda, working with the provincial *Shura-e Ulema* to issue *fatwas*, discussing topics for Friday prayers, and encouraging religious leaders to support the government in their sermons (*khut'bas*).[393] The MoHRA prefers that provincial directors have a college-level religious degree and be local to the areas in which they serve; unfortunately, in contested areas they are usually not local.[394] In addition to provincial directors, the MoHRA also employs district representatives who function largely as administrative, non-religious support staff.[395]

A representative from the MoHRA and the District Governor distribute mosque speakers to local religious leaders. *Source: Patricio Asfura-Heim*

(FOUO) The MoHRA has little capacity to fulfill its official functions. Because it is under-funded and under-staffed, it has limited ability to engage with the majority of Afghanistan's religious leaders and institutions.[396] The annual budget of the MoHRA is only $12.7 million, and as of 2011, only a quarter of the ministry's positions were filled.[397] In particular, very few representatives have been assigned at the district level. According to recent statistics, the MoHRA has registered

only 2,634 mosques out of estimated tens of thousands, and has only registered and paid 3,250 mullahs out of the estimated 160,000 working in Afghanistan.[398] Aside from providing stipends, the MoHRA is provided with no other budget to conduct projects.[399] Furthermore, in the past, the MoHRA has had difficulty communicating directly with district representatives or disseminating religious materials at the local level, having to depend on unreliable telephone communications with their provincial directors and costly trips to Kabul.

(FOUO) In addition to administrative shortfalls, the MoHRA lacks religious credentials and thus has limited influence over most of Afghanistan's religious leaders. It is able neither to issue Islamic jurisprudence nor to guide madrasa education. Afghans widely believe that the MoHRA does little more than pay religious leaders to act as government spokesmen.[400] However, the MoHRA does tend to exert some influence in urban areas where mosques are more likely to be registered and receive money for repairs; mullahs are better educated and receive stipends and housing; and Friday sermon topics are more likely to be utilized.[401]

The Ministry of Education

(U) The Ministry of Education (MoE) is responsible for oversight of religious and secular education. The MoE actively monitors government-run schools (madrasas) to ensure quality of education and prevent radicalism from gaining a foothold.[402] At the provincial level, government-funded madrasas fall within the administrative purview of the Provincial Education Office and are overseen by the Director of Islamic Education.[403]

(U) Under the MoE, the Islamic Education High Council was established in 2008 to manage, revise, and supervise Islamic education activities and programs.[404] The Curriculum Department (a division of the Curriculum and Teacher Education Directorate) is responsible for the development of curriculum and learning materials. Islamic experts developed curriculum for both schools (Hanafi and Jafari) of Islamic jurisprudence via a national consultative process. Along with religious subjects, the new curriculum includes mathematics, science, foreign languages, and computer courses.[405] In addition, the MoE has initiated efforts to certify government Madrasa teachers. The MoE offers an exam every year to certify teaching candidates.[406]

(U) Currently, a mere 485 madrasas are registered with the MoE.[407] Recognizing that a quality Islamic education system can be an important tool for countering extremism, Afghanistan's National Education Strategy and Plan (NESP) calls for an increase in the number of religious schools that fall under the control of the MoE.[408] As part of the NESP, the MoE intends to construct secondary madrasas (grades 7-12) in all districts; 34 higher secondary madrasas (grades 7-14) and dormitories for boys; and 34 higher secondary madrasas for girls in each provincial capital. Some of these madrasas will be developed into Islamic centers of excellence (*Darum al-Ulum*).[409]

The Ministry of Justice

(U) The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is the institution charged within the executive branch to uphold the rule of law, in respect to both secular and religious law. Among other duties, it is tasked with strengthening Hanafi sharia jurisprudence and the rule of law by drafting and reviewing proposed laws. The *Taqnin* (legislative drafting and review office) is the arm of the MoJ tasked with scrutinizing all draft laws for compliance with sharia law (along with the constitution and international agreements ratified by Afghanistan).[410] Government and independent Afghan agencies rely on the *Taqnin* for subject matter expertise when they want to ensure passage of specific legislation or amendments. The *Taqnin* plays an important role in the harmonization of religious and secular law.[411]

The Supreme Court

(U) The Supreme Court constitutes the highest authority of the judiciary of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Nine justices are appointed by the president for ten-year terms. The constitution requires that the Chief Justice be an expert in secular law as well as Islamic jurisprudence. If there is no provision in the constitution or other laws, the courts can issue rulings based on sharia law. Finally, the Supreme Court has the responsibility of officially determining the start of the holy month of Ramadan.[412]

(U) Within the Supreme Court, the Islamic Verdict & Vice and Virtue Department is a body that advises the justices on religious matters.[413] It is staffed by Islamic scholars and imams trained in sharia (Islamic) jurisprudence. The department advises the court on how to best apply sharia law in its verdicts in the absence of specific provisions in

the constitution or other laws.[414] The department issues *fatwas* in answer to requests by institutions, individuals, and Afghan consulates abroad. The department also officiates conversions of non-Muslims to Islam. It also conducts campaigns on promotion of virtue and elimination of vice through mosques and other social gatherings.[415]

National *Ulema* Council

(U) The National *Ulema* Council, or *Shura-e Ulema,* is an officially recognized, government-sponsored council of religious advisors. While a national religious council has never been mandated by the Afghan constitution, one has existed in various forms since the reign of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan (r. 1880-1901). The council's current incarnation has been active since 2002. Its members are tasked with advising the president on religious, ethical, and legal issues as well as keeping him informed on public opinions. They also serve as an advisory body to the legislative and judiciary branches. However, while the *Shura-e Ulema* has been influential as a pressure group to further Islamic interests within the government, in principle it has no legal authority and its declarations are not binding.

(U) The national level *Shura-e Ulema*, which meets monthly in Kabul, is composed of 160 members, made up of 2-3 representatives from each province.[416] Currently, most members of the council tend to be Sunni scholars and imams (most are from urban areas and many were marginalized during the Taliban regime), but some Shi'a clerics are also involved. Traditionally, Tajiks have been strongly represented in the council's leadership. Nomination into the national *Shura-e Ulema* is based on a cleric's education and reputation in his community, as well as a vetting process led by the provincial governor, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), and the provincial police chief. Ultimately, the president has the prerogative to approve or reject nominees.[417] The *Shura-e Ulema* is affiliated with, but not administered by, the MoHRA, which often provides council members with stipends and other types of support. In addition, the government also sends suggested sermon topics to *Shura-e Ulema*-affiliated mosques.

(FOUO) The *Shura-e Ulema* has associated provincial and district-level councils across the country, with a total membership of approximately 3,000 clerics. These councils are often led by the provincial representatives of the national council and overseen by the provincial

director of the MoHRA. Some areas have *ulema* councils at both the provincial and district levels, some have only provincial councils, and some areas religious leaders have no involvement with government-sponsored *ulema* councils in any form.[418] At the provincial and district levels, inclusion in the *ulema* councils varies between appointment and election.[419]

Members of a government affiliated provincial Ulema council meet with a representative of the MoHRA. *Source: Patricio Asfura-Heim*

(U) The *Shura-e Ulema* has been marginally effective as a pressure group within the government and less so as a bureaucratic tool to endorse official policy and extend government influence over the population. Since the ratification of the Afghan constitution, the council has successfully supported the passage of religiously grounded legislation.[420] Although initially appearing to be favorable to an open democratic society, declarations made by the *Shura-e Ulema,* in particular about women's rights, indicate a fundamentally conservative platform, which at times has conflicted with international legal norms.[421]

(U) Religious leaders are split in their opinions about the role of the *Shura-e Ulema* in national politics. Some believe that the council should actively preach in support of government policies, while others believe it should remain independent, and simply act as a link between the government and the people on apolitical matters.

Common to both sides, however, is the view that the role of the council is to act as advisors on issues of morality.[422] Public opinion on the council varies by location, but is predominantly negative.[423] Many Afghans view the *Shura-e Ulema,* and its associated sub-national councils, as government stooges. A number of council members lack religious credentials (or have obtained forged diplomas), maintain interests in illegal activities such as poppy trafficking, or were appointed solely on the basis of political connections.[424] As a result, in many provinces, the *ulema* councils lack religious legitimacy and authority in the eyes of the population.[425]

(U) Despite its limitations, the influence of the *Shura-e Ulema* is seen as particularly threatening to the Taliban, which has traditionally dominated both the religious sphere and the information environment. In the past several years, there have been numerous attacks against members of the *Shura-e Ulema* who have spoken out against the insurgency. These attacks, and the government's inability to provide adequate protection, pose the greatest obstacles to effectively harnessing the political strength of the council and are, in fact, succeeding in widening the gap between moderate religious actors and the state. Significantly, overt participation with the *Shura-e Ulema* councils is often limited or non-existent in areas with an active Taliban presence.

ANA Religious and Cultural Affairs Officer Corps

(U) Established in 2009, the Religious and Cultural Affairs (RCA) program was created to perform functions similar to those of military chaplains.[426] The RCA Directorate of the ANA is located in Kabul, and is mentored by U.S. Army chaplains. RCA officers provide Islamic religious support to ANA solders and spearhead religious leader engagement, helping unit commanders and district government officials effectively interact with the local population.[427] Beyond their religious role, they work with literacy, moral welfare, and recreation programs, and provide family support.

RCA Officer leading prayers alongside a local mullah.
Source: Patricio Asfura-Heim.

(U) Although the RCA program is relatively new, the concept of embedding religious advisors in the Afghan military is not. Religious advisors have been incorporated into the Afghan military in one form or another since 1986. Recognizing the importance of the religious sphere in their war against the mujahideen, the Communist government instituted a policy requiring that every regiment have two mosques and two mullahs.[428]

(FOUO) Today, most RCA officers are not mullahs, but they have typically completed at least some post-high school secular and Islamic education. In addition to RCA officers, the ANA utilizes mullahs as non-commissioned officers to lead prayers and sermons in the mosques.[429] RCA Officers are assigned at the battalion (*kandak),* brigade, and corps levels. There are currently no RCA officers at the company (*tolai)* level. Reports indicate that they wield considerable influence over Afghan soldiers.[430]

RCA officers distribute Qur'ans to local mullahs.
Source: Patricio Asfura-Heim.

National Directorate of Security

(U) The NDS (also referred to as *Amniyat*) is the domestic intelligence agency of the Afghan government. It has been involved in a variety of religious engagement activities and cooperates closely with the MoHRA.[431] The NDS runs a program to pay stipends to religious leaders throughout the country, though according to reports from 2008, this support to the clerical community has had little impact due to the modest amounts of cash being distributed.[432] In addition to outreach programs, the NDS currently directs a de-radicalization program to rehabilitate captured would-be suicide bombers. This program involves Islamic instruction by moderate clerics, as well indoctrination and counter-propaganda lessons. For example, the NDS shows suicide-recruits films of Taliban atrocities and escorts them to well-attended mosques to prove that, counter to insurgent propaganda, Afghans under the current government remain devout Muslims and are able to continue to freely practice their faith.[433]

XI. Operationalizing religious knowledge: appropriate behavior for international personnel in the field

(U) Religious awareness among foreign forces has an immediate bearing on the ability to successfully engage with the Afghan population. Moreover, in the long term, the comportment of the international community in the religious sphere has the potential to shape efforts to legitimize the Afghan government itself. To facilitate the implementation of ongoing security, development, and governance initiatives, international personnel in the field must tailor their interactions with Afghans to avoid inflaming cultural and religious differences.

(U) Afghans belong to a notoriously xenophobic society and are keenly aware of strangers in their midst. Historically, they have violently rejected foreign influences, in particular, those deemed threatening to Islamic values and ways of life. In most Afghan conflicts, religion has been the catalyst for social mobilization. Rebels have routinely exploited a ruler's dependence on foreigners by calling into question their ability to act as the Commander of the Faithful (*Amir al-Mu'mumin*). If a government cannot protect its population from perceived theological transgressions, it loses its political legitimacy and opens itself up to religiously sanctioned opposition. The successful defense of Islam continues to be a key consideration in the ongoing negotiation of the Afghan social contract.

(U) Today, many insurgents - and alarmingly, a considerable number of non-aligned and pro-government Afghans – perceive threats to their culture and religion by an international intervention composed of and managed by mostly non-Islamic nations.[434] In addition to the Taliban's 'infidel invader' narrative (see '***the Taliban's use of religion as a propaganda tool***' section above), scandals such as prisoner abuse in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay and the publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in Europe, have contributed to

the belief by some that, in fact, a global war on Islam has been declared.[435]

(U) Whether accidental or intentional, intermittent religious offenses (such as *Qur'an* desecrations and post-mortem defilement of insurgents) have often resulted in public demonstrations, violence, and have reinforced suspicions of an anti-Islamic bias among coalition forces.[436] Significantly, religious offenses have been cited as a contributing factor for increased ANSF attacks on Western security forces.[437] Further, it's apparent inability to prevent transgressions or to hold foreign forces accountable has adversely affected the Afghan government's public image as the legitimate sovereign and fuels Taliban propaganda (see '***Islam and the legitimation of political authority***' section above). If transgressions do occur, coalition commanders should not be surprised to find the central government and its National Ulema Council loath to expend already limited political capital intervening in the matter, despite their support for a continued coalition presence.[438]

(U) Therefore, in order to maintain public trust, improve security force cooperation, and prevent the unintentional discrediting of the Afghan government, the international community must become aware of and learn to avoid religious pitfalls. The following section provides a suggested list of "do's and don'ts" for deployed personnel. While the following recommendations can help to prevent misunderstandings and promote temporary tolerance, in isolation they should not be expected to help garner favor or lead to meaningful friendships.

Religious Etiquette in Afghanistan[439]

(U) In Afghanistan, religion, spiritualism, and local tribal customs blend to form a unique set of cultural and religious norms. Ethnic and sectarian diversity has resulted in regional variation of religious beliefs and practices. Moreover, in some cases, Afghans may ascribe religious significance to behaviors not deemed Islamic in origin by Muslims from other countries. The following suggested actions and prohibited behaviors are nominally based on Islamic tenets recognized by most Afghan Muslims. Limited in scope to the religious sphere, these recommendations should not be considered a comprehensive guide to the full Afghan social code, which is equally influ-

enced, if not dominated, by ethnic and tribal customary systems such as *Pashtunwali.*

General public comportment and conversation etiquette

- Avoid drawing attention to oneself or appearing brash. Afghans hold modest behavior in high esteem.
- Wear clothing that portrays modesty. Men are discouraged from wearing shorts and short-sleeved shirts. Women should cover their heads and avoid form-fitting clothing.
- Use the right hand for all public functions like eating, greeting, and passing objects (Islamic jurisprudence decrees the left hand unclean, and its public use can be considered an insult).
- Avoid pointing or touching an Afghan with the soles of the feet (because they touch the ground, feet are considered closer to the devil and furthest from God).
- Avoid all discussion of religion with Afghans. If asked, respectfully state personal beliefs and avoid comparisons between religions.
- Do not call someone Hajji unless you know they have completed the Hajj. Because of the great expense associated with the trip, incorrect application of the term may shame a person who lacks the means to make the pilgrimage.
- Do not walk between a man praying and Mecca – walk behind him at a respectable distance.
- If prayer time coincides with a meeting, non-Muslims should sit quietly and wait for prayers to conclude.

Religious holidays and festivals

- Avoid scheduling meetings during religious holidays, if possible.
- During the month of Ramadan, schedule meetings in the morning.
- While Afghan personnel are fasting, do not offer food and avoid drinking or eating in their presence.

Mosque etiquette

- Under normal circumstances, do not enter a mosque without permission from a religious leader.
- Never attempt to interrupt prayers.
- When entering a mosque, always remove shoes or boots.
- Never enter a mosque with a weapon.
- In some circumstances, taking photographs within a mosque may be considered inappropriate. Seek permission first.
- Never smoke inside a mosque.
- Traditionally, most Afghan women do not attend mosque services. Western women should avoid entering without having first received explicit approval from local religious leaders.

Handling of religious materials

- Since there is disagreement about whether non-Muslims should handle the *Qur'an*, non-Muslims should refrain from touching it.
- Do not allow materials with *Qur'anic* verses or other religious symbols to fall to the ground, where they can accidentally be stepped on.
- Do not display any image of the Prophet Muhammad.

Proper behavior during combat operations, patrols, and training ANSF

- Avoid using prayer times to stop individuals for questioning. (Be aware there will be increased population movement to and from the mosque during prayer times)
- Never use dogs to search a mosque.
- Avoid profanity. Afghan Muslims can be extremely sensitive to obscene language.
- Spitting or urinating while facing the West (the direction of Mecca) is immensely disrespectful.

- Avoid forcing an Afghan Muslim's head to the ground. Muslims only touch their heads to the ground when praying.
- When searching an Afghan male take care to avoid knocking over his head covering.
- Only female members of the security forces, preferably Afghan AUP, should search Afghan women.
- Do not cremate dead enemy fighters. Muslims must be buried within 24 hours of death.
- Integrate the Afghan practice of fasting during Ramadan when planning joint operations.
- Avoid reprimanding an Afghan in public. Displays of anger and a raised voice are also considered rude.
- While on operations with ANA, 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).

Religious leader engagement etiquette

- Use the term "Mullah *Saheeb*" when referring to a Mullah as a term of respect.
- Avoid meeting in mosques or military camps, if possible. It is preferable to meet in a neutral location.
- Avoid theological debates with religious leaders. Though some may be tolerant of other religions, they will not stand for any criticism of Islam.
- Do not touch the *Qur'an*. If these are given as gifts to local mosques, let Afghan government personnel distribute them.
- Avoid any activity that could be perceived as proselytizing. In Afghanistan, conversions from Islam are condemned.
- If asked to embrace Islam, respond by affirming preference for one's own religion but noting respect for Islam.
- Avoid photographing mullahs without prior permission.

Behavior towards the opposite sex

- Avoid staring at or photographing Afghan women.

- Avoid showing Afghan males personal photos of wives and daughters of age.
- Avoid public displays of affection towards the opposite sex.
- Men should not extend a hand to an Afghan woman in greeting.
- Western women may extend a hand to Afghan women in greeting. However, when greeting an Afghan male, it is proper to wait for him to extend his hand first.

A note on handling the Qur'an

(U) The Holy Qur'an is held by Muslims to be the exact word of God. It must therefore be handled only with the reverence shown to a divine object.

(U) In recent years, a string of incidents involving the mishandling or improper disposal of the Qur'an have incited public outrage and strained relations with Afghan partners. Public anger has been such that the Taliban has adopted desecration accusations as part of its misinformation campaign, designed to provoke violent reactions and drive wedges between locals and coalition forces. The extreme sensitivity of this religious affront and its repeated occurrence, suggests future infractions will likely result in increasingly negative and disproportionate public responses. As such, international personnel must understand the sacrosanct nature of Islamic texts and strictly observe handling etiquette.

(U) Muslims have developed etiquette for handling copies of the Qur'an based on the following verse: "None may touch it save the purified" (Q 56:79). Muslim scholars have debated the degree of cleanliness required before touching the Qur'an: some advocate for the ritual washing of the entire body (*ghusl*) and others for the lesser ritual washing (*wudu'*), typically performed before daily prayer. Afghan adherence to these prescribed legal traditions varies. There is disagreement amongst religious scholars regarding the handling of the Qur'an by non-Muslims, who do not follow any of the prescribed rituals of cleanliness.[440] This also extends to the handling of material containing Qur'anic verses.

(U) An Afghan may give the Qur'an to a non-Muslim but will advise on proper handling etiquette.[441] Nevertheless, international personnel operating in Afghanistan should be aware that some Afghans might take offense to any non-Muslims casually handling the Qur'an.[442] Since there is continued debate among Afghans about non-Muslims touching the Qur'an, international personnel should refrain from doing so publicly, and in particular, without first receiving an explicit invitation and instruction.

(U) Quotations from the Qur'an are everywhere in Afghanistan; even the opening phrase of many official documents, "In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate," is a quote from the Qur'an. Although any object that contains a verse from the Qur'an should be treated with respect, their prevalence and the diverging opinions on how to handle them means non-Muslims run much less risk of offending Muslim sensibilities by touching or disposing of such items. Nevertheless, caution should be taken to prevent these objects from falling to the ground, where they could be stepped on. There have been several incidents where coalition forces have incorporated seemingly innocuous images, such as the Afghan flag (which in actuality contains a Qur'anic verse), onto playing cards, soccer balls, and psychological operations pamphlets dropped from the air - causing extreme offense.

Disposing of the Qur'an and Material That Quotes It

(U) Hanafi jurisprudence, the predominant legal school in Afghanistan, enumerates several methods for disposing of paper containing verses from the Qur'an: they may be buried, placed in flowing water, or burned after erasing the name of God, His angels, and His Messengers.[443] As for disposing of a worn copy of the Qur'an itself, the Hanafi legal school prohibits burning copies of the Qur'an; it prefers that they be buried.[444] Rulings by Shi'a authorities do not differ substantially from the Hanafi position.[445]

(U) Because of the extreme sensitivity and exacting protocols involved in the disposal of religious materials, coalition forces should avoid doing so themselves. Instead, Qur'ans and other Islamic texts should be turned over to Afghan religious authorities for disposal. As for English translations of the Qur'an, it is recommended to err on the side of caution and treat them in the same manner.

Talking points for countering accusations of anti-Islamic behavior in the field

(U) While it is highly advisable to avoid theological discussions with Afghans, particularly by uniformed servicemen in the field, personnel should be prepared to counter or respond to accusations of anti-Islamic behavior. Below are some talking points that can be used when confronted by antagonistic locals or hostile religious leaders:

- "Afghanistan is an Islamic country and we recognize that fact."
- "We support GIRoA, and GIRoA supports Islam. It is enshrined in Article 2 of the Afghan Constitution."
- "We have no intention to convert or to proselytize. We are not going to build any churches in your country."
- "We are not atheist (like the Soviets). We are largely 'People of the Book." (Christian or Jewish faiths)
- "We have chaplains in our military because we worship God as well."
- "We respect Islam, and we respect your role as a mullah. How can we show you our good faith?"

XII. International engagement in the religious sphere

(U) The conflict in Afghanistan will never be resolved with military power alone. Leveraging civil society institutions to sway the population away from the insurgency and to bolster the state-building process is quickly becoming a cornerstone of the stabilization strategy.

(U) Religious actors and institutions can either support or hinder peace, development, and state building processes. Currently, the clerical community in Afghanistan remains largely divided and the religious sphere remains a contested space. Although most clerics remain cautiously skeptical of the government, many believe they could positively contribute to the state-building agenda by generating support among the people, as well as through more direct participation in development projects and aid programs.[446] A small number have begun to cooperate with the government or have independently supported initiatives sponsored by the international community (IC). Most clerics however, remain neutral; either weary of a government whom they feel has ignored them or paralyzed into inaction by the Taliban murder and intimidation campaign.

(U) The role religious leaders will play in the current conflict and in the building the future Afghan state is largely contingent on the willingness of others to prepare the ground for their involvement.[447] The IC has begun to involve itself in Afghanistan's religious space in order to reduce public support for the insurgency, promote reconciliation, address local grievances, and facilitate collaboration between civil society actors and the Afghan government.

Overarching Religious Engagement Objectives

(U) Religious leaders maintain varying degrees of influence in their local communities. They are not just spiritual guides or preachers, but also teachers, healers, mediators, and respected opinion leaders. In rural areas, clerics are a primary source of information for the largely illiterate population, and influence perceptions and attitudes

on a range of issues and topics. Their performance of these civil society functions makes them valuable contributors to security, governance, and development initiatives.

(U) Properly scoped objectives for engaging the religious space will facilitate clerical participation and help prevent unintended side effects. Their traditional functions and past participation in state formation and politics suggests religious engagement objectives are most appropriately confined to a limited sub-set of counterinsurgency missions. Broadly, these are: (1) Increased effectiveness of IC/GIRoA public outreach and communication, (2) improved effectiveness of reconciliation and peace building efforts, (3) reduced influence of extremist influences, and (4) increased legitimacy of Afghan state intuitions.

1. Facilitate Communications between the GIRoA/International Community and the population

(U) Currently, the government and the international community face significant challenges in effectively communicating with large segments of the Afghan population. Access to mass media, while improving, is not yet available to all Afghans. Most communities in Afghanistan remain rural and isolated and many suffer from high rates of illiteracy. Most significantly, an innate distrust of the central government and a distaste of foreigners have reduced the credibility of IC/GIRoA messages.

(U) Local religious leaders remain a trusted source of information for much of the population. Through their weekly sermons, clerics are capable of affecting perceptions and modifying attitudes on issues of the day. Engaging religious leaders has the potential to open channels of communication with segments of the populations that are currently not accessible to GIRoA and the IC. In particular, religious leaders can be effective contributors to counterpropaganda efforts and in the dissemination of public service announcements.

- (U) **Counterpropaganda**: The Taliban uses religious propaganda to gain support, justify its criminal activities, create distance between the population and the Afghan government, and promote a culture of militant jihad. Non-Muslims have little credibility to refute the religious elements of the Taliban's mes-

sages. Clerical messaging can help de-legitimize and decrease the influence of insurgent communications while demonstrating to Afghans how reform and partnership with GIRoA, ISAF and the international community will lead to better Afghanistan.

- (U) **Public service announcements:** The Afghan government and its international backers are involved in numerous development projects, public health campaigns, and programs designed to involve the population in local governance. Clerical messaging can help create public awareness of government programs and policies, and increase participation in community outreach initiatives such as vaccination drives, voter registration campaigns, and counter-narcotics programs.

2. Improve reconciliation and peace building efforts

(U) A combination of political, religious, cultural barriers has made it difficult for GIRoA and the IC to constructively engage the insurgency in reconciliation and peace building endeavors. In addition, the weakness of state institutions and its poor reputation in general, have left the government unable to contain or mediate the rampant infighting among tribes, powerbrokers, and government officials brought on by deep-seated local grievances and decades of war. Unending cycles of violence and disunity among local actors have provided openings for the insurgency, despite its overwhelming unpopularity.

(U) All religious leaders, but in particular Sufi *pirs* and *sayyeds,* continue to function as respected mediators between warring tribes and political factions. Their unfettered access to disputants (including insurgents) as well as their status as neutral agents outside of the government and of the tribal system, facilitates conflict resolution. Leveraging religious leaders with reputations as mediators and impartial interlocutors could further the national peace process, facilitate the reintegration of local fighters into society, and find solutions for longstanding local conflicts.

- (U) **National peace process:** Taliban leaders are often connected to unaligned religious scholars through trusted madrasa networks. These clerics can act interlocutors between with Taliban leadership and the Afghan government to further peace

talks. In addition, national Sufi leaders, who have a prior history of negotiating with the Taliban in the 1990s, could also help promote reconciliation efforts.

- (U) **Reintegration:** The Afghan government is involved in initiatives to draw local fighters away from the insurgency. Islamic jurisprudence contains provisions for the demobilization of rebel fighters. Religious leaders' dual roles as both mediator and spiritual advisors can be translated for use in reintegration schemes. No honor is lost to a fighter who subordinates himself to the neutral cleric.

- (U) **Local mediation:** Afghan society is fragmented by ethnic and tribal divisions as well as by competing strongmen and warlord. These fissures have consistently been exploited by insurgents to co-opt disenfranchised groups. Mediation efforts by religious leaders may inhibit Taliban infiltration by helping to unite fractured communities and addressing root causes of conflict.

3. Reduce influence of xxtremist narratives

(U) Extremist religious narratives play a central role in the Taliban's ideology and facilitate its recruitment and propaganda campaigns. Extremist Pakistani Deobandi educational centers - where many Taliban leaders studied and where many foot soldiers are recruited from - remain popular among some Afghan Pashtuns, not only because of historic ties, but also due to the poor quality of religious training available in Afghanistan. A lack of well-respected Islamic universities and insufficient numbers of Afghan religious scholars trained in moderate universities has inhibited the government's ability to effectively counter the Taliban's extremist narrative.

(U) As the primary source of education for most rural youth, and as the interpreters of Islam in a highly illiterate society, religious leaders exert a major influence on Afghan religious perspectives. Identifying and supporting moderate, influential religious leaders could be an effective method for countering extremist narratives in Afghanistan. Specifically, moderate religious leaders can contribute by helping to reform Afghanistan's religious education system and by promulgating moderate religious messages in their weekly sermons.

- (U) **Religious education reform:** Extremist madrasas contribute to the radicalization of Afghan society. Religious leaders can help promote a more tolerant religious narrative by partnering with the government to create a moderate religious curriculum and by helping to register private madrasas with the Ministry of Education.
- (U) **Weekly sermons:** Lacking a sophisticated understanding of Islamic law, the Taliban propagate a distorted extremist, militant narrative that is alien to most Afghans. Well-trained religious leaders can debunk the Taliban's flawed theological arguments and promote a more moderate narrative.

4. Increase the legitimacy of the Afghan government

(U) The Afghan government suffers from a general lack of popular support due to charges of corruption, inconsistent delivery of security and essential services, and its reliance on foreign backers. These weaknesses are neither unique to the Afghan state nor have they proven fatal to the writ of the central government. However, Afghan history suggests that the denunciation of the government as an "apostate regime", as currently levied by the Taliban, may ultimately prove the most dangerous threat to its political legitimacy.

(U) Historically, religious leaders have played a key role in the legitimation of Afghan rulers and have provided religious cover for their political activities. As the guardians of morality, they continue to retain high levels of respect and are thus able to affect public attitudes on the religious "legality" of the government and its policies. Today, the vast majority of clerics remain disconnected from the government. Engaging religious leaders, both as spiritual advisors and as civil society actors, can help legitimize the government by bolstering its religious credentials and by facilitating the delivery of essential services.

- (U) **Bolstering religious credentials:** Taliban propaganda accuses the government of being un-Islamic and of overseeing the moral decline of Afghan society. Through partnership and consultation, religious leaders can help promote the government's image of a piety and can publically confirm its commitment and respect for Islam.

- (U) **Delivery of essential services:** In part, the legitimacy of the Afghan government has been undercut by its inability to deliver basic services to the people. Through their role as civil society actors, religious leaders could assist the government in the delivery of those basic services traditionally associated with the clergy, such as mediation, education, and health care.

Guiding principles and best practices for engaging religious leaders in the field

(U) Engagement with Afghan religious leaders has long been thought to be an issue too culturally sensitive and potentially volatile to pursue effectively by members of the international community. However, an approach based on in-depth knowledge of Afghan religion, culture, and history can increase the likelihood of success and can help to mitigate associated pitfalls.

(U) This section highlights some general guiding principles for international personnel engaging in Afghanistan's religious sphere. The following best practices have been derived from an examination of ongoing religious engagement activities as well as suggestions from Afghan clerics and government officials. Additionally, these approaches are informed by historical analysis of Afghan government religious outreach activities.

(U) While most of the following recommended approaches are applicable across Afghanistan, international personnel should remain flexible in adapting these methods and allow for local conditions to drive their engagement strategies.

- (U) **Sanction their independent status:** In order to effectively perform their traditional civil society functions, clerics must retain their status as independent representatives of their communities. Many religious leaders are hesitant to work with GIRoA or the IC for fear of being viewed as conduit for government messaging. Thus, engagement with religious leaders must not be approached from a purely utilitarian perspective or characterized by one-way communications. Instead, cooperation with religious scholars should be based on shared goals and must also address local grievances. The IC should accept that religious leaders will continue to criticize GIRoA and this

should not necessarily rule out further engagement. Lastly, religious leaders must maintain their reputations as neutral mediators in order to assist in the peace process and in reintegration programs.

- (U) **Consult, do not co-opt:** Religious leaders should be consulted on issues affecting their communities. Currently, many religious leaders feel excluded from the political discourse and believe they are only included when the government wants to lend legitimacy to proceedings. An invitation to discuss their concerns can breed support and build cooperation from the clerical community. Topics can include reconstruction initiatives, government programs and policies, and the distribution of humanitarian assistance. Significantly, consultations with religious leaders can help identify legitimate local grievances that are exploited by the insurgency, and suggest potential solutions.

- (U) **Provide protection:** Many religious leaders are wary of declaring allegiance or working for the government in any capacity (e.g. through the MoHRA or *Shura-e Ulema*) for fear of Taliban retribution.[448] The Taliban have consistently targeted religious leaders who have spoken out against them. In order to protect the safety of religious leaders, engagement should be attempted only in areas that have been cleared of direct Taliban control and have some ANSF presence to provide security. While GIRoA's or the IC's role in engagement efforts should not be hidden, it should not be overt. Working through Afghan interlocutors could also help reduce the risk to religious leaders.

- (U) **Utilize interlocutors:** A religious leadership engagement program could be misinterpreted as a desire to interfere with religious practice of Afghans and could potentially be used as ammunition by Taliban propagandists. In some instances, overt participation in counterinsurgency programs has reduced the credibility of religious leaders or has meant that only those with little influence to loose have chosen to participate.[449] Because of the risk of delegitimizing engagement partners through direct contact with foreign forces, Afghan interlocutors should be utilized whenever possible. Interlocutors can be influential community leaders, district and provincial government offi-

cials, or other authority figures with good reputations and a nuanced understanding of clerical concerns.

- (U) **Align engagement with civil society roles and COIN priorities**: IC engagement activities should leverage the civil society functions performed by religious leaders that further counterinsurgency priorities. In particular, the provision of much needed basic services (like mediation, education, public awareness, etc.) will require close collaboration between the government and civil society actors like religious leaders.[450] For example, the United Nations Children Fund Program was successfully able to implement its mother-child health campaign through a network of mosques.[451]

- (U) **Cultivate personal relationships:** Their ambivalent status in the current conflict (caught between insurgents and the government) means a great degree of trust building is required to establish effective working relationships with religious leaders. By engaging with foreigners, local religious leaders may be putting their personal safety, reputation, and livelihood on the line. Notably, religious leaders have voiced a preference for working with civilians and development agencies as opposed to uniformed military personnel.[452] International personal should manage their expectations; it may takes months and perhaps material assistance to gain the confidence and support of religious leaders. Moreover, it is reasonable to expect that religious leaders who have been vocal in their opposition to the government will not be able to publically reverse their position overnight.

- (U) **Identify key religious leaders at the local level:** More effort needs to be focused on identifying and engaging influential, non-government affiliated clerics at the grassroots level. Provincial and district religious leaders appear to retain a higher degree of credibility than do national figures, and some have extensive local followings. In particular, Sufi *pirs* have been known to wield influence across provinces and even into neighboring countries. Key religious leaders and potential targets for engagement are readily known to the local population and can be identified through local government officials. The most influential tend to be the Friday Prayer Leaders; clerics with large congregations and well maintained and funded

mosques; clerics with advanced training; and clerics with reputations as teachers and mediators. While identifying and engaging with true religious influencers can be an effective approach, care must be taken to determine a religious leaders motivations to avoid empowering future opposition to the government or destabilizing local political dynamics.

- (U) **Develop engagement strategies in collaboration with local government:** Some Afghan government officials have viewed religious engagement efforts as a potential threat to state building initiatives. Developing engagement strategies with the approval and in conjunction with local officials can help allay these fears. Moreover, strategies developed in collaboration are more likely to succeed as they are culturally acceptable and within their comfort zone to implement. Most significantly, this approach builds habits of cooperation between the government and the clergy, which is in fact a primary objective of religious engagement. To date, several successful initiatives have resulted from partnerships where district officials or the *ulema* councils themselves took the lead.

- (U) **Bolster the capacity and credibility of Afghan religious outreach institutions:** To reduce the IC's visibility in the religious sphere and to ultimately encourage the transition of engagement responsibilities to the Afghan government, it is necessary to bolster the capacity (and the credibility) of Afghan religious outreach institutions such as the MoHRA, the *Shura-e Ulema,* and the RCAs (see **Government Religious Outreach Institutions** section above). In addition to capacity building, the IC should urge these institutions to form true partnerships with religious leaders, instead of merely attempting to co-opt them.

- (U) **Leverage Muslim coalition partners:** Several Arab countries have deployed military personnel to Afghanistan as part of the ISAF mission. Initial reports from the field indicate that Arab Muslim soldiers and imams, though few in number, have proven to be a valuable asset for IC engagement in the religious sphere. Despite some initial success, the use of foreign Muslims for religious engagement activities with Afghan clerics should be done with a note of caution. Arab Muslims' notions of Islam are based on a more literate and Orthodox tradition, these urban Muslims may find themselves at odds with less ed-

ucated Afghan clerics whose religious beliefs are inextricably tied to rural customary legal systems such as *Pashtunwali*.[453] Foreign-born Muslims conducting religious engagement must take care not to offend or contradict their Afghan coreligionists.

- (U) **Provide religious leaders with "intellectual ammunition"**: Most clerics in Afghanistan have received little to no formal religious instruction and thus lack the ability to challenge the Taliban's extremist narrative. Connecting local clerics with renowned mainstream scholars (in Afghanistan and abroad) and holding local educational seminars will promote a more moderate Islamic narrative.

- (U) **Show respect through symbolic gifts:** The distribution of small gifts such as prayer mats, mosque speakers, and foods stuffs on Islamic holidays is an effective way for the IC to showcase respect for Islam and for engendering cooperation with religious leaders. Donating funds towards the repair of mosques has been cited as particularly effective when done as part of a targeted religious engagement strategy.[454] Any material support must be discreet and should not be seen as reciprocal.

- (U) **Employ religious leaders for cultural sensitivity training:** Few Afghans are better suited for instructing international personnel on proper religious etiquette than Afghan clerics themselves. In addition to the exchange of cultural knowledge (on both sides on the classroom), working with local religious leaders to train coalition personnel demonstrates the IC's desire to respect their cultural and religious traditions.

- (U) **Avoid using religious leaders as informants:** Mullahs were stigmatized under the Taliban for acting like spies and reporting on their villages. While a network of clerics presents a prime opportunity for intelligence collection, any overt attempt to use a religious leader as an informant would likely delegitimize him in his community and make him a target of the Taliban. To ensure the viability of religious engagement activities (and protection of participating clerics), information gathering should be done over the course of routine consultation and discussion.

Measuring the effects of religious engagement

(U) It is difficult to directly correlate the effects of religious engagement activities with the changes in perception, motivation, or behavior of Afghan religious leaders or the communities they influence. Nevertheless, surrogate metrics can provide compelling circumstantial evidence to suggest successful engagement practices. Metrics to measure the effectiveness of religious engagement activities vis-à-vis the engagement objectives outlined in preceding sections could include:

Suggested metrics:

- Percentage of district level governments (officials such as the District Governor and his deputy, the District Chief of Police, local NDS officers, and MoHRA representatives) actively engaging the clergy
- Number of newly stood up provincial and district level *ulema* councils affiliated with the national *Shura-e Ulema* or working with the government in some capacity
- Percentage of prayer leaders that invoke the President's name during the weekly *khutbah*
- Rate of attendance at pro-government/ neutral vs. insurgency affiliated mosques
- Rate of attendance/participation by religious leaders at weekly District Community Council meetings
- Number of ex-Taliban mullahs who have reintegrated and work with the government in some capacity
- Percentage of ex-Taliban fighters whose reintegration was assisted by local religious leaders.
- Number of mosque schools and madrassas accepting state sanctioned educational curriculum.

Other "input-based" metrics:

- Percentage of government registered mosques and madrassas

- Percentage of MoHRA *tashkiel* representatives fielded at the district level
- Percentage of RCA officers present for duty in each ANA Kandak
- Percentage of district level religious leaders on the government payroll
- Amount of money spent by the international community on religious engagement activities per district
- Number of international community facilitated provincial *ulema* council visits to the districts
- Number of religiously oriented RIAB messages recorded and broadcasted
- Number of mosque/madrassa/shrine refurbishment projects completed
- Number of international community and facilitated cultural exchanges

Terminology

Adhan (also pronounced azan): The Islamic call to prayer.

Ahkam: Religious principles in Islam.

Ahl Al-Kitab: "People of the Book." In the Qur'an, the People of the Book refers to Christians and Jews who follow the Torah and the Gospels (*Anjeel*), which Muslims also consider divine revelations.

Akhund: A local religious leader, often the instructor or master of a madrasa.

Akhundzada: Son of an akhund.

Akhera: The next world. Belief in the world to come is a central tenet of Islam. All people will be judged according to their good and evil deeds, and will be accordingly spend eternity in either Paradise or Hell.

"*Allahu akbar*": Arabic phrase meaning "God is great."

Alim (plural: ulema): A religious scholar with an advanced degree. Teacher. See *ulema*.

Amir al-Mu'mumin: Literally, "Commander of the Faithful."

Ashura: A holiday commemorating the martyrdom of Hussein ibn Ali, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad at the Battle of Karbala in the year 61 AH (AD 680). It is one of the major Shi'a festivals, and an occasion for processions. It occurs on the 10th of Muharram on the Islamic calendar.

Awaliya: Saints and holy men such as *malangs*, *sayyeds*, and Sufi *pirs*. Literally, "friends of God."

Ayatollah: A senior rank in the Twelver Shi'a hierarchy of clergy. Until recently, no native Afghan Ayatollahs existed.

Barakat: Literally, "Beneficent force of divine origin." A form of holiness associated with saints and holy men that brings blessings, healing, and prosperity to those who come into contact with them.

Batin: A domain of extrasensory understanding apprehended only by prophets and saints

"*Bay khudai*": Pashto phase meaning "Without god," or atheism.

"*Bismullah il-Rahman il-Rahim*": Literally "in the name of God the Most Benevolent and Merciful." The phrase is spoken before reciting verses from the Qur'an or as an invocation before engaging in any activity – for example, delivering a speech, eating a meal, or beginning a task.

Bonyad: A Shi'ite charitable trust or foundation.

Chishtiya: Sufi order that was founded by Mawdid al-Chishti who was born in the twelfth century and later taught in India. The Chishtiya brotherhood, concentrated in the Hari Rud valley around Obe, Karukh and Chishti-Sharif, is very strong locally.

Darul Hifaz: An educational center for memorization and recitation of the Qur'an.

Darul Uloom: A school for advanced religious study. Often referred to in Afghanistan as "Centers of Excellence".

Da'wa: Calling, proselytizing. The practice of inviting non-Muslims to Islam.

Dastar bandi: A student's graduation ceremony from a madrasa, marked by wearing a dastar, or turban. During the ceremony, a turban is traditionally tied onto the heads of the graduates.

Dervish: A mendicant. A follower of an ascetic Sufi path, who seeks closeness to God by exploring the mystical dimensions of faith. Der-

vishes are known for pledging poverty or austerity, and for the pursuit of religious ecstasy through meditation, chanting, fasting, or beating of drums, for example. The so-called “whirling dervishes” are practitioners of an order that heighten their meditation by spinning.

Du’a: A prayer or invocation. It is a short, often impromptu prayer, as opposed to *namaz,* the ritual prayer that is made five times daily. Du’a can be made to ask for blessing or assistance, for example, or to praise God.

“*Inna lilahi wa inna lilahi raji’oon*”: A phrase said as a prayer for the dead or just before death. The phrase is Arabic, taken from the second chapter of the Qur’an, and means “We belong to God, and we return to God.”

Eid: Literally, “holiday.” The two most important Islamic holidays are Eid al-Fitr, which occurs at the end of Ramadan, and Eid al-Adha, which occurs at the end of the annual Hajj.

Faqir: A religious mendicant (see also *qalandar*, *dervish,* and *malang*).

Fard: A religious obligation.

Fatwa: Literally, a “religious decree.” In sharia law, a *fatwa* is a legal opinion issued by a mufti. In the Sunni faith (unlike that of the Shi’a) religious decrees are not always legally binding, and conflicting *fatwas* on the same topic are common. Typically, a fatwa is issued to serve as guidance on religiously appropriate course of action in a particular circumstance.

Fitna: Literally “disorder, sedition, civil war.” *Fitna* is often seen as the opposite of the order established by God’s religion.

Fiqh: Literally, “jurisprudence.” Also refers to the study and the interpretation of sharia law.

Ghazi: Holy warrior. In Afghanistan, it is often taken to mean "Muslim warrior" or “hero,” and is roughly analogous to mujahideen in local parlance.

Hadd (plural: *hadud*): A punishment imposed for acts forbidden by the Qur'an. The hadd is the right or claim of Allah and no pardon or amicable settlement is possible once these cases have been brought before the *qazi.*

Hadith (plural: *ahadith*): A narrative that records of the words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad. *Hadith* is considered second in authority to the Qur'an and a source of Muslim belief and practice. They constitute a major aspect of understanding of Islam and Islamic law.

Hafiz: One who has memorized the Qur'an. Memorization of the Qur'an is considered a great and noble achievement. Memorization does not mean that the hafiz understands the meaning of the words, nor is memorization a requirement for advanced Islamic study.

Hijab: *Hijab* is the practice of dressing modestly, which all Muslims past the age of puberty are instructed to do in the Qur'an. The word *hijab* is also frequently used to refer to a headscarf worn by a woman. No precise dress code for men or women is set out in the Qur'an and various scholars have interpreted the meaning of *hijab* in different ways. The basic requirements are that when in the presence of someone of the opposite sex, Muslims should dress in a way that does not draw sexual attention.

Hajj: The pilgrimage to Mecca. Performing the Hajj is the Fifth Pillar of Islam, meaning that every Muslim is required to do it at least once in their life, provided he or she is able to do so. The pilgrimage is a commemoration of the life of the Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim), and takes place over the course of five days.

Hajji: A title given to those who have completed the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. Because it is traditionally more common for someone to perform Hajj later in life, the word is also used as a term of respect for the elderly.

Halal: Something that is permitted by Islam. The opposite of halal is haram. Though it can be used in a wide variety of circumstances, *halal* is often used to describe the religiously appropriate way to slaughter an animal and prepare food. It is the Islamic equivalent of kosher.

Hanafi: One of the four main schools of Sunni legal thought and predominant in Afghanistan. It emphasizes consensus, analogy, reason and intellect in legal decisions and thus is said to be the most liberal of the four Sunni schools of legal thought as well as the most compatible with local traditions, customs, and cultures.

Haram: Something that is not permitted by Islam. The opposite of haram is halal.

Hazara: Ethnic group in Afghanistan, who represent about 20% of the country. Predominately in the central region of the country, called the Hazarajat, but communities are spread across much of Afghanistan. Most, but not all Hazara belong the Shi'a faith.

Iftar: The meal breaking the fast at sundown during Ramadan.

Ijaza: Literally "permission." In Afghanistan, this refers to a certificate given by an alim to pupil, authorizing him to teach.

Ikhwan: Literally "brotherhood." It typically refers to al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin (the Muslim Brotherhood), but many historical and modern groups have dubbed themselves "ikhwan" without having any connection to the contemporary political parties of the same name. In Afghanistan, the adjective "*Ikhwani*" is often used to refer to any Islamist party, particularly those influenced by outside sources.

Imam: A title and term of respect used in several different ways. Most commonly, it refers to the person who leads a congregation in the five daily prayers. In the Sunni context, it can refer to the Caliphs or to the founders of the major schools of legal thought. In the Shi'a context, it typically refers to the descendants of Ali ibn Abi Talib, who are believed to be the proper successors to the Prophet Muhammad. Different denominations of Shi'a recognize five, seven, or twelve Imams before the last one went into a state of hiding. It is believed that this Imam, known as the Mehdi, will return in the last days to rid the world of injustice and oppression.

"*Inshallah*": A commonly-used expression in the Muslim world, literally translated as "if God wills". While often held as evidence for a purported fatalism in Islam, the term is sometimes used to indicate

that something will certainly happen (i.e. that God has the power to make it happen, or alternatively that God doesn't prevent it from happening).

Ismaili: A Shi'a sect also known as Sevener Shi'a. The global spiritual leader of the *Ismaili* community is the Agha Khan, currently (as of 2012) Karim Aga Khan IV, the 49th Imam of the community. The Ismailis residing in Baghlan are led by the Sayyeds of Kayan family currently headed by Alhaj Sayyed Mansoor Naderi.

Isqat: Charity given to the poor or religious by the relatives of the deceased as a waiver for unpaid worldly debts.

Ithna Ashari: Twelver Shi'a, the largest community of Shi'a worldwide and in Afghanistan. Twelver Shi'a believe in a lineage of twelve imams before the *Mahdi*, who went into hiding around 873 AD. Twelver Shi'a follow the *Jaafari* school of Islamic jurisprudence. The name comes from the Arabic word for twelve.

Jamaat Tablighee : A vast, transnational Islamic propagation and repietization organization with a strong following in Afghanistan. The group is an offshoot of the Indian Deobandi movement and was created to promote individual Islamic purification.

Ja'afaria: The largest school of Shi'a jurisprudence, practiced by the Twelver community. It is the most common Shi'a school in Afghanistan.

Jamatkhana: A congregational house where Shi'a Ismailis gather to say their prayers

Jihad: The word "jihad" is usually used to describe a military conflict in the name of Islam, but it can also refer to the internal struggle to live according to the laws of the religion.

Kaaba: A cube-shaped building in Mecca, Saudi Arabia that is Islam's most sacred place. The Kaaba is believed to have been built by the Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim) as a place to worship God. All Muslims around the world face the Kaaba when making their five daily prayers, and it is the focal point of the Hajj rituals as well.

Kafir: Literally, "Non-Muslim, unbeliever, infidel." In its most innocuous usage, "kafir" may be used to describe a non-Muslim in the same way as "gentile" or "goy" is used to describe a non-Jew. However, the word is typically derogatory and frequently politically charged, and is used to indicate that one is not a member of the Muslim community. Thus, hardline *salafists* and jihadists often use the word "kafir" against Muslims who do not adhere to strict *salafist* practices. See also *Takfir*, *Salafist*.

Kalima: The Islamic Testament of Faith. This is a local word for the *Shahada*, the Arabic phrase that contains the essential beliefs of Islam: "La illaha ill-Allah wa Mohammadan Rasool Allah," meaning "there is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger."

Karamat: Literally, "charisma." The term denotes the marvels wrought by the 'friends of God' (such as saints, *sayyeds*, *pirs*, *malangs*, etc.) including miracles, predictions, and the interpretation of dreams.

Khalifa: In the context of Islamic history, a khalifa was one of those who led the Muslim community after the passing of the Prophet Muhammad. In contemporary Afghanistan, it is a title given to the man recognized by a *pir* to teach mystical lessons and to be his successor (see also mauzun).

Khan: An influential tribal figure. Often a landowner in a village or town.

Khanaqah: Sufi center for meeting and meditation, center of activity associated with a Sufi *pir*. A *khanaqah* is often attached to a shrine, mosque, or madrasa.

Khateeb: One who delivers the Friday sermon at a mosque.

Khutba: The sermon delivered at the Friday prayer service.

Langar: An eating area for disciples and visitors to a Sufi *pir*. Often associated with Sufi *Khanaqah* lodges.

Madrasa (plural: *Madaris*): A religious school. While the word "madrasa" simply means "school," in Afghanistan it carries the context of a

traditional school where religious instruction is the sole focus of education.

Maktab: Literally, "A School where one learns to write." The term refers to a lower level religious school. Today, the term is also used to refer to ordinary public schools.

Malang: A wandering mystic, imbued with special powers to perform miracles and heal the sick (see also *darvish*, *faqir*, and *qalandar*). In order to better connect with the divine, many *malang* embrace poverty and seek to detach themselves from materialism. They tend to live on the fringe of society.

Masjid: Mosque.

Maulana (also pronounced *maulawi* or *maulavi*): A religious scholar with an advanced degree capable of interpreting Islamic law. Considered to be a part of the elite *ulema* community. Often associated with a madrasa.

Mia: Honorific title used for descendants of certain venerated saints; sometimes used in the Afghan frontier for *sayyeds*, descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

Minbar: A pulpit in a mosque.

Mirhab: A niche in a mosque wall that indicated the direction towards Mecca.

Mujahed (plural: *mujahideen*): One who fights *jihad*.

Mujtahid: A legal expert in the Shi'a faith who is qualified to exercise *ijtihad* (individual reasoning or independent judgment) in regards to sharia law.

Mullah: A learned man who typically administers a local village mosque and leads daily prayers. He may or may not have formal religious raining. Villages without state schools typically rely on the mullah to provide at least an elementary-level education.

Mudarri: Teacher in a madrasa.

Murid: Disciples of a Sufi *pir.*

Mufti: An expert in Islamic law qualified to give authoritative legal opinions (i.e., *fatwas*).

Muezzin: The person who gives the call to prayer.

Naqshbandiyya: The most prominent Sufi order in Afghanistan. Many Afghan Naqshbandi are linked with the Mujaddedi family. Sibghatullah Mujaddedi, leader of the Mujahideen Jabha-i Nejat-i Melli party, became the head of this order when his predecessor, along with 79 male members of the family, were executed in Kabul by the Taraki-Amin government in January 1979. The Sufi brotherhoods in Kabul and around Mazar-i-Sharif are mostly associated with the Naqshbandiya. Leadership is derived from heredity, rather than religious scholarship.

Namaz: Literally, "prayer." This is the Persian word for Islamic prayer (*salat*), commonly used in Afghanistan.

Nowruz: The Persian New Year, commonly celebrated throughout Afghanistan. It was once banned by the Taliban but today it has become a national holiday.

Pashtunwali: The Pashtun honor code and tribal law.

Pir: A title used for saints and for masters of a Sufi orders. *Pirs* are endowed with substantial authority and are considered to be religious elites akin to the *maulana.* As they are believed to be channels for divine intervention.

Qaderiya: A prominent Sufi orders in Afghanistan led by *Pir* Ahmad Gailani. The Qadiriya are found mainly among the eastern Pashtun of Wardak, Paktia and Nanagarhar, including many Ghilzai (Ghiljai) nomadic groups. Other smaller groups are settled in Kandahar and in Shindand, Farah Province.

Qalandar: Religious mendicant (see *malang*).

Qari: One who has learned to recite the Qur'an according to traditional rules for pronunciation and inflection.

Qazi: An Islamic judge, usually appointed by the government.

Qur'an (Quran, or Koran): The religious book of Muslims around the world, believed to be the Word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, between 610 and 632 AD.

Ramadan (Ramazan): Ninth month in the lunar calendar, the Islamic month of fasting. In Afghanistan, the first day of Ramadan is a national holiday during which government offices are closed.

Rakat: The prescribed movements and words followed by Muslims during prayer.

Sadaqa: Charity beyond the required annual *zakat.*

Sharia: Islamic law. Sharia is the body of legislative knowledge used by Islamic scholars and lawyers in the various schools of jurisprudence that have been derived from the Qur'an and *sunnah.* There are four prominent schools of Islamic law followed by Sunnis: Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki, and Shafi'i. The most prominent school of Shi'a jurisprudence is Ja'fari.

Shahadah: The Muslim profession of faith and the First Pillar of Islam. It is also known as *kalima.* The creed is recited at the end of every daily prayer. It succinctly states: "There is no god but Allah (God), and Muhammad is His Prophet/Messenger."

Shahid: A martyr who dies in the cause of Islam.

Sheikh: A term of respect, typically used in Afghanistan to refer to a man of religion or the head of a Sufi tariqah. The term may also be used as Shaikh ul-Islam.

Silsila: A "chain" or lineage of Sufi masters.

"*Salaam Alaykum*": A typical Afghan greeting. Literally "peace be upon you."

Salafist: Derived from "*salaf,*" meaning a righteous companion of the Prophet Muhammad, a *Salafist* (sometimes "*Salafi*") is a follower of a

movement that sees itself as returning to the original tenets of Islam. There are many varieties of *Salafists*, but the term is often used to describe extremists who embrace hard-line "reformist" Islamist politics.

Shura: A council, advisory body.

Shi'a: A denomination of Muslims. The term "Shi'a" has its origins in a split in the Muslim community over who should succeed the Prophet Muhammad. The Shi'a were those who favored his cousin, Ali. Initially a political division, over time the differences between Sunni and Shi'a became more distinct as the branches diverged on doctrine and practice. Contemporary Shi'a in Afghanistan are divided between two groups, Twelvers and Ismailis. About 20% of Afghans (mainly the Hazara) are Shi'a.

Sufi: An adherent of Sufism. A Sufi could be Sunni or Shi'a, but believes in a more mystical and spiritual form of Islam.

Sufism: The religious practice of seeking the inner, mystical dimension of Islam. There are three prominent Sufi orders in Afghanistan: the Naqshbandiya, Qadiriya, Chishtiya. A small number of adherents of the Suhrawardi brotherhood are also said to reside in Afghanistan.

Suhrawardi: A Sufi order founded by Abu al-Najib al-Suhrawardi (1097 – 1168), an Iranian Sufi. He studied Islamic law in Baghdad, then set up a retreat by the river Tigris, where he gathered disciples, which eventually came to be the Sufi order of Suhrawardiya.

Sunni: The largest denomination of Muslims worldwide, and in Afghanistan. The Sunni tradition derives from those Muslims who accepted Abu Bakr as the rightful first Caliph, or successor, to the Prophet Muhammad, as opposed to those who favored Ali, who became known as the Shi'a. Contemporary Sunni jurisprudence is divided into four schools: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali.

Sayyed: A descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. The ability to trace one's lineage directly back to the Prophet Muhammad is a mark of great honor and respect in Islamic societies. While individual *sayyeds* may not necessarily be religious figures, religious figures who are *sayyeds* benefit from additional prestige that accompanies that sta-

tus. In Afghanistan, the term is sometimes also used for healers and holy men in general. They are seen as a tribe unto their own by Pashtuns.

Sunnah: The practice and example of the Prophet Muhammad. *Sunnah* includes the Prophet's words, habits, and practices as recorded in the *ahadith*. Since Muhammad is considered the best example for sharia, *sunnah* is often used as the basis for reasoning in Islamic law. It also provides examples of how to best live daily life.

Tabligh: Preaching, proselytizing. Tablighi Jamaat is a religious revival organization found throughout South, Central, and Southeast Asia that is dedicated to bringing Muslims closer to their faith. Although the organization is adamantly non-political and pacifist, terrorist organizations have occasionally infiltrated the group and/or posed as members as cover.

Takyakhanas: A community hall and place of worship for Shi'a; a Shrine to Imam Hussein where the tragic stories of Hasan and Hussein are reenacted.

Takfir: Excommunication; declaring a person to be an apostate or unbeliever. Salafi jihadi groups use takfir as a way to justify the killing of Muslims. See kafir.

Talib (plural: Taliban): A student of religion. The Taliban are so named because their movement began among students in radical madrasas.

Taqiyya: An Arabic term meaning the dissimulation or act of concealing one's faith in the face of persecution (*dorough ba maslehat* in Dari.) Islam does not condone the notion of suffering tyranny in order to prove one's faith. Rather, if one is likely to be persecuted for being Muslim, one's true faith should be hidden. The idea of *taqiyya* is much more common among the Shi'a who have been more widely persecuted than Sunnis.

Tariqah: Literally, "the path." In Afghanistan *tariqah* refers to a Sufi order or brotherhood

Tawheed: Unity, oneness, monotheism. The Islamic concept of monotheism emphasizes that there is only one God, undivided and eternal, without an equal or manifestation.

Tawiz: Literally, "amulet or talisman." The tawiz usually consists of small amulet that contain pieces of paper with verses from the Qur'an that are believed to cure illness and protect against misfortune.

Ulema (singular: *Alim*): Religious leadership. The term "*ulema*" refers to the class of religious scholars that are engaged in Islamic studies. Members of the *ulema* have typically been educated in the religious sciences, such as *fiqh*, *hadith*, and *tafsir*, although in Afghanistan some scholars considered among the ulama may have received less formal education.

Umrah: The lesser pilgrimage to Mecca. Whereas the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca is a pillar of Islam and must be done at one particular time of the year, *umrah* made at any time of the year. *Umrah* also includes only some of the rituals involved in the Hajj.

Wahhabi: The term used to describe the teachings and followers of Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, an 18th-Century Arabian cleric. The religious teachings of Abdul Wahhab were embraced by the Al Saud before their conquest of Arabia and have been incorporated into the foundations of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism teaches strict, Salafi interpretation of the Qur'an and *sunnah*, and its practice has been exported widely as a result of Saudi proselytizing. Many madrasas in Afghanistan and Pakistan have adopted Wahhabi teachings, either in part or fully, because of the availability of Saudi teaching materials and the financial support of wealthy Saudi donors.

Waqf (pl. awqaf) – Religious endowment. *Waqf* is typically real estate that has been donated to the state for religious purposes.

Wazifa: Activities that Talibs do in order to collect money to fund their madrasa. This will normally entail singing a religious song, or reciting a prayer. The term also refers to a pension or stipend granted to a religious leader by the government.

Wudu: Ablutions, or obligatory cleansing rituals for Muslims to be performed before prayer. It consists of washing the hands, mouth,

face, arms up to the elbows, and feet. In the absence of water, clay or sand may be used.

Zakat: Tithing, Third Pillar of Islam. A religious tax incumbent on Muslims Islamic tax, a legal alms tax raised by Muslims as a religious obligation that Muslims are supposed to give to charity.

Zikr: Mystical act associated with Sufism involving the repeated recitation of sacred phrases. Sufi practice consisting of the reputation of the name of God, a spiritual remembrance act associated with Sufism involving the repeated association of sacred phrases.

Ziarat: A shrine commemorating a religious figure or containing a holy relic. Though the veneration of shrines is technically prohibited under Islam, Afghans undertake pilgrimages to the *ziarats* to pray and receive blessings, particularly in times of crisis Shrines vary in form from simple mounds of stone or mud to ornately decorated complexes. They are often marked by cloth flags flying on poles, and many also have goat horns either on the flagpoles, on their own poles, or on the ground.

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[150] (U) The authority of religious leaders in Afghanistan is derived from religious training, age, reputation as a teacher and mediator, source of patronage, family ties, and other social connections.
[151] (U) Under the Taliban government of the 1990s mullahs increased in political and social status, and in income vis-à-vis other community leader such as tribal elders. They were in demand as the teachers in madrasas – the approved form of education under the Taliban – and as administrators in the government at all levels.
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[164] (U) Peace Training and Research Organization, field interviews of clerics, community leaders, and government officials in Nangahar, Balkh, Kandahar, and Kabul; conducted May-June 2012, interview transcripts provided to author.

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[212] (U) Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
[213] (U) That said, there have been attempts by the government to build Afghan schools. Darul-uloom-e-Sharia (Abu-Hanifa) is a significant religious institute in Kabul. This institute has graduated thousands of religious students over the past many decades including former president Burhanuddin Rabbani.
[214] (U) From its inception in 1867, the Deoband movement fused some aspects of Sufism with the study of the *hadith* and strict adherence to sharia, as well as advocating non-state-sponsored Islamic *da`wah*.

[215] (U) Ralph H. Magnus and Eden Naby, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002); John Butt, Ahmed Rashid, Peter Mardsden, Christine Aziz, *Crosslines Essential Field Guide to Afghanistan: Crosslines Essential Field Guides to Humanitarian and Conflict Zones,* (London: Crosslines Essential Media, 2011); Peace Training and Research Organization, field interviews of clerics, community leaders, and government officials in Nangahar, Balkh, Kandahar, and Kabul; conducted May-June 2012, interview transcripts provided to author..

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[218] (U) Darul-uloom Haaqania is the most significant destiny for Afghan students in Pakistan. This Madrasa propagates the Deobandi current of Sunni Islam. It is most famous for having many senior leaders of Afghanistan Taliban among its alumni, including Mullah Omar.

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[233] (U) One of the most significant Afghan Mujahideen parties that fought against the Russian invasion of Afghanistan is Itihad-i-Islami. The leader of party Professor Abdul Rab Rasul Sayyaf is a follower of Wahabi school and has received substantial financial support from Saudi government during 80s. Professor Sayyaf is currently a member of Afghanistan Parliament and has maintained close relation with President Karzai.
[234] (U) Ron Moreau and Sami Yousafzai, “Afghanistan’s Taliban Wish Al Qaeda Would Go Away,” *Newsweek Magazine*, 13 August 2012, accessed 13 August 2012 at http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2012/08/12/afghanistan-s-taliban-wish-al-qaeda-would-go-away.html.
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[296] (U) *Pashtunwali* is the legal framework of Pashtun customary law. It is organized around several key elements: revenge (*badal*), forgiveness/reconciliation and sanctuary (*nanawati*), personal honor (*ghayrat*), and defense of female honor (*namus*). *Pashtunwali* provides restorative justice, which requires the criminal to be seen paying compensation, which in turn allows the victim to regain his moral status and honor.
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[438] (U) Author's personal experience suggests provincial and district government officials and *Shura-e Ulema* members by and large support the continued presence of the international community and favor ongoing collaboration. However, some will publicly pander to anti-coalition sentiments when it is politically expedient.

[439] (U) The recommendations provided in this section were derived from interviews with Afghan clerics, ISAF cultural advisors, and Afghan academics and legal scholars. In addition, various coalition force cultural awareness training briefings and manuals were used. "Afghanistan: Operational Culture for Deploying Personnel," FOUO, Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL), Training and Education Command (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps Combat Development Command, 2009); "Afghanistan: Behavior and Etiquette," Operational Culture Awareness Training, Center for Information Dominance: Center for Language, Regional Exper-

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[441] (U) Abd al-Rahman b. Yusuf, "Qur'an: Can't Touch a Translation of the Qur'an without Wudu," *Sunni Path* 2008, accessed at
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[443] (U) Muhammad b. Adam al-Kawthari, "Would It Be Permissible to Use a Paper Shredder to Dispose of Material with Qur'anic Verses on Them?" *Sunni Path* 2008 accessed at
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