



WEST SOUTH ASIA

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Officer Block 2 and Enlisted Block 3

# An Introduction to the West South Asia Region

CENTER FOR ADVANCED OPERATIONAL CULTURE LEARNING

# **Regional, Culture, and Language Familiarization (RCLF) Program**

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711 South Street • Bldg. 711  
Quantico, VA 22192  
Phone (703)432-1504 • email: [caocladmin@usmc.mil](mailto:caocladmin@usmc.mil)

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## Introduction

One must distinguish between the study of regions, countries, and cultures. Chapters 1 through 6 in this document introduce a region and provide some information about its countries and their relationships. They do not introduce a culture or cultures. Those chapters simply provide knowledge about the region and the environment in which people with different cultures live.

Regions and states do not have a single culture; instead they have multiple, diverse cultures. Cultures are not necessarily bound by national borders. There may be multiple cultures in a single state, while people sharing a single culture may live in more than one state.

The case study in Chapter 7 is about one specific culture in the region. Building upon the information provided in chapters 1 through 6, Chapter 7 introduces one of the many cultures in the West South Asia region, using concepts discussed in the Operational Culture General document.

## Why This Region is Relevant to You as a Marine

In his U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) posture statement, General Lloyd J. Austin III, CENTOM Commander (assumed command from 2013 to 2016) said “The region is an area rich in history, culture, and tradition. It is one of the most strategically important regions, holding well over half of the world’s proven oil reserves and plentiful natural gas deposits, which are crucial to the global energy market.”

The region of West South Asia falls under USCENTCOM, which is one of the nine unified commands in the United States military. USCENTCOM’s mission, along with national and international partners, “promotes cooperation among nations, responds to crises, and deters or defeats state and non-state aggression, and supports development and, when necessary, reconstruction in order to establish the conditions for regional security, stability, and prosperity.”<sup>1</sup>

The region is of high strategic importance to the United States. Some of the main USCENTCOM priorities include:<sup>2</sup>

- Defeat al-Qaeda, deny violent extremists safe havens and freedom of movement, and limit the reach of terrorists.
- Counter malign Iranian influence, while reducing and mitigating against the negative impacts of surrogates and proxies.

- Prevent, and if required, counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; disrupt their development, and prevent their use.
- Protect lines of communication, ensure free use of shared spaces (including the cyber commons), and secure unimpeded global access for legal commerce.
- Shape, support, and maintain ready, flexible regional coalitions and partners, as well as cross-CCMD and interagency U.S. whole-of-government teams, to support crisis response; and optimize military resources.
- Develop and execute security cooperation programs, improving bilateral and multi-lateral partnerships, building partnered “capacities,” and improving information sharing, security, and stability.<sup>3</sup>

Afghanistan remains one of the U.S. top priorities in the region. The U.S. is committed in supporting Afghanistan, in partnership with NATO, to build a secure and stable country that is regionally integrated. United States forces have been in Afghanistan for more than 14 years and the U.S. has invested precious lives and resources to maintain its achievements in the country. Afghanistan was designated a Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA) by the U.S. in 2012, and that same year the United States and Afghanistan signed a 10-year Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), which seals the mutual commitment of the two countries to combat terrorism, and promote peace, democratic



U.S. Marine meets with village elders in Afghanistan (Source: Department of Defense)

values, and economic opportunities in Afghanistan and the region. On September 30, 2014, the United States and Afghanistan signed a Bilateral Security Agreement that laid out the framework for a continued engagement and commitment to train, advise, and assist the Afghan National Defense Security Forces (ANDSF) after December 31, 2014. Another agreement was signed on that same date between Afghanistan, the United States, and the NATO allies to continue these same efforts after 2014 as well.<sup>4</sup> These agreements and partnerships help improve Afghanistan’s relations with its neighbors, particularly Pakistan, in terms of increased counter-terrorism efforts and cooperation in the region.<sup>5</sup>

Following September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Pakistan became a strategic partner of the United States in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency efforts, as well as for security and stability coordination in West South Asia. This security partnership led to the capture of more than 600 al-Qaeda members and their allies. The U.S. is Pakistan’s biggest bilateral trading partner, exceeding \$5.1 billion traded in 2015. Most U.S. investments in Pakistan are focused on fast-moving consumer goods, transportation, energy, construction, chemicals, and communications. The U.S. has committed over \$1 billion in emergency humanitarian assistance for disasters in this country. U.S. civilian assistance focuses on five main areas which include energy and economic growth – including agriculture, community stabilization of underdeveloped areas vulnerable to extremism, education, and health. Meanwhile, U.S. security assistance to Pakistan is mainly focused on strengthening the country’s counterterrorism and counterinsurgency capabilities. This security assistance also improves Pakistan’s ability and role in maritime security operations

and counter-maritime piracy. Also, the U.S. provide Pakistan with International Military Education and Training (IMET) assistance which enhances the professionalism of Pakistan's military and strengthens long-term military relations between the two countries.

The United States and Iran – which was known as Persia until 1935 – have had diplomatic relations since 1883. However, the relations with Iran were severed in 1979 when Iranian protestors seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and took 52 Americans hostages.<sup>6</sup> Following this incident, the U.S. broke diplomatic relations with Iran, at which time it became known as the Islamic Republic of Iran. Since the Iranian Revolution, U.S. policy towards Iran has been to reduce its



Lance Cpl. Tom Morton, a 23-year-old team leader with 3rd Platoon, Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, and native of Nashville, Tenn., hands an Afghan child a toy during a security patrol. The Marine partnership is a vital part of preparing the Afghan National Security Forces to assume lead security responsibility in Garmsir (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Reece Lodder)

perceived threat in the region and to U.S. interests, which include the security of the Persian Gulf.<sup>7</sup> Iran's nuclear program, its sponsorship of terrorism, and its poor human rights records prompted the U.S. and the international community to impose comprehensive sanctions against Iran. These sanctions had a crippling effect on Iran's economy, which forced Iran to the negotiation table with the U.S. and international community.<sup>8</sup>

Many of the existing issues in the region are broad in scope. The region is challenged by a number of serious threats including terrorism, sectarian violence, narcotic trafficking and human trafficking, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and deteriorating environment (i.e.; water scarcity or threats from environmental hazards).

## Geographic Overview

### Why a Geographic Overview Matters to You as a Marine

Geographic features include physical and biological factors tied to location, topography, climate, soil, environmental hazards, flora, and fauna. These features influence human and social characteristics such as beliefs, behaviors, social organization, economy, and politics, to name a few. This is not to say that geography determines how people and societies behave, but rather that it has varying effects on what they believe and do.

The locations of rivers, mountains, deserts, and coasts have great influence on where people live, what crops can be raised, and what modes of transportation are suitable. Climate and weather influence how people dress, work, and earn a living. Natural disasters like hurricanes, flooding, and earthquakes can devastate a region, and dislocate a great number of people.

### Countries

The West South Asia region includes Iran, which is slightly smaller than Alaska, and its capital city is Tehran.

Afghanistan is slightly smaller than Texas, and its capital city is Kabul. Pakistan is about five times the size of Georgia, and its



West South Asia region (Source: CAOCL)

capital city is Islamabad. Iran, the biggest country in the region, has a total area of 636,372 sq mi (1,648,195 sq km), making it the world's 18<sup>th</sup> largest country. The size of the entire region is 1.2 million sq mi (3 million sq km), or about one third of the size of the United States (3.8 million sq mi).



## Global Location

Functioning in many ways as a geopolitical transitional zone between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, the RCLF-designated region of West South Asia borders Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to the north; China to the northeast; India to the east; and Iraq and Turkey to the west.

The region's sea borders are formed by the Caspian Sea to the north, and the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and the Arabian Sea to the south. The Caspian Sea is the world's largest enclosed body of water.<sup>9</sup>



Map of West South Asia region (Source: CIA)

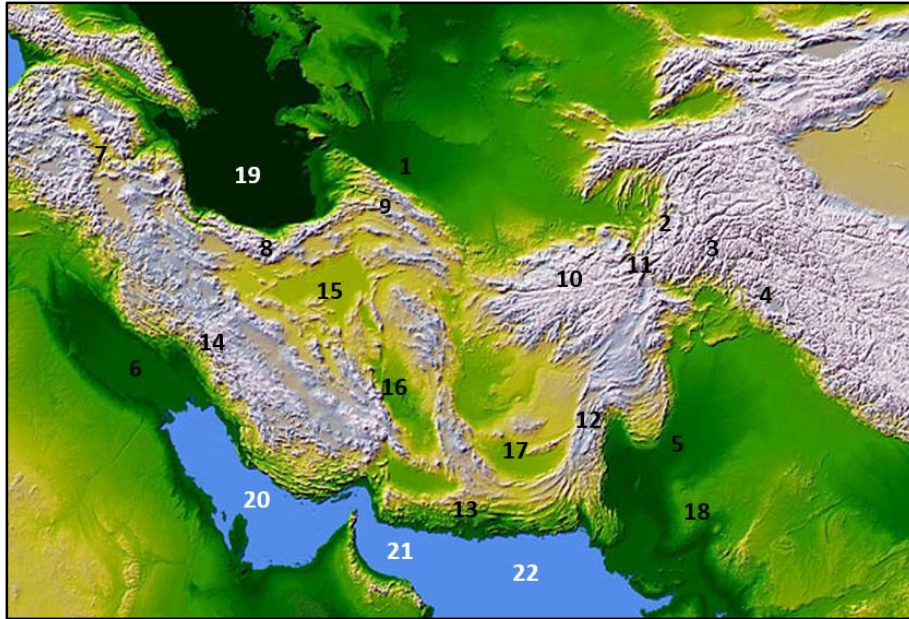
## Topography

The West South Asia region is made up of extremely diverse terrain, with many contrasts. It ranges from high elevations in the Himalayas, to coastlines, to lowland marshes and lush forests, to expansive arid deserts, to river plains and plateaus.

The region's terrain is dominated by the Iranian Plateau. The plateau is approximately 1.04 million sq mi (2.7 million sq km), and it extends about 1,500 mi (2,500 km) from west to east, and about 932 mi (1,100 km) from north to south.<sup>10</sup> About two-thirds of the plateau is located in Iran, while the rest is mainly in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Iranian Plateau is bounded to the north by the Caspian Sea, and, in Turkmenistan, the Kara Kum Desert. To the northeast, the Pamir Mountain range, the Karakoram Mountain Range, and the Himalayas, which is in northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan, mark the border of the region with Tajikistan and China. To the east, the plateau transitions from the highland to the valley of the Indus River in Pakistan. To the south, the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Oman, and the Persian Gulf form the southern border of the West South Asia. To the southwest, the Mesopotamian lowland forms the border between Iran and Iraq, and to the northwest, the plateau abuts the Armenian Highlands and the Caucasus Mountain Range.

The West South Asia region's interior is delineated by mountain ranges, creating distinct topographic regions. The Elbrus Mountains, the Turkmen-Khorasan Mountains, the Paropamisus Range, and the Hindu Kush dominate the north of the region. The Zagros Mountain ranges and the Makhran Mountain Range dominate the southwest and the south. The eastern part of the region is dominated by the Sulaiman range and the Indus River Valley.





- 1) Kara Kum Desert; 2) Pamir Mountain; 3) Karakoram Mountain; 4) Himalayan Mountain Range; 5) Indus River Valley; 6) Mesopotamian Lowland; 7) Armenian Plateau; 8) Elbrus Mountain Range; 9) Turkmen-Khorasan Mountains; 10) Paropamisus Range; 11) Hindu Kush; 12) Sulaiman Range; 13) Makron Coastal Range; 14) Zagros Mountain Range; 15) Kavir Desert; 16) Lut Desert; 17) Kharan Desert; 18) Thar Desert; 19) Caspian Sea; 20) Persian Gulf; 21) Gulf of Oman; 22) Arabian Sea.

Iranian Plateau (Source: CAOCL)

Fourteen mountain peaks in the world are above 8,000 meters and five of them are located in Pakistan. At 8,611 meters, K-2 is – after Mount Everest -- the second highest mountain in the world.

The mountain ranges in this region create formidable barriers to rain clouds. As a result, deserts occupy large tracts of the region's interior. Located in the north-central part of the country, the Kavir Desert is Iran's largest desert. The Lut Desert is located in eastern Iran. The Kharan Desert and the Thar Desert are located in southwestern and eastern Pakistan, respectively.

## Rivers



The Indus River (Source: Wikimedia)

The Indus River, measuring 2,000 mi (3,200 km) long, is the longest in the region, and is one of the longest in the world, stretching from the Tibetan Plateau in China to the Arabian Sea.<sup>11</sup> The Indus and its tributaries are fed from the Hindu Kush, the Karakorum Range, and the Himalayas. The Indus River system is characterized by high water flow variability, with regularly reoccurring floods (around 70 percent of the average annual flow occurs in only two months, July and August).<sup>12</sup> Due to the mountainous relief, the other rivers in the region tend to be short. Melting snow and glaciers on the mountain peaks contribute almost 40 percent of the average annual flow in the Indus. In the spring and early summer, rivers are extensively used for irrigation in this mostly arid and semiarid region. There are no large lakes in the region.

At 58 cubic miles, the Indus River's annual flow is twice that of the Nile River in Africa.

## Climate and Weather

The climate of the region is arid to semiarid, and ranges from continental to subtropical. Temperatures vary according to location and elevation. Weather in the north tends to be hot during the summers and cold in the winters; while in the south, it is usually hot in the summers and warm in the winter. In coastal areas, the influence of the nearby sea moderates temperature variations between summer and winter. High altitudes in the north keep the temperature low throughout the year.

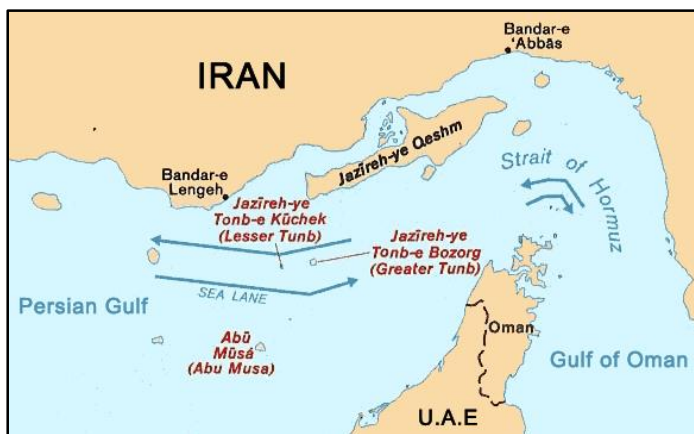
Arid conditions prevail with sparse annual precipitation. Annual rainfall varies from average of 8.9 in (228 mm) in Iran, to 12.8 in (327 mm) in Afghanistan, to 19.4 in (494 mm) in Pakistan.<sup>13</sup> However, some areas receive significant rainfall. Annual precipitation reaches up to 78.7 in (2,000 mm) on the northern slopes of the Elbrus Mountain in Iran. Most of Pakistan, except for the dry west, also experiences heavy rainfall during the monsoon season from June to September. On the southern slopes of the Himalayas the annual rainfall varies between 30-50 in (760-1,270 mm). Because of the large variation in precipitation, successive patterns of floods and droughts are not uncommon.

## Coastline

While Afghanistan is completely landlocked, Pakistan enjoys 649 mi (1,046 km) of coastline on the Arabian Sea to the south. Iran has a 1,516 mi (2,440 km) coastline on the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf, as well as a 459 mi (740 km) coastline on the Caspian Sea.

## Key Terrain

Located between Iran in the north and the Arabian Peninsula -- particularly Oman in the south -- the Strait of Hormuz connects the eastern edge of the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, to the southeast. It is 35-60 mi (56.2-86.6 km) wide. In 2013, 17 million barrels of oil per day were transported through the Straits, or about 30 percent of all seaborne oil. In addition, Qatar used the Strait the same year to transport 3.7 trillion cubic feet of liquefied natural gas per year, or 30 percent of the global trade in liquefied gas.<sup>14</sup> Merely



Strait of Hormuz (Source: Wikipedia)

21 mi (33.7 km) across at its narrowest point, the Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important oil transportation chokepoint. The Strait has two shipping channels – one for northbound traffic and the other for southbound – each channel measures just 2 mi (3.2 km) wide, and are separated by a 2-mi buffer zone.<sup>15</sup>

## Environmental Hazards

The three countries in the region are among the world's states most at risks from natural disasters including cyclones, dust storms, floods, droughts, intense rainfall, earthquakes, landslides, and snowstorms.<sup>16</sup> Often these disasters overwhelm the disaster-response capacity of the states in the region.

Half of Afghanistan's population lives at risk from drought, flood, and earthquakes, with the first two posing a particular challenge. What makes the population especially vulnerable to these natural disasters is the country's low capacity in disaster management and response.<sup>17</sup>

Flood exposure is especially high throughout Pakistan due to runoff from rivers, especially during the rainy monsoon season. Flooding over the last century has caused significant damage to property and loss of life in Pakistan, particularly during 1950, 1992, 1998, 2010, and 2011.



A washed-out bridge damaged from 2010 flooding in Pakistan (Source: Wikimedia)

In 2010, monsoon rains in Pakistan caused a flood that left 2,000 people dead, and damaged or destroyed over 700,000 homes. A record-breaking 10.8 in (274 mm) of rain fell in Peshawar during 24 hours.

In 2005, a 7.6-magnitude earthquake in Kashmir Pakistan killed 73,000 people.<sup>18</sup> In 2003, a 6.6-magnitude earthquake in Iran killed 31,000 people.



West South Asia's tectonic plates (Source: Wikipedia)

Pakistan is also vulnerable to cyclones, which can be especially damaging in the coastal area; this is because the low-lying coastal belt allows storms to travel several hundred miles inland.

Located where the Indian, Eurasian, and Arabian tectonic plates move against each other, West South Asia is one of the most seismically active regions in the world.

## Historical Overview

### Why History Matters to You as a Marine

History provides a knowledge of how people, institutions, and states in a region evolved into what they are today. It also provides insights into people's collective memory about their group and others. In other words, history not only shapes a region's current affairs, but also tells us something about the historical roots of the individual and group identities of its inhabitants.

History does not predict how groups, institutions, and states in a region may behave in the future. Instead, it provides insights into what is possible and probable.

### Prehistory

Written history observes that the first people to populate West South Asia were Indo-European tribes, mostly nomadic herdsman. This group originally populated the lands north of the Caspian and Black Seas in what is today Russia. Around the twentieth century BC, Indo-European tribes gradually migrated southeastward, settling in the RCLF-designated West South Asia region. These tribes emerged as the dominant ethnicity, either displacing or intermarrying with the people who preceded them. Over the centuries, the tribes became well-established; they formed powerful regional confederations and empires, with a majority of them having a "center of gravity" in what is today Iran. Their descendants are now found in all three of the states that comprise West South Asia.

Prehistory is defined as the period before the existence of written records. Our understanding of the prehistoric period is derived from analysis of the archeological record.

**BC/BCE:** the designations **CE** (Common Era) and **BCE** (Before the Common Era) are alternative terms for the traditional Western designations, **AD** (*Anno Domini*, or in the Year of our Lord), and **BC** (Before Christ). Also **C.** or **CA.** refers to *circa*, which is Latin for around, about, or approximately.

### Ancient History

#### *The Achaemenid Persian Empire*

The Medes, one of the Indo-European tribes to settle in West South Asia, was the first group to create a powerful empire and dominate the region, beginning in the seventh century BCE. In the sixth century BCE, a related Indo-European tribe, the Persians, replaced the Medes, as the dominant people



in the region. Over the coming centuries the Persians created the Achaemenid Persian Empire, one of the world's greatest empires.<sup>19</sup>

The balance of power between the Medes and the Persians rapidly changed after Cyrus II became king of Persia in 559 BCE. After defeating the Medes, Cyrus II enlarged his new empire, reaching the Aegean Sea to the west, Babylon and Mesopotamia (in modern-day Iraq) to the south, modern-day India to the east, and Central Asia in the north.

During the rule of another Persian emperor, Darius the Great, the empire ruled over vast expanses of land, extending even further into the Balkans and Egypt. Darius, who reigned 522-486 BCE, managed to consolidate the empire (considered to be the largest in ancient history) by adopting a cohesive governing structure, a single written language, taxation, communication networks, and a firm control over the armed forces.



The Tomb of Cyrus the Great (Source: Wikimedia)

**Cyrus II King of Persia:** founder of the Achaemenid Persian Empire, known as Cyrus the Great. The Persian emperor was born around 590 BCE and died in c. 529 BCE.<sup>20</sup> He reigned 559-c.529 BCE.<sup>21</sup> Cyrus is known for his tolerance and bravery, therefore he is called 'the Father' by Persians. Cyrus is credited for liberating the Jews from their exile in Babylonia. He allowed them to return to Jerusalem and establish the Second Temple on the site of the First Temple in 516 BCE.<sup>22</sup>

As with all great empires, however, the Persian Empire soon began to suffer the stresses of overextension as it struggled to maintain control over a vast territory populated with diverse and rebellious people, while simultaneously fending off constant external challenges. The Greeks to the west of the empire proved more than a match: beginning in the fifth century, the Greeks increasingly challenged the Persians for regional supremacy. In the fourth century BCE, armed Greek forces led by Alexander the Great defeated the Persians and destroyed their empire.

After the assassination of his father in 336 BCE,<sup>23</sup> 20-year-old Alexander became the king of Macedonia and set out to destroy the Persian Empire.<sup>24</sup> In 331 BCE he defeated the Persians in modern-day Iraq. In just 13 years, Alexander the Great conquered the Levant and continued his campaign through what is now Afghanistan and into the Indian subcontinent. His empire stretched from Macedonia, in the west to India in the east.<sup>25</sup> On his way back west, Alexander died, in



Alexander the Great (Source: Wikimedia)

Babylon (present day Hilla in Iraq) in 323 BCE.<sup>26</sup> His death is believed to be caused by either malaria or Typhoid and possibly aggravated by alcoholism. After Alexander's death, his empire was divided among his generals, including territory in West South Asia. Greek influence in the region persisted for centuries.

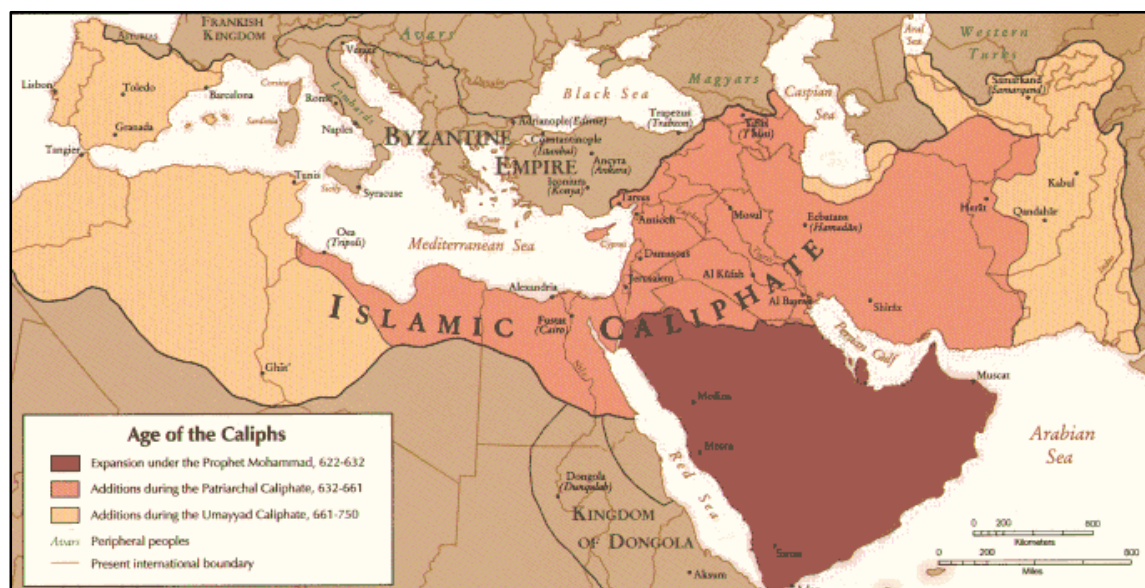
Between the third century BCE and the third century CE, the Parthian dynasty ruled vast tracts of this region.<sup>27</sup> Throughout their reign, the Parthians battled the Roman Empire to the west and nomadic tribes to the east. The Parthian dynasty was succeeded by the Sassanian dynasty,<sup>28</sup> which remained in power between the third and seventh centuries CE. The Sassanian dynasty restored Persian dynasties to power in the region. In order to maintain supremacy, the Persians battled the Roman Empire and, later, the Byzantine Empire (also known as the Eastern Roman Empire).

### *The Turkic People*

Starting in the sixth century, the dominance of the Indo-Iranian people in the region was challenged by Turkic tribes. Setting out from the steppes around the Altai Mountains, the Turkic people moved westward and southward, pushing the Persian-speaking people south into modern-day Iran and Afghanistan. By the early eighth century, the Turkic people firmly established themselves in Central Asia as the northern neighbors of the Persians. The Persians and the Turkic people frequently clashed over dominance in the region.

### *Islamic Period*

The centuries-long wars between the Persian and Byzantine Empires weakened both sides, and made them vulnerable to other invaders. In the seventh century, Arabs conquered Persia and made it a part of the Islamic caliphate, ruling much of West South Asia from Damascus and, later, Baghdad. The Arab conquest also marked the gradual spread of Islam throughout the region. Rather than assimilate the Persians, Arab rulers in the region adopted many aspects of the Persian culture. In essence, the Persian culture of West South Asia transformed the Muslim culture from its simple Arab origin.



Age of the Islamic Caliphate (Source: Wikimedia)



Persians managed to gain independence from the Baghdad-centered Islamic caliphate in the late ninth century, after two centuries of Arab rule. Persia was once again ruled by Persian dynasties that deliberately attempted to revive Persian culture at the expense of Arab traditions. Persian rule did not last long, as Turkic people to the north gradually penetrated the region and imposed their control over a vast territory stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to the west, and Afghanistan in the east.

The region suffered another invasion in the thirteenth century, this time from the Mongols, led by Genghis Khan (1162-1227), who reigned from 1206-1227.<sup>29</sup> The Mongols ruled the entire region until the late fourteenth century, when a Turkified Mongol (Turco-Mongol) -- descendent from the nomadic Mongol confederation, the Barlas -- invader,<sup>30</sup> Tamerlane (also known as Timur), conquered much of it. Ruling from his base in Central Asia, Tamerlane subdued not only the entire West South Asia region, but also penetrated deep into India, sacking the city of Delhi. Although Tamerlane's descendants fought each other over their shared inheritance, they managed to maintain control over most of the region until the early sixteenth century.

### ***Persian Empire Restored***

After four centuries of foreign rule (first by Turkic people and then the Mongols), Persians regained control over the region in the early sixteenth century. During the Safavid dynasty (1502-1736), adherents of the Shi'a sect of Islam, advanced from their stronghold in northwestern Iran and managed to conquer territory all the way to Afghanistan. Shi'ism also gradually became the dominant form of Islam in the region. As soon as the Persian Empire was reestablished, it faced another great power to the west: the Ottoman Empire (1516-1918). Both empires became locked in a contest that lasted for centuries.

The Persian Empire's influence spread east beyond Afghanistan into present-day Pakistan. The Mughal Empire, ruled by Muslim emperors, dominated these lands from the early sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> Although this empire was established by Babur, a Turco-Mongol conqueror from Central Asia, its rulers adopted Persian culture, which they promoted throughout Mughal-controlled lands. The Mughal Empire began to gradually disintegrate as a result of the British colonization of the Indian subcontinent.

**Babur:** born in 1483 and died in 1530, he is Zahir al-Din Muhammad, founder of the Mughal Dynasty, also known as the Mongol Dynasty.<sup>32</sup> Reigned from 1526-30, Babur the Turco-Mongol conqueror was a descendant of Genghis Khan (Mongol conqueror), and Tamerlane (Turco-Mongol conqueror of the same Barlas confederation). Babur was known for his military and statesman prowess. He was also a gifted poet and an autobiographer.<sup>33</sup>

### ***Modern History***

By the eighteenth century, the Persian and Ottoman Empires were in gradual decline, enabling two great ascending powers -- the Russian Empire and the British Empire -- to join the regional contest. After expanding from its stronghold in Europe, the Russians swept south, conquering Central Asia and the Caucasus Mountains, pushing the Persians further south. For its part, Great Britain gradually gained economic control over India, and sought to extend its influence over Persia and Afghanistan. Seeking influence in the same area, Russia and Great Britain reached an agreement<sup>34</sup> to create their own spheres of influence in West South Asia. According to the agreement, the Russian Empire gained

commercial and political influence in northern Persia, while Great Britain gained influence in southern Persia. Thus, while Persia remained formally an independent state, both Russia and Great Britain gained great influence over the country. In the mid-nineteenth century, Great Britain established full control over present-day Pakistan and India, and in the process ended the Moghul Empire.

To this day, there is a perception among Iranians that Russia and Great Britain's influence over Persia from the eighteenth century into the twentieth century is just another example of the West's constant meddling in Iran's internal affairs.

Russia's advance to the south marked a century-long struggle between Russia and Great Britain for dominance in Central Asia. This struggle is often referred to as "The Great Game."

The weakening of Persia also marked the emergence of Afghanistan as an independent player in the region. For much of its history, the country had been part of the Persian Empire, but starting in the mid-eighteenth-century, leaders of Afghanistan's Pashtun tribes managed to conquer territories stretching from Central Asia to the Arabian Sea and into India. The rulers of the new states managed to unify diverse groups of people among whom Pashtuns were the most numerous. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Afghanistan found itself squeezed between expansionist Russia and British colonial presence in South Asia. Russia, looking for a land route to India, sought to establish a friendly relationship with Afghanistan. Great Britain, on the other hand, feared Russia's advances southward. Accordingly, Great Britain sought to dominate Afghanistan, fighting three wars in the country between 1839 and 1919. Afghanistan managed to resist a British invasion and kept virtual independence, although Britain exercised some control over the country's foreign affairs. In 1919, after a month-long Afghan-British war, the two sides signed a peace treaty and Afghanistan gained full independence. Later, Afghanistan also signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union, which created a special relationship between the two countries that lasted well into the 1970s. Afghanistan observed strict neutrality in international relations: the country maintained neutrality during WWII, and refused to take sides with United States or the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

In 1935, Persia's ruler, Reza Shah Pahlavi, who ruled Iran from 1925-1941, announced that Persia should be known as "Iran," which is the name of the country in Persian.

**Shah:** in Farsi, this means "king" or "lord." Shah was also the title given to Persian emperors and kings.

In the early twentieth century the successor to the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, retreated from Iran, leaving Great Britain in semi-control of the country. During WWII, while the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925-1979) reigned, Britain and the Soviet Union once more interfered in Iranian affairs. A shared interest in excluding Nazi Germany from Iran prompted the two countries to deploy troops to the region and set up supply routes – largely to support the Soviet war effort.

After the end of WWII, the Soviet Union initially refused to withdraw its troops from northern Iran; it finally stood down after intense international pressure. Following the Soviet withdrawal, Iran became a close ally of Great Britain and another superpower operating in the region: the United States.

In 1955, the U.S. convinced Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and Great Britain (plus, until 1959, Iraq) to form a defense treaty organization aimed at resisting Soviet encroachment in the region.

After WWII, Great Britain no longer had the resources to maintain a controlling presence in South Asia. In 1947, it ended its rule and India was divided into two independent states: Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan. Pakistan lacked territorial continuity, and was composed of two noncontiguous regions, East Pakistan and West Pakistan, separated by some 1,000 miles of Indian territory.



Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi with President Kennedy at the White House (Source: Wikimedia)

The partition of the former British territory led to violent rioting and massive population movement as Muslims in India migrated to newly-formed Pakistan, and Hindus in Pakistan migrated to India. A significant number of people were killed during this human migration, with casualty estimates ranging from 200,000 to 1 million deaths.

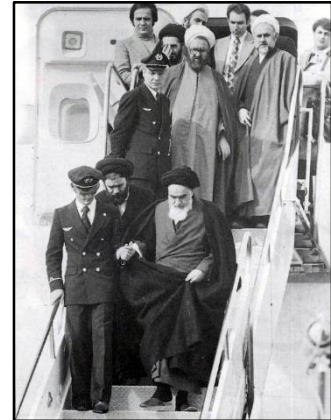
The newly established states also became involved in a territorial dispute over the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistanis believed that Jammu and Kashmir should become part of Pakistan because the majority of the state's population was Muslim. India believed that the state should be included in India because its last leader under British rule agreed to join India. As a result of this dispute, the two countries fought two wars, first in 1947-48, and again in 1965. Reaching a stalemate and coming under international pressure, Pakistan and India accepted a ceasefire. This disputed territory continues to be a major source of tension between the two countries: Pakistan currently controls roughly one-third of the state, referring to it as Azad Kashmir; India controls the remaining territory, calling it the state of Jammu and Kashmir.



Pakistan India Partition (Source: Wikimedia)

In 1971, India and Pakistan also went to war – for the third time in the twentieth century -- over East Pakistan. The cause of the war: West Pakistan and East Pakistan had become locked in a dispute over the distribution of political control. When Pakistani authorities used the military to crack down on dissent in East Pakistan, India promptly sided with the East Pakistanis. After less than two weeks of fighting, the Indian military defeated Pakistani troops; East Pakistan soon after declared independence, officially calling itself the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

The 1970s was a turbulent period in West South Asia. In 1978-1979, Iran's religious leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, led a revolution to topple the monarch. A diverse coalition of clerics, conservative rights advocates, secular leftists, nationalists, unemployed, small business owners, and other groups – all dissatisfied with many issues -- overthrew the monarchy. The Iranians were protesting against issues ranging from uneven economic development, the monarch's modernization and secular policies, and Western influence in the country. In 1980, Iran was declared an Islamic Republic. The post-revolutionary government was based on *Velayat-e faqih*, Khomeini's idea of society and state governed by the clergy according to the Shi'a interpretation of Islamic law and tradition.



Return of Khomeini to Iran from exile (Source: Wikimedia)

In November, 1979, a group of young Iranian revolutionaries invaded the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and took 66 Americans hostage, thereby precipitating a crisis in the U.S.-Iran relations. Iran soon after released 14 of the hostages. After an unsuccessful attempt by the U.S. military to rescue the hostages, the remaining 52 Americans were finally released after 444 days of Iranian captivity.

Iran's standing within the international community was damaged by its establishment of clerical rule, the 1979-80 hostage crisis, and the new regime's professed policy of exporting Iranian-style Islamic revolution abroad. Many Western countries, as well as many countries in the region, feared that Iran's religious-fueled influence would spread throughout the region; many of these Iran-watchers actively sought ways to counter the new regime.

***Velayat-e faqih* or *Wilayat al-Faqih*:** it is the Islamic Republic of Iran's concept of governing. It means the guardianship of the Islamic jurist, or the rule by Islamic jurist, where an Islamic jurist is given power and guardianship over people, supposedly according to Islam. The Guardian Jurist is known as the *el-Vali-e-faqih*, who serves as the Supreme Leader of the government. Following the Islamic revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, became *Vali-e-faqih* of Iran. After Khomeini's death, in 1989, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei became Iran's *Vali-e-faqih*.

A year after the 1979 Revolution, a long-standing border dispute was a pretext for Iraq to invade southwestern Iran. As a result, the two countries fought a war of attrition for eight years, which ended in a stalemate and no territorial gains for either side.

Although the war with Iraq inflicted a high cost on Iran in terms of blood and treasure, the Islamic regime continued to seek influence in the region. Iran extended support to Shi'a groups in the Middle East, including terrorist groups. It also sought to increase its military power by developing missile forces and investing in nuclear technology for military applications. These moves further isolated Iran internationally as many states imposed sanctions on the regime.

Afghanistan did not escape the political and military conflicts sweeping West South Asia in the 1970s. In 1973, the monarch of Afghanistan was overthrown in a *coup d'état* led by Prime Minister Mohammed Daoud, who instituted a secular republican form of government. In 1978, a Communist *coup d'état* occurred and Daoud was executed and replaced by a Communist republic.

The new regime in Afghanistan sought to introduce reforms undermining traditional social norms while expanding cooperation with the Soviet Union.<sup>35</sup> Political instability, a Pashtun insurgency against the communist government, and revolts in the countryside against what was seen as a government assault on traditional values and norms, prompted the Soviet Union to intervene with military force in 1979.<sup>36</sup> After failing to defeat the insurgency, the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, causing the country to descend into a civil war and chaos.

By 1998, one Islamic fundamentalist group, the Taliban, gained control over much of Afghanistan (about 90 percent).<sup>37</sup> The Taliban gave refuge to a terrorist organization, al-Qaeda, which soon committed a series of terrorist acts against the United States. Following 9/11 terrorist attacks committed by al-Qaeda, the U.S. militarily intervened in Afghanistan and overthrew the Taliban that provided sanctuary to al-Qaeda. The U.S. and its allies maintained military presence in the country until 2014.





Persian artifacts (Wikimedia)



Cyrus (Wikimedia)



Persian helmet (Wikimedia)

Standard of the Crown Prince of Iran (Wikimedia)



Iranian Revolution (Wikimedia)



In 1973 the monarch in Afghanistan was overthrown. In 1978 a Soviet Union-backed Communist government was established. The Soviet intervened and withdrew in 1989.

The Pahlavi Dynasty reigned in Iran. It ended when Khomeini led a revolution, toppled the monarch, and established the Islamic Republic of Iran. A theological government ruled by clergy. Iran's relations with the U.S. were severed after a group of protesters invaded the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and took 66 Americans hostages.

The Mughal Empire dominated the region

Mongols, led by Genghis Khan, invaded the region and ruled the entire region.

The Sassanian Dynasty restored the Persian dynasties in the region and battled the Byzantine Empire.

Greek forces led by Alexander the Great defeated the Persians and destroyed their empire.

Cyrus the Great founded the Achaemenid Persian Empire

Indo-European tribes settled in West South Asia



The Medes Empire



Persian soldiers. (Wikimedia)

Darius ruled the Persian Empire which became the world's largest at this point in history

Carved Faravahar (Wikimedia)



The Parthian Dynasty ruled vast traces of West South Asia. They battled the Romans

Islamic-Arab forces conquered Persian and made it part of the Islamic Caliphate.



Umayyad Dinar (Wikimedia)

The Persians regained control over the region. The Persian Safavid Dynasty, adherent of Shi'a Islam, conquered territory and Shi'ism became the dominant form of Islam in the region. The Safavids became locked in a contest with the Ottoman Empire that lasted for centuries.

Afghanistan gained independence

Marines in Afghanistan (Wikimedia)



After WWII, Great Britain ended its controlling presence in South Asia. India was divided into two independent states, Hindu-majority India, and Muslims-majority Pakistan.

Afghanistan descended into civil war and chaos. Taliban ruled much of Afghanistan in 1990s. Al-Qaeda committed 9/11 2001 terrorist attacks. In 2001 the U.S. military intervened in Afghanistan and overthrew the Taliban that provided sanctuary to al-Qaeda.



## People and Society

### Why People and Society Matter to You as a Marine

Missions across the range of military operations require Marines to understand, and work with, foreign populations. Knowing the people in the region, including their ethnicities, languages, and religions, as well as the way they live in social entities, enables Marines to create a mental picture of the human dimension of the region.

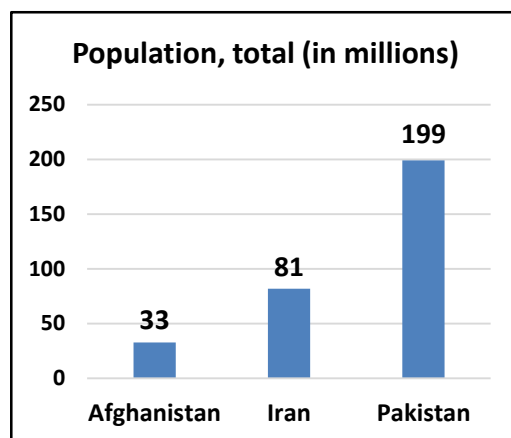
### Population

Although the combined size of the three countries in West South Asia region is less than a third of the size of the United States, its total population almost equals the American population: 313 million people live in this region; 321 million people live in the U.S.

At 240 people per sq km (about 619 per sq mil) of land area, Pakistan has the highest population density, while Afghanistan and Iran have 48 people per sq km (about 120 per sq mil). By comparison, America's population density is merely 34 people per sq km. Due to topography and climate, including rugged mountains and deserts, some areas in West South Asia have significantly lower population density than others. Hence the central parts of

Iran, the mountains of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the deserts of all three countries are only sparsely populated, while some coastal areas and especially the river valleys have very high population density. For example, over 16 million people live in Pakistan's largest city, Karachi, while over 8 million people live in the country's second largest city, Lahore. The majority of Pakistan's population lives in the Indus River Valley, which forms an arc from the city of Peshawar in the northwest, east to Lahore, and south to Karachi.<sup>38</sup> Also, Iran's capital, Tehran is home to over eight million residents.<sup>39</sup>

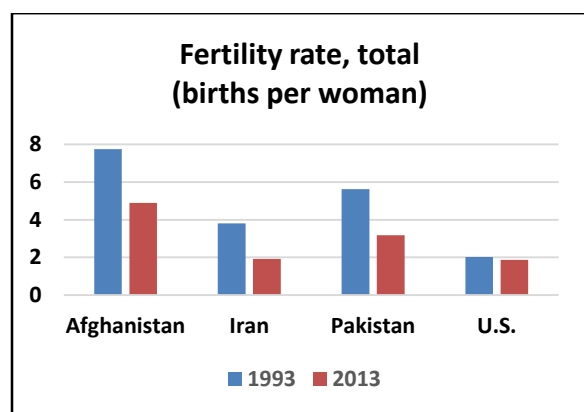
Afghanistan and Pakistan are mostly rural, with, respectively, 26 and 38 percent of the population living in the countryside. The population of Iran, on the other hand, is mostly urban, with 73 percent of people residing in cities. By comparison, 81 percent of the population in the U.S. is urban. The availability of water and resources in West South Asia has always been the main factor on determining where people reside. Coastal zones, oases, valleys, and river deltas in the region have supported human settlement since the Neolithic times and the beginning of agriculture in the region.<sup>40</sup>



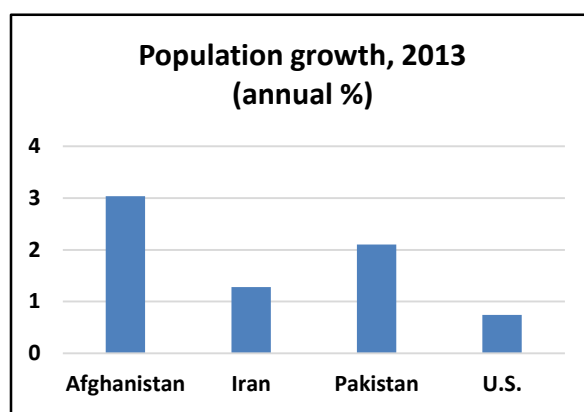
Source: CIA World Factbook, 2015

In the last two decades, the region has witnessed a dramatic slowing of population growth mainly due to declining fertility rates (average births per woman). Nevertheless, Afghanistan continues to have one of the world's fastest growing populations and a very high fertility rate. In contrast, Iran's fertility rate reached a level comparable to the one in the U.S., which is relatively low.

In 2014, young people represented a very large share of the population in both Pakistan and Afghanistan: 35 and 45 percent of their respective populations were below the age of 14. At 24 percent, the fraction of 14-year olds and below was lower in Iran. In comparison, in the same year only 19 percent of the population in the United States was under the age of 14. Overall, Iran has a large young population. Over 60 percent of Iran's 81 million people is under the age of 30,<sup>41</sup> while more than 60 percent of Afghanistan's population is below the age of 25,<sup>42</sup> and 60 percent of Pakistan's total population is under the age of 24.<sup>43</sup>



Source: World Bank



Source: World Bank

The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan displaced millions of Afghans. Many Afghans found refuge in Pakistan and Iran. In addition to being displaced by armed conflicts in Afghanistan, hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees have been forced to flee recurring natural disasters -- floods, droughts, and earthquakes. Following the 2001 U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, over six million Afghans returned to Afghanistan. However, by 2015 some 4.6 million Afghan refugees (2.6 million registered and 2 million undocumented) still resided in Pakistan and Iran.<sup>44</sup> Since 2010, the voluntary return of refugees to Afghanistan has steadily declined as the security situation in the country has deteriorated.

## Ethnic Groups

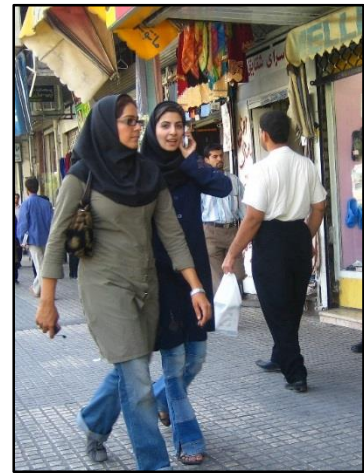
Ethnic identity is a sensitive issue in all three countries, which is one reason why there are no accurate or official statistics for ethnic group populations. The three states prefer to emphasize religion, rather than ethnicity, in order to foster national identity and avoid divisions based on ethnic affiliation.<sup>45</sup> However, different ethnic groups in the region may have different cultural norms, different political and social structures, and -- very often -- different languages. While many of these ethnic groups generally interact peacefully, and often intermarry, this diversity and ethnic mosaic can also be a source of conflict.

The ancient ties that link members of ethnic groups to each other extends well beyond modern-day political borders that define the countries in the West South Asia region. The region is populated by many so-called "transnational ethnic groups." One example of this type of group is the Pashtuns. A

mainly Sunni Muslim ethnic group that possesses its own language and culture, Pashtuns live in northwest Pakistan and in southeast Afghanistan. The ethnic identity of the Pashtuns is far stronger and more salient than any national identity.

The Azeris are another example of a transnational ethnic group. Azeris are clustered mostly in Azerbaijan and northwest Iran. While most Azeris living in Iran are religiously observant Muslims, Azeris in Azerbaijan (having experienced decades of atheistic Soviet rule) are largely secular. What unifies Azeris in these two countries are their shared history and Turkic language.

Persians comprise 61 percent of Iran's total population, and are the country's largest ethnic group. The second-largest ethnic group in Iran is the Azeris (between 16-20 percent). The Kurdish people make up 10 percent of the Iranian population, the Lurs are 6 percent, and the Baloch, Arab, and Turkoman ethnic groups each respectively comprise 2 percent of Iranians. The remaining one percent of the Iranian population is made up of other small minorities.<sup>46</sup>

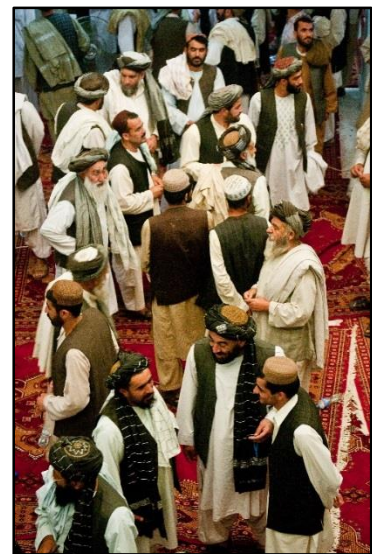


Iranian women (Source: Wikimedia)

Iranians often identify themselves with a specific ethnic, religious, linguistic, or regional background, much as Americans might identify themselves as Texans or New Yorkers. Despite the country's ethnic diversity, most Iranians -- no matter their ethnic heritage -- think of themselves, first and foremost, as Iranian citizens. However, many of the minorities face discrimination and have overtly protested the government's unfair treatment, calling for more rights and representation rather than autonomy.<sup>47</sup>

Although there are many ethnic groups in Pakistan, the major ethnic groups are generally divided along Pakistan's provincial lines: the Sindhis live primarily in Sindh province, Balochis in Balochistan, Punjabis in Punjab, and the Pashtuns in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. However, many of these ethnic groups have migrated to different regions within the country for different reasons. There are other minority groups that do not have a "home province," but are distributed within the four provinces.

In Pakistan, Punjabis, with 44.68 percent of the national population, are concentrated in the Punjab plains. Pashtuns, comprising 15.42 percent of the population, live mainly in the northwest frontier and the Federal Administered Tribal Area (FATA). The Sindhis, who form 14.1 percent of the population, are concentrated in the southeast Sindh province. Sariakis comprise 8.38 percent of Pakistan's total population; Muhajirs are at 7.57 percent; and Balochis, living largely in Baluchistan, are 3.57 percent. There are many small ethnic groups that live in the northern parts of the country. Pakistan has many groups wanting to secede from Pakistan, thus creating a rift in national identity. Some minorities -- such as the Balochis and Pashtuns -- identify more strongly with their tribe and ethnic background.



Pashtun men (Source: United States Navy; Wikimedia)

In Afghanistan, the Pashtuns are the largest and most politically powerful ethnic group; they account for about 42 percent of the total population. Mainly Sunni Muslims, Pashtuns are historically seen as the founders of the Afghan monarchy in 1747. They are divided into five major tribal confederations (the Durrani, Ghilzai, Karlani, Sarbani, and Ghurghusht) and live mainly in the south and eastern provinces of Afghanistan as well as in western Pakistan. Among the five Pashtun confederations, the Durrani and Ghilzai are considered to be the most influential.<sup>48</sup>



Hazara Children (Source: United States Army; Wikimedia)

Tajiks, of Central Asian origin, are the second largest ethnic group in Afghanistan; they comprise about 27 percent of the population. Tajiks live mostly in north, northeast, and west Afghanistan.

Uzbeks and Hazaras each make up nine percent of the population. The Uzbeks live in the central and north-central parts of the country. The Hazaras, who are Shi'a Muslims, live in the Hazarajat located in the mountainous central region of Afghanistan.<sup>49</sup>

There are more than a dozen other smaller minority ethnic groups in Afghanistan, including the Nuristani, Turkemen, Pashai, Qizilbash, Baluch, Brahui, Arab, Gujar, Kyrgyz, Wakhik, and Aimaq. Afghanistan's 2004 constitution officially recognizes 14 ethnic groups.

## Language

The official language of Iran is Persian, also known as Farsi. Farsi is also spoken in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and parts of Uzbekistan.<sup>50</sup> While the entire population of Iran speaks Farsi, about 40 percent are multi-lingual in Farsi and one or more ethnic tongues such as Kurdish (nearly 10 percent of the population), Azeri Turkic (nearly 20 percent of the population), Gilaki, Mazandarani, Luri, Balochi, and Arabic. The commonality of the language and popularity of Persian culture tie people together in Iran.

Afghanistan recognizes Dari and Pashto as the country's official languages. Dari is a dialect of Farsi, with minor differences in pronunciation and vocabulary. Dari is spoken in northern and western Afghanistan, and in the capital city of Kabul. Pashto is spoken widely by Pashtun in the southern east of the country. Uzbek and Turkmeni are spoken in parts of northern Afghanistan. There are more than 40 languages and dialects spoken in Afghanistan.



Tajik woman with a baby (Source: Wikimedia)

Urdu and English are the official languages of Pakistan. The British left a lasting cultural influence on languages spoken in Pakistan: English is one of the country's official languages and the



*lingua franca* of Pakistanis. Urdu, with its formal vocabulary borrowed from Arabic and Persian, is the country's second official language.<sup>51</sup> Spoken Urdu is similar to Hindi; both languages are completely mutually understood. Although Urdu is not the first language learned at home in Pakistan, it is still spoken by more than 90 percent of the population. Urdu is the first language learned at home by only eight percent of the population.<sup>52</sup> Most languages of Pakistan are written in the Perso-Arabic script, with an infusion of Turkish and Persian vocabulary. Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, Kashmiri (Koshur), and Saraiki are also commonly spoken, although there are over 70 native languages in Pakistan.<sup>53</sup>

## Religion

Religion plays a major role in all aspects of life in the West South Asia region; it shapes cultural values and identity. Understanding the impact and role of religion in West South Asia will help you understand the complex dynamics of the region. Religion plays a complicated role in West South Asia; it plays a major role in politics, and is also one of the main instigators of conflicts.



Shrine of Imam Reza in Mashad, Iran (Source: Wikimedia)

Islam is the dominant and official religion in the West South Asia region; the populations in the three countries are almost exclusively Muslim. Iran's population is 99.4 percent Muslim (90-95 percent Shi'a and 5-10 percent Sunni); 0.3 percent are members of other faiths (Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian); and 0.4 percent remain unspecified. Afghanistan's population is 99.7 percent Muslim (84.7-89.7 percent Sunni and 10-15 percent Shi'a); and 0.3 percent of Afghans practice other religions. Pakistan's

population is about 96.4 percent Muslim (85-90 percent Sunni and 10-15 percent Shi'a), and 3.6 percent are members of other faiths (including Christianity and Hinduism).<sup>54</sup> Iran and Pakistan have respectively the world's first and second-largest number of Shi'a.

The Indian subcontinent (South Asia) and West South Asia first came into contact with Islam as early as the seventh century through Muslim traders doing business and settling on the west coast of India. Today, only 15 percent of the world's billion-plus Muslims are of Arab descent. Over 60 percent of the global population of Muslims live in Asia.

The inhabitants of West South Asia at the time of the Arab-Muslim conquest were largely Zoroastrians, Hindus, Buddhists, and communities of Jews and Christians, most of whom either converted to Islam or coexisted peacefully with the Muslims. However, non-Muslims, particularly Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians (regarded by Muslims as *ahl al-kitab*, 'people of the book,' or the monotheists) living under Islamic rule, were required to pay special taxes known as *jizya*. They were given the status of *dhimmi* or the 'protected people.'



The Faravahar or Frawahr is one of the symbols of Zoroastrianism (Source: Wikimedia)

***Jizya*** is an Islamic system where non-Muslims, specifically “people of the book,” Christian, Jews, and Zoroastrians, were tolerated, protected, and allowed to practice their faith under Islamic rule upon paying special taxes.<sup>55</sup> They were not allowed to serve in the military.

Eleven percent of the world's Muslims live in Pakistan, home to the second largest Muslim population in the world, after Indonesia.<sup>56</sup> The region's Muslim population is as diverse as it is vast. Muslims are generally divided into two branches: Sunni and Shi'a.

Following the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Iran became the Islamic Republic of Iran -- a theocracy, clerically-ruled government, where religion and politics are intertwined under the Shi'a interpretation of the sharia law.<sup>57</sup> The Shi'a-majority Iranian political leadership has barred public display of other Islamic sects such as Sunni, as well as other faiths, such as Baha'i, Judaism and Christianity. Members of Iran's Sunni minority -- especially among the Kurds, Arabs, and Balochis -- often face discrimination, oppression, and lack representation in the government.<sup>58</sup> While the country's constitution officially guarantees the



Synagogue in Tehran (Source: Wikimedia)

rights and freedom of faith to Islamic minorities (as well as to Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians -- the 'People of the Book' cited in the Qur'an), religious minorities are normally regarded with suspicion. Non-Shi'a Iranians are barred from serving in senior administrative positions in the government. The country's Baha'is are considered apostates and, therefore, are constantly persecuted.



Conversely, Shi'a minorities in both Pakistan and Afghanistan have been the main target of<sup>59</sup> bombings and execution-style targeted assassinations by Sunni radical groups. Many of these groups -- as *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*, *Ahl al-Sunnat Wal Jama'at* (previously known as *Sipah-e-Sahaba*), and *Jundallah* in Pakistan -- are affiliated with al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and/or the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).<sup>60</sup> However, on an official level and despite the fact that Pakistan is majority Sunni country, Shi'a have been actively involved in Pakistan's government and politics since the country's inception. Shi'a have held many senior positions in government, including president and prime minister, and are well represented in the country's parliament.<sup>61</sup> Mohammed Ali Jinnah, founder of Pakistan, was a Shi'a Muslim.<sup>62</sup> Aside from the Hazaras in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Pakistani Shi'a are not typically distinguished by language or ethnicity.<sup>63</sup>

The majority of Sunnis in the region are adherents of the *Hanafi* School of Islamic jurisprudence under one of two major religious movements: the Bareilvi or the Deobandi. The *Ahl al-Hadith* movement is a smaller yet significant movement, and is a manifestation of the fundamentalist Salafi-Wahhabi ideology promoted and largely funded in Pakistan by Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf states. Each of these movements operate their own mosques and *madrassas* (the Arabic word for "schools") throughout the region.

With the rise over the past three decades of extremist militant organizations in the region, the Sunni Bareilvis -- a group largely influenced by Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam -- have come under attack, particularly in Pakistan, due to some of their religious practices, such as visiting tombs and shrines of Sufi saints, and for their use of music and dancing in certain spiritual exercises. These rituals are seen by more fundamentalist groups as being "un-Islamic," and have therefore become a target of bombings and suicide attacks by extremist militant groups.

## Islam

Islam is the world's second largest religion, after Christianity, with approximately 1.6 billion followers -- 23 percent of the global population.<sup>64</sup> Understanding the main concepts and practices of Islam will assist in understanding the culture and practices of people in the West South Asia.

Founded in the early seventh century in the Arabian Peninsula by **Muhammad ibn Abdullah**, Islam is believed to be the third of the monotheistic Abrahamic faiths.<sup>65</sup> Islam teaches that there is one God "Allah," and Mohammed is his messenger -- the final, the 'seal', of all religious prophets starting with Abraham.<sup>66</sup> The name "Islam" is derived from the word "submission," and obedience to God is a primary theme in this religion.<sup>67</sup>

**Mohammed ibn Abdullah ibn Abd al-Muttalib ibn Hashim, (AD 570-632)<sup>68</sup>**

The **Qur'an** is the central book (scripture) of Islam. Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the word of God and the final divine revelation of God as revealed to Prophet Mohammed, in Arabic, by the angel Gabriel over a period of 23 years.<sup>69</sup> Along with the Sunna, the Qur'an provides spiritual and practical guidelines (*sharia* or Islamic law) for leading a Muslim way of life.<sup>70</sup>

**Qur'an** (English pronunciation): *al-qur'ān*, literally meaning "the recitation." The Qur'an contains 114 chapters, which are known as *surah* in Arabic. Also, the Qur'an is sectioned into 30 equal parts known as *juẓ'ū'*, which makes it easier for Muslims to read the Qur'an daily over the course of a month.

There are two major sects in Islam: Sunni Islam, which accounts for over 75 percent of all Muslims; and Shi'a Islam, which comprises 10-20 percent of all Muslims. Additionally, there are several minor Islamic sects, including the Druze, the Ismailis, and Alawites.<sup>71</sup>

### The Sunni-Shi'a split

Both **Sunni** and **Shi'a** sects agree on the fundamentals of their common faith but each fervently believes that its own path is the truest approach to the divine.<sup>72</sup> Islam split into these two branches over a religious-political leadership dispute, particularly over the rightful successor of Mohammed, following his death.<sup>73</sup>

Following Mohammed's death, Abu Bakr, Mohammed's father-in-law and close friend, emerged as the '*Amir al-Mu'minin*,' (Commander of the Faithful), initiating the '*Khulafa'a Al-Rashidun*' Rightly Guided Caliphate. The next caliph was Omar Ibn Al-Khattab; the third was Uthman Ibn Affan; and Ali Ibn Abitalib, Mohammed's cousin and son-in-law, was the fourth caliph.



The Muslim Holy Book Quran (Source: Wikimedia)

**Caliph** means “successor,” and refers to the temporal leader who succeeded Mohammed.

**Caliphate:** is an Islamic government or a state governed by a caliph who is a political and religious leader with absolute power and authority.<sup>74</sup>

It was controversy over Ali Ibn Abitalib that incited the Sunni-Shi'a split. While Shi'a Muslims believe that Ali Ibn Abitalib was the only divinely designated *imam* '*caliph*' to lead following Mohammed's death, Sunnis maintain that the first three caliphs after Mohammed were also legitimate religious leaders and that Ali Ibn Abitalib was the last of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs.

**Sunni:** the name comes from *Ahl Al-Sunna wal Jamma'a*, which means “people of the Sunna and the community.” The word **Sunna** means path or habitual practice in Arabic, the conduct and the way of life for Muslims based on the sayings, teachings, and practices of the prophet of Islam, Mohammed.<sup>75</sup>

**Shi'a:** the name is shortened from the historical name *Shi'a-t-Ali*, which means the followers of Ali Ibn Abitalib or the party of Ali Ibn Abitalib.<sup>76</sup>

Ali's supporters, the Shi'a, believe that he should have been named the first caliph; they also believe that he was Mohammed's infallible, divinely appointed, and true successor. They held that the caliphate should pass down only to direct male descendants of Ali Ibn Abitalib and his wife Fatima, Mohammed's daughter. Conversely, Sunni Muslims regard Ali Ibn Abitalib as merely the last of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs; they believe that Mohammed intended for Muslims to choose a successor by consensus.

Over the years, the political divide between the two sects broadened and deepened, from simply political-leadership disagreement, to include theological discrepancies, opposing interpretations of the Qur'an, and conflicting religious practices.

Sunni Islam has four schools of Islamic doctrine and law (jurisprudence): *Hanafi*, *Maliki*, *Shafi'i*, and *Hanbali*. While Sunnis can elect to follow any one of these schools, Shi'a follow one Islamic doctrine which is the Twelver, (derived from what Shi'a believe in the twelve divinely chosen imams who are the direct male descendants of Ali Ibn Abitalib and Fatima), or *Ja'afari* (derived from the name of imam *Ja'afar al-Sadiq*, whom Shi'a consider the sixth imam and core interpreter of the Shi'a Twelver's jurisprudence). The Twelver Islamic doctrine is also known as *Imamiya*, which is derived from the word *imam*.



Afghan men praying in Kunar, Afghanistan (Source: United States Army; Wikimedia)

Within the Twelver Islamic doctrine, there are Shi'a religious scholars, known as *marja'a*, whom through their experience and theology studies offer their followers guidance and religious interpretations. These scholars study and receive degrees at Shi'a Islamic schools known as *hawza* located in Najaf in Iraq and Qom in Iran. The more distinguished and experienced scholars earn the title ayatollah, such as Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in Najaf. Shi'a Twelvers can elect to follow any *marja'a* from the many *maraji'i* (plural) in Iraq and Iran.

Sunnis strictly follow the Qur'an and the unique interpretation of the **hadith** (recorded oral traditions of Mohammed) through their respective schools of jurisprudence; whereas Shi'a follow the Qur'an and the teaching and recorded traditions of their twelve imams, also known as *Ahl Al-Bayt* (Arabic for "family of Mohammed"). Shi'a scholars use *ijtihad* (reasoning), while Sunni rely on the sourced *hadith* and Sunna.

**Hadith:** record of the collection of traditions containing sayings of Mohammed, the prophet of Islam.

Both sects have different views of acceptable schools of Islamic jurisprudence and who is the legitimate Islamic authority. Today the Shi'a-Sunni split continues to cast its shadow on most of the region's affairs, transforming from a matter of theological interpretation to serious issues with political and military ramifications.

Islam also has an active mystical branch, Sufism and several Sunni and Shi'a sub-branches.<sup>77</sup>

**Sufism** and **Salafism** are two significant Muslim movements that emphasize different aspects of Islam's doctrines and practices.<sup>78</sup> Both movements exist in the West South Asia region; however, Salafism has been largely growing among West South Asia Muslims the last few decades, especially in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Assisted by money and other resources from the Gulf States, especially

Saudi Arabia, the Salafi movement, particularly the Wahhabi, gained a foothold and popularity in the region, primarily during the Soviet war in Afghanistan.<sup>79</sup>

### Islamic Religious Movements: *Sufism*

The word Sufism, or *Tasawwuf*, derives from the Arabic word “suf,” a reference to the woolen clothes that the *Sufis* wear to demonstrate their devotion to a mystic life.<sup>80</sup> Sufism is not a branch or sect of Islam; rather, it’s the inward-looking and mystical aspect or dimension<sup>81</sup> of Islam that exists in both Sunni and Shi’a sects.<sup>82</sup> A member of these groups is called *darwish* or *darwish*, which means someone who gives up earthly issues to seek a personal relationship with *Allah* (God).<sup>83</sup>

The Sufism movement developed in the late eighth century AD,<sup>84</sup> and it focused on the esoteric and hidden meanings of the Qur’anic revelations, as opposed to the literal interpretation.<sup>85</sup> Sufism is centered on the personal and emotional religious experiences of the individual.<sup>86</sup>

Historically, Sufism is organized into a number of brotherhoods or mystical orders,<sup>87</sup> known as *ṭuruq* /*ṭariqah*, which literally means path.<sup>88</sup> Each order or *ṭariqah* has its own religious rituals, and saintly and hereditary leadership structure.<sup>89</sup> The leader of each order is known as the sheikh or *pir*, supposedly a descendent of the Prophet Mohammed. Sufi sheikhs and saints are believed to possess *barakah* (“blessing” or “charisma”).<sup>90</sup> The Sufi sheikhs’ positions are usually hereditary and passed from father to son.<sup>91</sup>



Sufi shrine in Pakistan (Source: Wikimedia)

Sufism mixes mainstream rituals of Islam, such as prayers with other spiritual practices. It aims at a mystical union of the individual Muslim believer with God through lengthy prayer, while performing physical and spiritual movements. One of the most popular Sufi rituals is called *zikr* or *dhikr* (“remembrance” of the divine); this involves chanting and praising God’s attributes while dancing. South Asian Sufis perform a unique dance at these events, called *dhammal*.<sup>92</sup> Sufi dancing is usually performed by whirling dervishes. This particular dance ritual is significant because according to Sufis, *dhikr* is often deemed more important than the sharia.<sup>93</sup> For this reason (and because of many others), Sufis have historically quarreled with other Muslims, particularly *Salafists*, who place greater emphasis on sharia.<sup>94</sup>

Some of the well-known orders in West South Asia are the *Shadhiliyya*, *Qadiriyyah*, *Submwardiyyah*, and *Naqshbandiyyah* orders. As mentioned earlier, Sufis have been the target of fundamental and terrorist groups in the region. Under the rule of Taliban, Sufism in Afghanistan was greatly repressed.<sup>95</sup>

### Islamic Religious Movements: *Salafism*

**Salafism** and the term **Salafi** or **Salafist** is derived from the Arabic word *Salaf* or *al-Salaf as-salib* which refers to the Islamic “pious predecessors” or “forefathers,” “ancestors, specifically of Mohammed’s time”—who are considered by the movement examples to be followed by Muslims. Salafism, therefore, seeks to restore Islamic practices in the way they existed at the time of Mohammed and the early three generations of his followers.<sup>96</sup>



In contrast with Sufism's mystical, cryptic approach (which exists in both of Islam's biggest sects, Sunni and Shi'a), the Salafi movement is an ultra-conservative movement only within Sunni Islam that embraces puritanical religious interpretations and views.

Adherents of Salafism believe that Muslims drifted away from the core principles of Islam set by the Prophet Mohammed and Islam's early followers; therefore the movement seeks to purify society by encouraging believers to return to these principles. Salafism stresses the importance of the principle of *tawhid* (the oneness of God)<sup>97</sup> and follows an apparent meaning and strict interpretation of the Qur'an and the Sunna and Hadith.

Salafists views the Qur'an and Hadith as the essential sources of Muslim beliefs and practices, and regards *al-Salaf as-salih* as the guiding instrument to understand Islam and purify society.<sup>98</sup> Salafists also believe every decision made in daily life should be supported by religious precepts.<sup>99</sup>

Salafism rejects *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning), *ijma'a* (consensus), and *taqlid* of *madhib* (school of jurisprudence)<sup>100</sup> in Islam and any form of traditional or moderate teaching and man-made laws: instead, it embraces a literal interpretation and application of sharia.<sup>101</sup> This directly contradicts the Sufism perspective of a mystical union between the believer and Allah.

Roots of Salafism emerged at first as an intellectual movement led by Mohammed Abduh, an educator; Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, a political activists; and Rashid Rida, an Islamic scholar at Al-Azhar University in Egypt in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Leaders of the Salafist movement intended to create social and political reform through preaching *da'awa* and education where it acknowledged and admired Western technologies and advancements.

However, Salafism evolved over the years and drifted away from its original reformist seeds planted by Al-Afghani, Abduh, and Rida. At some point, segments of the movement merged with the 'Wahhabi' Islamic doctrine practiced on the Arabian Peninsula under the reign of King Faisal during the 1960s. *Wahhabism* was founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792) in the eighteenth century and was adopted by the early leaders of Saudi Arabia.<sup>102</sup> Like Salafism, Wahhabism emphasizes the principle of *tawhid* (monotheism) and seeks to purify Muslim society of any Western influence and *bid'a* (innovations). It is worth noting that Wahhabis identify themselves as *muwahhidun* (monotheist or Unitarians); they consider the term Wahhabi to be derogatory and a form of *shirk* (idolatry, polytheism).<sup>103</sup>

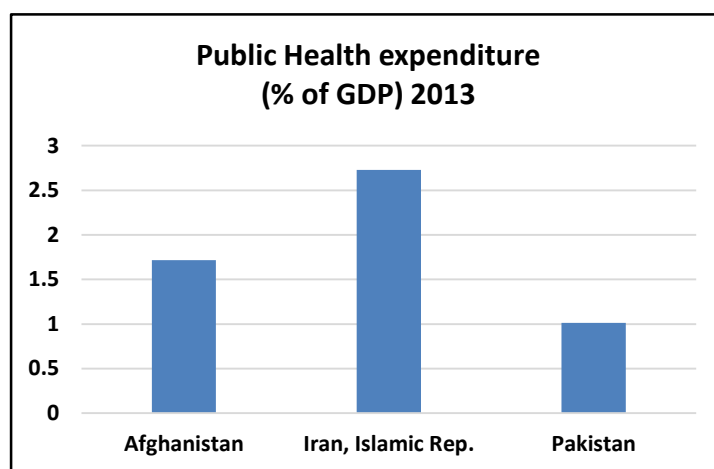
Experts in the field divide Salafism into three groups: 1) 'Quietist Salafists,' who dismiss politics, do not oppose rulers, and focus on non-violence preaching or *da'awa*, (a primary activity of the Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia). 2) 'Activists Salafists,' who are involved in politics and participate in modern political processes and elections. The Muslim Brotherhood and its branches are within this second group. 3) 'Jihadi Salafists,'<sup>104</sup> represented by terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram, al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL).

Overall, Salafism rejects Western (European-American) modes of thought, values, and social organization particularly the concept of a secular state, elections, and democracy. Many Salafists, however, embrace science and technology, but stress that they must be used in conjunction with Islamic values. They insist that sharia (Islamic law) is the solution to social problems.<sup>105</sup> The Taliban, Boko Haram, al-Qaeda, *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*, *Ahl al-Sunnat Wal Jama'at*, and *Jundallah in Pakistan* exemplify the *jihadi Salafism* doctrine.<sup>106</sup>

The difference in theological and political views was the catalyst behind countless attacks in different parts of the region by Salafist Jihadist groups. They destroyed the tombs of Sufi saints and Shi'a shrines,<sup>107</sup> as well as Buddhist temples.<sup>108</sup> (There is additional discussion about Islamic jihadist groups in the Regional Security section)

## Health

All three countries in West South Asia each have healthcare systems that are public (usually financed by the government and run by the ministry of health) and private (financed by public and private insurance policies and out-of-pocket payments). Healthcare is available to most people in the region to varying degrees. Factors such as affordability, the nature of the illness, the availability of facilities, and confidence in the type of doctor usually determine whether a family chooses primary public healthcare or opts for out-of-pocket or private healthcare.



Source: Data collected from World Bank

Out of the three West South Asian countries, Iran<sup>109</sup> has the most vigorous and well-established primary healthcare network. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Iran's "health system is one of the most robust worldwide." According to WHO, Iran's system emphasizes equity, community, inter-sectoral participation, and government subsidizing of essential services. However, out-of-pocket health expenditures, which stand at 58 percent, remain a challenge.<sup>110</sup>

Iranian life expectancy at birth is about 71.15 years. In rural areas, each village or several clustered villages are covered by what is known as a Health House staffed by trained community health workers. One step up is the Rural Health Center, which includes a physician and a health technician. On average, more than 85 percent of the population in rural and deprived regions has access to adequate healthcare.<sup>111</sup> Likewise, in urban areas, there are sufficient healthcare personnel and facilities to cover the population. The Iranian government is attempting to implement reform strategies to enhance the quality of the health service in these urban settings.

Wealthy urban communities, often receive better-quality medical services at private clinics.



Petty Officer 2nd Class Erik J. Belty, a hospital medic assigned to Preventive Medical Detachment, I Marine Headquarters Group (FWD), checks the vitals of a local during a village medical outreach outside Bouldac, Afghanistan (Source: NATO)



Though underreported, Iran is facing a growing and serious drug problem. The majority of Afghanistan's opium trade passes through Iran before it arrives in Europe and beyond.<sup>112</sup> According to the *2015 World Drug Report*, released by the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), the three countries (Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan) accounted for 90 percent of the global quantity of opium and morphine seized each year.” The report stated that “the Islamic Republic of Iran remained the country with the largest quantity of opium seized.”

The sharing of contaminated needles between Iranian intravenous drug abusers has led to the transmission of HIV<sup>113</sup> and rising HIV/AIDS rates.<sup>114</sup> According to data released by the Iranian government, there are 71,000 Iranians living with HIV, 68 percent of whom have contracted the virus through unsafe drug injections. Also, about 15 percent of injectable-drug users and 3-5 percent of non-injectable drug users have tested HIV positive.<sup>115</sup> In recent years, Iranian authorities have allocated additional resources for HIV and drug addiction treatment and prevention.<sup>116</sup>

Afghanistan's decades-long conflicts have resulted in high poverty and death rates, and a serious shortage of hospitals, doctors, and medical staff. Many communities, especially in rural areas, have no basic sanitation or access to safe drinking water.<sup>117</sup> Although the country's health sector saw some improvements in the last decade, infant, child, and maternal mortality rates remain high. Life expectancy at birth in Afghanistan is just at 50.87 years of age. This is mainly because of malnutrition, food and waterborne illnesses (diarrhea, hepatitis A, and E and typhoid), and vector-borne diseases (malaria and rabies). Afghanistan, as well as Pakistan, remain the only two countries in the world with endemic polio. This is primarily a result of Pashtun-based insurgency threats and rejection of polio vaccines, claiming it is a “western effort to sterilize Muslims.”<sup>118</sup> A lack of adequate healthcare forces many Afghans to resort to and rely on “traditional” forms of medicine, such as herbs and plants.

According to the WHO, primary healthcare coverage in Afghanistan has been extended to many areas and districts, reaching up to 82 percent of the population. Despite making much progress improving the quantity of Afghanistan's health services and increasing the number of health centers and coverage, the accessibility and quality of healthcare in the country is still a significant problem. Thirty percent of the population has limited access to healthcare due to a precarious security climate, while 40 percent have to travel about an hour to the closest healthcare center.<sup>119</sup> Lack of skilled and well-trained healthcare providers, especially women, is another major issue in Afghanistan. Most of the major healthcare programs in Afghanistan are funded by multi-/bilateral donors and development agencies such as USAID. The major health sector program, System Enhancement for Health Action Transition



Petty Officer 2nd Class Erik J. Belty, a hospital medic assigned to Preventive Medical Detachment, I Marine Headquarters Group (FWD), checks the vitals of a local during a village medical outreach outside Bouldac, Afghanistan (Source: NATO)



Mobile Health Unit in Pakistan (Source: USAID)

(SEHAT), in the country is supported and funded by the Afghan government, USAID,<sup>120</sup> the World Bank, the European Commission, and the European Union; and is assisted by WHO.<sup>121</sup>

In Pakistan, the government is a federal democracy, comprised of Pakistan's four major provinces: Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (previously known as North-West Frontier Province). Pakistan also has one minor province, Gilgit-Baltistan. Healthcare in Pakistan is managed by provincial health departments, with some provinces having better-quality healthcare services than others.

According to the WHO, urban-rural healthcare inequality is evident in Pakistan. While health facilities, skilled medical staff, and sanitation infrastructure are adequate in urban areas, it is generally poor in rural areas.

Patient services in the Pakistani healthcare system are delivered by state and non-state, and for-profit and non-profit entities. Pakistan has a mixed, multi-tiered healthcare delivery system with a significant number of programs, projects, interventions, and health facilities. These programs are supported and funded by the Pakistani government and/or development partners with varying levels of involvement in different areas.

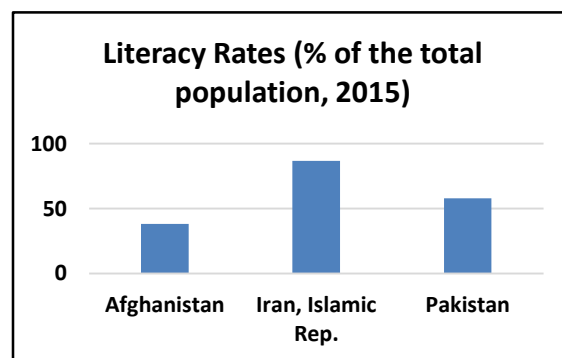
Some of the main development partners in Pakistan's health sector include: USAID,<sup>122</sup> WHO, Government of China, the EU, Saudi Arabia, UN agencies, the World Bank, and the IMF, to name a few.

Despite ongoing local and international efforts and initiatives, Pakistan remains one of the two remaining countries in the world with endemic polio.<sup>123</sup> Pakistan has the sixth highest global rate of tuberculosis.<sup>124</sup> The country also has high rates of malaria, ranging between 2-5 cases per 1,000.

Life expectancy at birth in Pakistan is 67.39 years of age. High rates of mortality for children under the age of five are caused by malnutrition, acute respiratory diseases, and diarrhea. Additionally, Pakistani women remain at risk of pregnancy-related morbidity and mortality due to limited access to reproductive health services<sup>125</sup> and because there are so few female doctors and nurses. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, social customs require a patient to be treated by a doctor of the same gender.

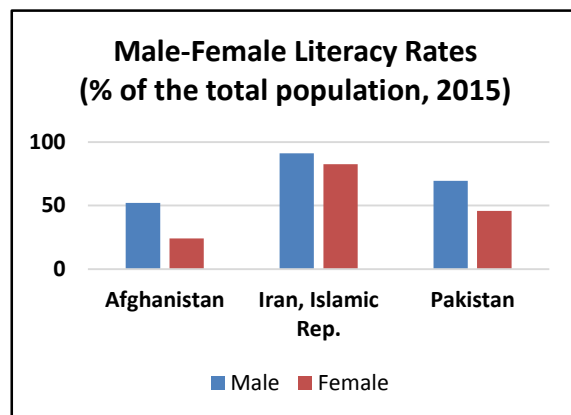
## Education

The three countries that comprise West South Asia have some of the lowest literacy rates in Asia. Literacy rates in Afghanistan and Pakistan remain particularly low, with Afghanistan having the lowest at 38.2 percent. Iran, with a literacy rate of 86.8 percent, has the highest. Literacy discrepancy between males and females is particularly evident in Afghanistan, where the literacy rate is 52 percent for males, and 24 percent for females. Pakistan's male to female literacy disparity is at 69.5 percent for males and 45.8 percent for females. While in Iran, the literacy rate for males is at 91.2 percent and females at 82.5 percent.



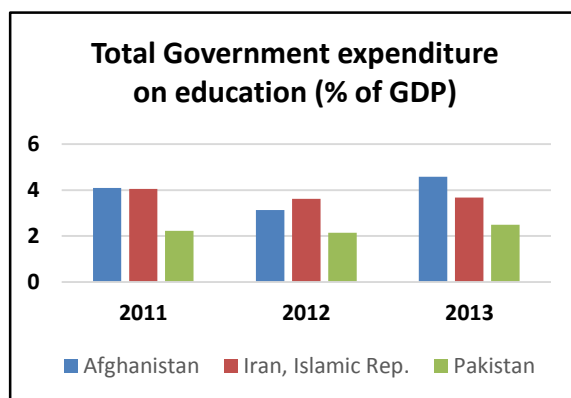
Source: Data collected from the CIA World Factbook

Overall, there is an evident urban-rural disparity in education quality and infrastructure. In rural areas, if children are lucky enough to be enrolled in school, they usually have a spotty attendance record; this is because many children have to work to support their families. Across the three West South Asian countries, rural families are usually hesitant to send their daughters to school, either for safety reasons (especially if school attendance requires traveling) or for reasons associated with tradition and religion. While the Taliban governed Afghanistan, girls were banned from having an education. However, following the toppling of the Taliban, a nationwide public awareness campaign promoting the value of educating girls was launched by the Afghan government and its development partners.



Source: Data collected from the CIA World Factbook

Prior to Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, the education system was Western-style at the elementary and secondary level. Following the Islamic Revolution, the Iranian government aggressively promoted literacy, with an emphasis on educating students about Islam. Compulsory education lasts eight years, from age six to age thirteen.<sup>126</sup> Education is public and funded by the Iranian government. However, compared to urban areas, rural areas have fewer schools. For that reason -- and because of child labor practices and traditional/religious attitudes towards women's education -- rural families are less likely to send children to school, especially females. Many Iranian university students study abroad, especially those who can afford it. Obtaining a higher education overseas is favored by promising Iranian students due to high competition and limited university seats inside Iran. Students who graduate from prestigious foreign universities are highly regarded inside Iran.<sup>127</sup>



Source: Data collected from the World Bank

In Afghanistan, many Afghan children attended school for the very first time in 2002. More than two decades of war and internal conflicts had destroyed the education infrastructure, and forced teachers out of the country; this resulted in an entire generation lacking a basic education. This reality is reflected in Afghanistan's literacy rates.

There are two school systems in Afghanistan: public schools and Islamic schools. Most children attend public schools, while some children can study at the religious schools, known as *madrasas*. Compulsory education in Afghanistan lasts nine years, from age seven to fifteen.<sup>128</sup> The country's



Afghanistan's Ministry of Education with support from USAID have distributed more than 47 million textbooks across Afghanistan in 2014 and 2015 (Source: USAID)

higher education system was ruined under Taliban rule; the current Afghan government is still in the process of restoring it.

The education system in Pakistan is managed by provincial governments, and some provinces are wealthier and better-managed than others. Compulsory education lasts 12 years, from the age of five to the age of sixteen.<sup>129</sup> To attend a university, a student must pass an examination at the end of the second year of intermediate college. For many parents, the only way for their children to obtain an education is through *madrassas*, where students are taught the Qur'an and Hadith.

While the knowledge obtained in these schools is well respected in the country, graduates of these schools possess skills that have little value in a modern workplace. Moreover, some *madrassas* are often described and known to be hotbeds of religious extremism that teach students in extremist and violent interpretations of Islam. As for higher education, Pakistan's public universities largely focus on science and engineering.



COMSATS Institute of Information Technology in Pakistan (Source: Wikimedia)



## Government and Politics

### Why Government and Politics Matter to You as a Marine

Most people live in states governed by formal and informal institutions. Marines need to know how power and authority are distributed in the state by studying the formal and informal structures of governments in the region. In addition, Marines need to understand how people, groups, and institutions exercise power and authority, in other words, what comprises politics in the states.

### Political Order

The three countries that comprise West South Asia are Islamic republics. Because the official names of these countries includes the phrase ‘Islamic Republic,’ -- and because the official religion of all three countries is Islam -- they abide by laws in accordance with Islam, and frequently reject any legislation that contradicts Islam’s tenets and provisions. Pakistan and Afghanistan adhere to Sunni Islamic law; while Iran is based on Shi’a Islamic law.

According to “official” constitutional order in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan, political power is shared between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. However, the manner in which political power is actually divided and exercised in West South Asia varies from country to country.



Source: Data collected from Freedom House

Politics in all three West South Asian countries have also been very volatile: they have experienced frequent violent conflicts that have led to massive changes to the constitutional order and political systems. Iran and Afghanistan, for example, were constitutional monarchies until the 1970s, when revolutions overthrew the monarchs and established a new political order.

In 2015, Freedom House, an independent think-tank, produced its annual survey on the state of freedom around the world. Defining “freedom” within the context of several criteria (the state of civil liberties, political rights, freedom of expression, democratic governance, and rule of law) the report classified Pakistan as “partly free,” while both Afghanistan and Iran were classified as “not free.”

## Afghanistan

Afghanistan has frequently faced political instability and conflicts that have affected the country's political order. Afghanistan was a constitutional monarchy until 1973, when a military coup overthrew the monarch and established a republic. The country did not experience more stability, and as more military coups led to more turmoil, it prompted the Soviet Union, a neighbor, to intervene and send in an armed “stability force.” The Soviet military occupation of Afghanistan would last from 1979 to 1989. The Soviets supported the existence of a communist regime, which had very little authority outside big cities. The Soviet withdrawal did not end violence in the country, and in 1992 the Taliban wrested power and established an Islamic state governed by sharia law.

Following the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, the country ratified a new constitution in 2004 that provided for a directly elected president and a bi-cameral parliament. The parliament is comprised of a directly elected lower house, and an upper house that includes presidential appointees as well as people appointed from local and provincial councils. The new constitution also established Islam as the state religion and prohibits laws that contradict Islamic religious tenets.

**Bi-cameral:** it is a system of government where the legislature, or legislative body, encompasses two chambers, houses, or branches.<sup>130</sup>

The new Afghan constitution also institutionalized the *Loya Jirga*, or “grand council,” a mass national gathering of representatives from the country’s various national, religious, and tribal communities. The Loya Jirga is a century-old institution that has been occasionally convened to settle important national issues, to solve crises, to declare war, to approve a new constitutional order, to choose a new king, or to make sweeping reforms. Although the



A gathering of Loya Jirga (Source: RFE/RL)

Loya Jirga does not have formal powers, its decisions are respected both by the population and the state institutions, including the President and the Parliament, which ratify them into law.<sup>131</sup> Loya Jirga became once again an important institution after the fall of the Taliban, convening several times -- notably, in 2002, to establish a transition government; in 2003, to ratify the new constitution; and, in 2013, to discuss a strategic partnership with the United States.

Afghanistan’s 2003 constitution created a centralized system of government in which the president (directly elected by absolute majority popular vote for a five-year term and eligible for a second term) has substantial powers, while the powers of local governments remain limited. Provincial governors, district chiefs, and police chiefs are appointed by the president, rather than elected by the local population. This political arrangement has created tensions: Afghans living in the provinces resent the powers of the central government; they perceive it as unaccountable, corrupt, and distant.

In accordance with the new constitution, Afghanistan held presidential elections in 2004. Hamid Karzai, the head of transitional government, won the election with 55 percent of the vote. Karzai was reelected in 2009 amid accusation of widespread voter fraud. Constitutionally barred from seeking a third term, Karzai was succeeded in 2014 by Ashraf Ghani, who, like his predecessor, won his presidential seat in yet another election marred by irregularities and conflict. Since the overthrow of the Taliban, Afghanistan has also held parliamentary elections in 2005 and 2010. Similar to the presidential elections, the parliamentary elections were marred by violence, widespread fraud, and voting irregularities.

## Iran

The 1979 Revolution overthrew the monarchy and set the foundation of Iran's current constitutional and political order. The country is a theocratic Islamic republic with a mixed system of government in which the executive, parliament, and judiciary are overseen by several institutions dominated by the clergy. This system of government is justified by the concept of *Velayat-e faqih*, explained earlier, which gives political power to a jurist in Islamic law, known as Supreme Leader, whose characteristics best qualify him to lead the people.



Head officials of the government of Iran (Source: Wikimedia)

Sitting at the top of Iran's political power structure, the Supreme Leader is elected by the Assembly of Experts, an institution comprised of clergy '*ulama*',<sup>132</sup> The Supreme Leader is chosen based on the candidate's personal devotion, expertise in Islamic law and jurisprudence, and political expertise. The Assembly of Experts can remove the Supreme Leader from office if they deem he is unable to perform his duties.

**The Assembly of Experts:** officially based in the holy city of Qom,<sup>133</sup> is an 86-member, all-male assembly of "clerics," each elected for an eight-year term. The Assembly of Experts is responsible for choosing and appointing the Supreme Leader of Iran. They also monitor the performance of the Supreme Leader, and have the authority to remove him if fails to fulfill his duties. All candidates for the Assembly of Experts are vetted ahead of the elections by the Council of Guardians.<sup>134</sup>

The Supreme Leader has no limit to his term in office and has extensive powers including commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The Supreme Leader appoints senior officers of the military and the Revolutionary Guards. He also appoints members of the judiciary,<sup>135</sup> half of the members of the powerful Council of Guardians,<sup>136</sup> and the head of radio and TV.<sup>137</sup> The Supreme Leader sets the general direction of the country's policies.

The most powerful body in Iran, the Council of Guardians, is a 12-member panel of jurists empowered to vet legislation passed by parliament. Half of the Council of Guardians are theologians appointed

by the country's Supreme Leader; the other six members are jurists nominated by the judiciary branch and approved by the parliament. Members of the Council of Guardians are elected for a six-year terms; elections are held every three years in phases, which means six of the 12 members change every three years.<sup>138</sup>

The Council of Guardians has the power to veto any law it deems inconsistent with the Iranian constitution and Islamic law. In addition, the Council approves all candidates standing for elections, and oversees the electoral process. The Council frequently prevents large numbers of candidates from running for office, including for the presidency. Additionally, the Council of Guardians vets all candidate 'clerics' seeking a seat in the Assembly of Experts.

**The Revolutionary Guards:** is Iran's best-trained and most effective military force. Established after the 1979 Revolution, the Revolutionary Guards are comprised of personnel considered the most politically dependable and religiously devout.

The president is the head of the executive branch of government. Directly elected every four years in a national election, the president is allowed to serve a maximum of two consecutive terms. The president is responsible for the day-to-day business of government, and is assisted by a cabinet of ministers. Ministers in the cabinet are selected by the president and approved by the parliament. The president's powers are limited by Iran's power structure – it is the Supreme Leader, not the president, who controls the armed forces and makes decisions on major foreign and domestic policies.

The country's parliament, also known as *Majles*, is unicameral; it includes 290 members elected directly in national elections for four-year terms.

**Unicameral:** it is a system of government where the legislature, or legislative body, encompasses one single chamber.

Local governments in Iran have limited powers. Mayors and the governors of provinces and counties are appointed by the central government, although city councilmen are elected locally.

Iran's judicial system is another branch of government shaped by Islamic practices. The country's chief justice and the prosecutor general must be specialists in Shi'a Islamic law. According to the constitution, all judges must base their rulings on sharia law. After the 1979 Revolution, all laws that were deemed un-Islamic were revoked.

The leader of the 1979 Revolution, Ayatollah Rohullah Khomeini, became Iran's first Supreme Leader. After his death in 1989, the Assembly of Experts elected Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as the new Supreme Leader.

## Pakistan

Since gaining independence in 1947, Pakistan has experienced decades of political turbulence that have frequently led to abrupt changes in the political order. On several occasions, the country's powerful military intervened to impose order. As a result, military administrations have ruled the country for roughly half of its history, most recently from 1999 to 2008. Even when not directly ruling the country,



the military remains deeply involved in politics, exerting great influence over domestic and foreign policies; it frequently mediates conflicts between political parties.<sup>139</sup>

The current Pakistani constitution stipulates a division of power between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. The constitution provides for a president as head of state, indirectly elected for a five-year term (eligible for reelection) by the country's bi-cameral parliament and the four provincial parliaments. The executive branch of government is headed by the prime minister and his/her cabinet, who are elected by the parliament. The lower house of parliament has 342 members, each of whom serves a five-year term. Ten of the seats in the parliament are reserved for non-Muslims and 60 for women, who are chosen by the major parties. The upper house of parliament has 100 members, each serving a six-year term. A portion of the members is chosen by provincial parliaments, while others are appointed.



The first woman to be elected as the head of an Islamic state's government, Benazir Bhutto was Pakistan's Prime Minister in 1988-90 and in 1993-96 (Source: Wikimedia)

Pakistan's judicial system has several levels, including a Supreme Court, provincial high courts, and districts courts. Although Pakistan inherited the legal code of Great Britain, its legal system also has a religious dimension – the country instituted a code of Islamic laws and a court of Islamic law that operate alongside the secular legal system.

Although the overwhelming majority of Pakistanis are Muslim, the population is very diverse in terms of language, religious sects, class, and region. This diversity complicates any attempt to establish a durable political system; as result, the country is frequently destabilized by political crises and violence.

Conflicts that have destabilized Pakistan include divisions between Sunnis and Shi'as; between richer, more powerful provinces and smaller, poorer provinces; and discord between political activists who want Pakistan to be declared a proper Islamic state and other activists who want a clearer separation between Pakistan's government and religion by establishing a secular state. Accordingly, none of the political parties in Pakistan represent national interests; instead, Pakistan's political parties are regionally focused and ethnically or class-based. Many political parties are led by strong leaders and by family networks that dispense patronage jobs and favors largely to relatives or loyal followers.

## Economic Overview

### Why Economy and Infrastructure Matter to You as a Marine

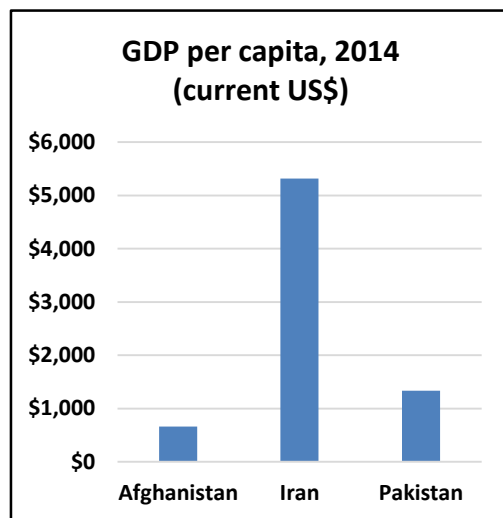
The goods and services that people exchange, the infrastructure that people use to move them, and the formal and informal structures that make exchange possible all play critical roles in survival. A thorough understanding of a region is impossible without knowledge of its economy because the region's political, social, and cultural trends both reflect and shape economic developments and trends.

### Economic Transition

The three countries in the West South Asia region -- Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan -- have very different economic systems, and have each experienced distinct economic changes over the last several decades.

#### *Afghanistan*

Of the three countries, Afghanistan is not only the poorest but also one of the poorest in the world.<sup>140</sup> Afghanistan's economy is highly dependent on foreign aid. Years of violent conflicts have weakened economic activity and destroyed the country's already limited economic base and infrastructure. After the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, Afghanistan's economy improved slightly -- largely due to the infusion of international assistance, the recovery of the agricultural sector, and the growth of the service sector. However, the population continues to have one of the world's lowest living standards. A substantial share of population -- 78.6 percent of the national workforce -- is occupied in agriculture, with many people involved in subsistence farming. The country's manufacturing sector is largely dominated by small-scale production: bricks, textiles, soap, furniture, fertilizers, apparel, and food products. Unfortunately, the production and trade in illicit drugs represents a large portion of Afghanistan's economy.



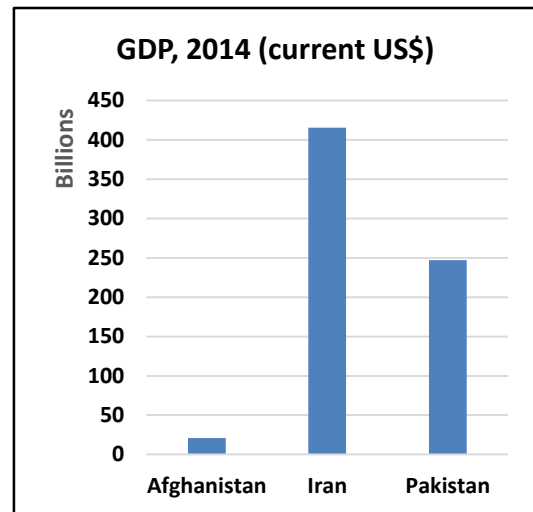
Source: World Bank

By 2015, almost 15 years after the overthrow of the Taliban, Afghanistan remained a very poor, unstable state, unable to achieve economic self-reliance; and it remained entirely dependent on international financial assistance.

Development and growth of Afghanistan's economy has also been affected by weak institutions and widespread corruption.<sup>141</sup> Additionally, economic growth has been hampered by the recent withdrawal of international security forces and drastic cuts in international financial assistance. As a result, the government is unable to implement economic reforms while the economy faces the challenge of creating jobs for 400,000 new entrants into the job market.<sup>142</sup>

### *Iran*

Of the three countries in West South Asia, Iran has by far the largest economy.<sup>143</sup> Unlike Afghanistan, Iran experienced a significant economic transformation in less than a century. Under the Pahlavi dynasty, which sought to modernize the country and make it more Western, Iran was transformed from a poor, agricultural economy into a diversified economy with booming manufacturing and trade sectors, and a large gas and oil industry. Iran's economic development was accompanied by the modernization of the country's education system: schools and universities were reconfigured to provide the skilled workers and professionals needed for newly diversified economy. As a major exporter of oil and natural gas, Iran also gained huge economic benefits from increased international demand for energy. Revenue from energy exports enabled the government to invest in infrastructure development and the country's industrial base, especially during the 1960s. The government also launched a far-reaching land reform program, spurring further growth in the agricultural sector.



Source: World Bank

The 1979 revolution led to significant changes to the structure of Iran's economy and put an end to the country's rapid economic growth. Seeking to eliminate the great disparity of wealth created by the previous regime's economic policies, post-revolution government nationalized major sectors of the economy and the assets of Iran's former ruling elite. Consequently, most sectors of the economy experienced a marked decline. Although the regime did not abolish private property, the state's intervention in the economy increased substantially.

Iran's economic deterioration was hastened by the new regime's limited governing expertise, the outmigration of well-educated Iranian professionals, and the imposition of U.S. trade sanctions (following the 1987 seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran).

Iran's 1980-88 war with Iraq and the collapse of oil prices added further troubles to the already distressed economy. The Iran-Iraq War incurred an



Weaving a carpet from a cartoon, Esfahan, Iran (Source: Wikimedia)

enormous cost in wealth and blood. To address shortages of goods and services, the Iranian government imposed price controls and increased subsidies to consumers and industries, further increasing its intervention in the economy. Meanwhile, Iran's industries suffered from lack of investments as the state directed resources to sustain the war effort.

The end of Iran's war with Iraq in 1988, and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, paved the way to much-needed reforms. Economic growth resumed when the state decreased its meddlesome role in the economy. However, attempts to reform and diversify the economy were limited, as Iran continued to depend heavily on energy exports.

The most severe blow to the Iranian economy came from U.S. trade sanctions, part of an international effort to force Iran to end its support and sponsorship of terrorism. At the turn of this century, Iran's economy suffered even more as the U.S. and the international community imposed sterner economic sanctions (aimed to curtail Iran's nuclear weapons program), including a freeze of Iranian assets abroad.<sup>144</sup> As a result, Iran's production and export of energy resources declined and the economy came close to collapse.<sup>145</sup>



Shazand power plant in Iran (Source: Wikimedia)

In 2015, after prolonged negotiations, Iran reached an agreement with representatives of the international community—namely, China, France, United States, United Kingdom, Russia, and Germany-- to suspend its nuclear weapons program in exchange for partial lifting of sanctions.

It is expected that Iran is well positioned to benefit from the gradual lifting of sanctions: it will have access to long-frozen assets estimated at \$50 billion.<sup>146</sup> Additionally, the country is poised for a rapid economic turnaround because of its massive, exportable energy reserves (world's second largest petroleum reserves); its young, well-educated workforce; and its well-developed manufacturing, commercial, and financial sectors.<sup>147</sup>



Bazar in Iran (Source: Wikimedia)

However, potentially large obstacles to Iran's renewed economic growth remain. Above all, the country's leadership could decide to renege on the agreement to suspend Iran's nuclear program -- thus triggering renewed sanctions. The economy also possesses structural weaknesses that predate the sanctions: a lack of economic diversification, a history of mismanaging the country's oil wealth,



persistent government favoritism shown to public enterprises (over private enterprises), and high unemployment, especially among women and young people.

Iran's political leadership may also be unwilling to implement economic reforms required to spur economic growth and to attract much-needed foreign investments and capital. In addition, corruption and inefficient bureaucracy pose big hurdles to entrepreneurship, both domestic and foreign. Lastly, Iran's infrastructure is in great need of modernization.

As much as 35 percent of the Iran's GDP is produced by a number of large religious and charitable foundations called *bonyads*. The foundations run large-scale enterprises and employ millions of Iranians. The heads of the foundations are selected by the Supreme Leader and are not responsible to the president, government, or parliament.<sup>148</sup>

## **Pakistan**

Pakistan's economy is much larger than the economy of Afghanistan, but due to its much larger population, Pakistan is only slightly better off economically than Afghanistan. Since independence, Pakistan has encountered significant economic, governance, and security challenges that have left the economy underdeveloped and slow-growing. Pakistan's economic growth has also been stymied and unable to keep up with a rapidly growing population and workforce, because of persistent political instability, the inability of government to collect taxes, limited



Chundrigar Road, the financial district of Karachi, Pakistan (Source: Wikimedia)

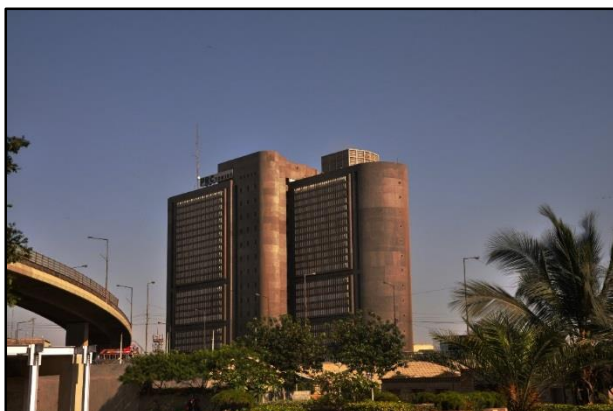
foreign investment, and because large segments of the economy operate in the shadows.<sup>149</sup> The population of Pakistan is projected to almost double, from 180 million to over 350 million, by 2050. Much of Pakistan's population is already comprised of mostly unskilled, working-age youth unqualified for high-quality jobs.<sup>150</sup>

Since gaining independence in 1945, Pakistan has experimented with a variety of economic models, including a mostly private economy, a mix of state-owned and private industries, and an "Islamic economy." None of the models have delivered sustainable economic growth. Currently, Pakistan's economy is a mix of privately owned industries and large sectors owned by the government, including finance, manufacturing, and transportation.

The government of Pakistan is in the process of privatizing state-owned industries and gradually dismantling Islamic economic practices adopted during the 1970s. The economic system currently undergoing modernization was based on sharia law, which made it illegal for a bank to charge interest on a loan and mandated the payment of *zakat* ("giving alms"). These economic reforms have yielded some positive results: Pakistan has made great strides reducing poverty and spreading prosperity to all

social strata. Nevertheless, the country's economy is still struggling to meet the expectations of a rapidly growing population, and poverty remains widespread.

Since gaining independence in 1947, Pakistan has transitioned from a primarily agricultural economy to one that is diversified; today, trade and services are the largest segments of Pakistan's economy. Although agriculture comprised only 25 percent of Pakistan's GDP in 2014, it continues to employ a very large segment, nearly 45 percent, of the total national workforce.<sup>151</sup> Wheat and rice are the two main food staples produced by the agricultural sector. The textile industry benefits from the widespread cultivation of cotton.



Karachi towers in Pakistan (Source: Wikimedia)

The service industry represents the largest sector of Pakistan's economy, at over 50 percent; it employs one-third of the national workforce. Components of the service industry include the civil service, public administration, defense, construction, and public utilities. As a former British colony, Pakistan inherited a well-developed civil service, positions in which are highly coveted for their financial and employment security.

Pakistan's economy is highly sensitive to fluctuations in the world economy. With its oil and gas resources limited, the country's economy depends on energy imports. As a consequence, price volatility in the world energy market can have a negative effect within Pakistan. Additionally, several million Pakistanis work abroad as seasonal and permanent laborers. Pakistan's expatriate workforce makes a significant contribution to the country's financial well-being: by some estimates, remittances from Pakistani immigrants totaled \$17 billion in 2014 -- about 7 percent of the country's GDP.<sup>152</sup> However, changes in the world economy can affect the size of remittances flowing back to Pakistan.

Foreign remittance – transfer of money from migrant workers to their families or other individuals in their home countries.

Pakistan's economic growth is vulnerable to natural disasters. Floods in 2010 and 2011 caused damages amounting to \$10 billion and \$3.7 billion, respectively. A massive earthquake in 2005 in Kashmir resulted in 73,000 deaths and \$5 billion in damages.<sup>153</sup> These disasters inflicted significant economic harm to a country already accustomed to frequent natural disasters.

## Industries

**Rank ordering of industries starting with the largest by value of annual output, 2014:**<sup>154</sup>

**Afghanistan:** small-scale production of bricks, textiles, soap, furniture, shoes, fertilizer, apparel, food products, non-alcoholic beverages, mineral water, cement, handwoven carpets, natural gas, coal, copper.

**Iran:** petroleum, petrochemicals, natural gas, fertilizers, caustic soda, textiles, cement and other construction materials, food processing (particularly sugar refining and vegetable oil production), ferrous and nonferrous metal fabrication, armaments.

**Pakistan:** textiles and apparel, food processing, pharmaceuticals, construction materials, paper products, fertilizer, shrimp.

## Informal Economy

The informal economy includes those economic interactions and exchanges that are not recognized, regulated, controlled, or taxed by a state government.<sup>155</sup>

All countries in the West South Asia have significant informal economies. The informal economy allows employers, employees, and self-employed to increase their take-home earnings. However, money that changes hands in an informal economy is not taxed; this deprives governments of the income needed to pay for a variety of public services. People employed in the informal economy also lack job security and work-related benefits. One estimate found that in 2007 more than 33 percent of Pakistan's GDP and 17 percent of Iran's GDP were produced in the informal economy.<sup>156</sup> Another report estimates that 80-90 percent of Afghanistan's economic activity is informal.<sup>157</sup>

West South Asia's informal economy is often used as a refuge for criminals, including smugglers, drug and human traffickers, prostitution rings, and gambling operations. Drug production and trafficking represent a very large share of the economy in the region, especially in Afghanistan, which accounts for 80 percent of global opium production (5,500 tons per year).<sup>158</sup>

## Transport Infrastructure

One of the signs of underdevelopment is the lack of an efficient transport network. An integrated transportation network, on the other hand, generates wealth in addition to numerous political and social benefits.

Buses and trucks are the most important means of transportation for both passengers and goods in all three countries in the region, while the railroad systems remain underdeveloped. However, Iran enjoys a well-developed robust and busy metro system in the capital Tehran. Although all major population centers are connected by roads, transportation is made difficult by mountainous and desert terrain, especially in Iran and Afghanistan. The majority of the roads in this region are paved. Although all three West South Asia countries have increased allocations for road construction in the last decade, low funding and poor maintenance have reduced the navigability of many roads. Air transportation networks in all three countries is also underdeveloped and dominated by state-owned air carriers.

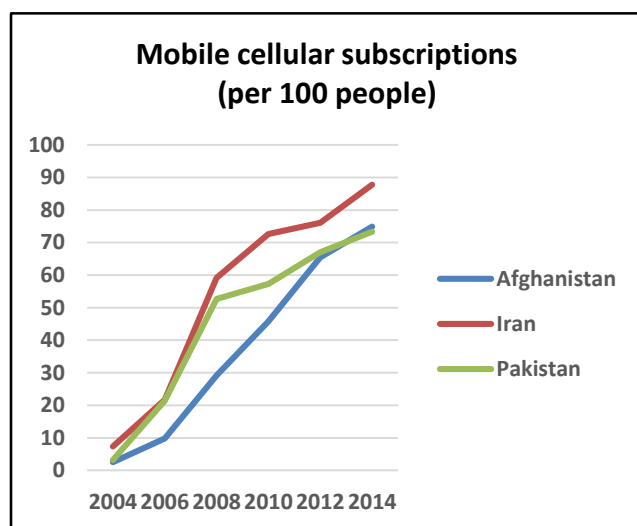


Tehran Metro (Source: Wikimedia)

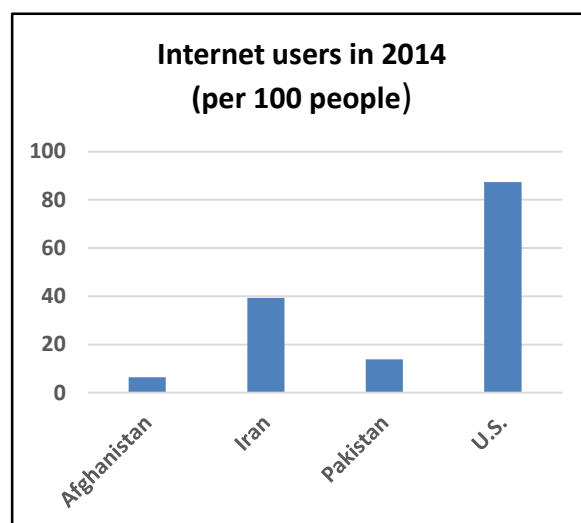
## Communications Infrastructure

For many years, all West South Asia countries had poor communication infrastructure – the number of telephone lines were particularly limited. In 2014, less than one percent and three percent, respectively, of Afghans and Pakistanis had a landline telephone. By contrast, nearly 39 percent of Iranians have a landline telephone -- a rate comparable to telephone usage in the United States.<sup>159</sup> In recent decades, all three countries in this region have invested in mobile phone infrastructure; today, cellphones are easily obtained and used by virtually everyone.

The countries in the region have witnessed a moderate raise in the access to, and use of, Internet.



Source: World Bank, 2014



Source: World Bank, 2014

## Media

The media in the region face numerous challenges. Media in Iran are dominated by state-owned outlets and there is very little official tolerance for independent journalism: the regime prosecutes journalists who dare to criticize the government. Lacking access to independent media, Iranians, especially young people, are increasingly turning to social media and the Internet for information.

Media in Afghanistan and Pakistan face fewer official restrictions, but their willingness to report the news candidly is inhibited by threats and intimidation coming from government agencies and militant groups. Television and radio outlets dominate the media in West South Asia, while the influence of the print media is limited -- especially in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where literacy is low.



## **Regional Security Issues**

### **Why Regional Security Issues Matter to You as a Marine**

A thorough understanding of a region is difficult without an account of its most significant security challenges. These challenges tend to affect not only relations between states in the region but also the behavior of its people and the choices they make. Regional security issues encompass a host of topics ranging from wars between states, to insurgencies, to organized crime, to weak institutions, to systemic corruption. Some of them involve violence, while others weaken states and societies and have the potential to turn low-level conflicts into violent confrontations.

### **Introduction**

This section discusses regional issues that have security implications for West South Asia. The region's internal problems range from dysfunctional institutions and widespread corruption, to border and territorial disputes, ethnic and sectarian conflicts, and economic problems. These internal problems are intertwined with external problems that are transnational in nature, such as terrorist groups, interference of regional power players, proxy wars, smuggling, and other criminal activities.

Although the RCLF-designated West South Asia consists of three countries, the region's security threats extend beyond these three countries. For example, a discussion about Iran's regional role cannot be limited to the three countries of this region; this is because Iran's role reaches far beyond West South Asia into the heart of the Middle East and Levant.

The U.S. has many security priorities in West South Asia, notably ensuring energy security and stability in the region, while also seeking to contain Iran's nuclear ambitions.<sup>160</sup>

The U.S. Central Command (U.S. CENTCOM), in coordination with "national and international partners, promotes cooperation among nations, responds to crises, and deters state and non-state aggression, and supports development and, when necessary, reconstruction in order to establish the conditions for regional security, stability and prosperity."<sup>161</sup>

### **This section identifies six broad regional issues:**

- The Iranian Threat and Sunni versus Shi'a Sectarian Violence
- Terrorism and militant groups
- Drug Trafficking

- Trafficking in Persons
- The Kashmir Statement
- The Federally Administrated Tribal Area

## The Iranian threat and Sunni versus Shi'a Sectarian Violence

A theocratic Shi'a regime came to power in Iran in 1979. Since then, the country's expansionist strategy has played a unique and dangerous role in the region. Iranian influence is one of the most significant factors contributing to increasing instability in this region and the greater Middle East.



Iranian missile (Source: Wikimedia)

The increasing self-assurance of the Iranian regime is bolstered by its uncontrolled activities in the region and beyond its borders via proxy players. Iran has funded and trained armed groups in other countries, most notably Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Assad regime in Syria, Hamas in Gaza (and other Palestinian terrorist groups), Taliban in Afghanistan, the Houthis in Yemen, and several Iraqi Shi'a militias. Iran's proxies are mainly Shi'a; however, it has also armed and trained Taliban in Afghanistan,<sup>162</sup> and is still arming and funding Hamas, which is a Sunni-radical Islamist movement.<sup>163</sup>

Iran's activities have been particularly harmful throughout the region with frequent acts of intimidation or coercion, turning countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, into war theatres for their proxy wars with Sunni regional powers such as the Gulf States and Pakistan.

Designated a "State Sponsor of Terrorism" in 1984 by the U.S. State Department, Iran continues to sponsor terrorism and terrorist-related activity through surrogates and its Quds Force, an elite unit of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.<sup>164</sup> Iranian terror networks have spread harmful influence and activities in the region, while Iran has threatened and attacked shipping in the Gulf, creating constant regional maritime tensions.<sup>165</sup> The development of weapons of mass destruction by Iran and the overall arms race in the region, are major security concerns for the United States and its global strategic partners, especially Israel.

Iran's aspiration to become a nuclear power is considered one the biggest threats to the region and greater Middle East. One of the reasons for Shi'a Iran's obsessive drive to become a member of the "nuclear club" is the fact that Pakistan, a Sunni Muslim country, already has nuclear weapons, which has created a rivalry between Pakistan and Iran over the existence of a "Sunni bomb."<sup>166</sup>

Iran has refused to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) access to its facilities to confirm or deny international concerns over its uranium enrichment program.<sup>167</sup> Additionally, Iran has consistently ignored the directions and provisions of a United Nations resolution which called on Iran to fully comply with the requirements of the IAEA, or suffer further trade sanctions.<sup>168</sup> Iran's refusal

to comply with the IAEA has always been coupled with assurances that Tehran's nuclear research and activities were for "peaceful purposes only."

In 2005, after years of Iranian foot-dragging and delays, the United Nations declared Iran "noncompliant" with the IAEA and imposed international sanctions.<sup>169</sup> The U.S., European Union, and United Nations sanctions collectively targeted all material and technology related to uranium production and development of ballistic missiles.<sup>170</sup> Sanctions also targeted trade, financial/banking transactions (including Iran's central bank), as well as any investments and exports from Iran's energy sector: oil, gas, petrochemicals, and refined petroleum products. The international sanctions imposed on Iran also included a freeze on the country's overseas assets, and a travel ban on a long list of Iranian individuals and institutions (especially anyone associated with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps).

The economic impact of international sanctions led to a broad sentiment of internal dissatisfaction, particularly among young Iranians. This internal discontent eventually prompted the Iranian regime to reconsider negotiations with the international community. In 2015, after 20 long months of negotiations, Iran reached an agreement, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), with representatives of the international community -- the United States, China, France, United Kingdom, Russia, and Germany -- to suspend its nuclear military program. In return for Iran's compliance with IAEA rules, the global community agreed to partially lift trade sanctions.<sup>171</sup>



The ministers of foreign affairs of France, Germany, the European Union, Iran, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as Chinese and Russian diplomats, announcing the framework for a Comprehensive agreement on the Iranian nuclear program (Source: Wikimedia)

Iran, with its large population, substantial oil reserves, relatively high level of economic development, and importance to adherents of Shi'a Islam, will play a critical role in the foreseeable future in the region, the larger Middle East, and on the global stage, regardless of who rules it. While the U.S. regards Iran as a threat, it has also been U.S. policy to encourage the country to abandon its nuclear aspirations and play a more responsible role in regional and international affairs.<sup>172</sup>

Iran's role and threat is not limited to West South Asia; the country is also seen as threat in the greater Middle East and Islamic world. The threat of Iran's regional role is centered on two ancient and volatile factors: the first is the Shi'a-Sunni rivalry (explained in a previous chapter) and embedded hatreds; the second factor is the centuries-old enmity between Persians and Arabs. These factors are distinctly separate, yet they overlap in many areas and have increasingly polarized societies within a huge swatch in the region, notably in the Middle East and West South Asia, such as in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and in the Gulf States.

Some experts see the ascendancy of Shi'ism as a counter reaction to the growth of Sunni extremism, as typified by the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which has always had an embedded prejudice against the Shi'a. However, the same argument could be made to explain the growth of Sunni extremism in the face of increased Shi'a influence and militancy in the region.

Moreover, the Shi'a threat, as represented by Iran, is a revolutionary, militant, and politically involved brand of Shi'ism; this is exemplified by groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon, al-Sadr militia in Iraq, and Houthis in Yemen. This Iranian version of Shi'ism is known as *al-hawza an-natiqa*, (the “vocal Shi'a seminary” or “outspoken Shi'a seminary”), as opposed to what is perceived by Iran and its followers as the more “quiet” version of Shi'ism, or *al-hawza al-samita* (the “silent Shi'a seminary”), espoused by Iraq's leading clerics in Najaf, notably Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani and those who follow him worldwide.<sup>173</sup>

The turmoil in the Islamic world is not simply a product of the Shi'a-Sunni conflict: when this dynamic is combined with the age-old Arab-Persian rivalry, the resulting situation becomes much more dangerous.

Iran sees itself as the defender of Shi'a populations located throughout the Middle East and West South Asia. Both Afghanistan and Pakistan have significant minority populations of Shi'a. (Pakistan, after Iran, has the world's second-largest number of Shi'a.) The majority of the people of Iraq and Bahrain are Shi'a; about half the Muslim population of Lebanon is Shi'a; in Kuwait, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia, minority Shi'a communities have become increasingly agitated; asking for more rights since the 2011 Arab uprisings. The minority Alawites in Syria are also classified as Shi'a by Iran, and have historically been supported by the country's ayatollahs. It is safe to assume that Iran has used these connections in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen to advance its expansionist strategy.

Iran's involvement in Middle East sectarian violence is best exemplified by the Syrian conflict that began 2011. While civil uprisings in other countries have resulted in regime change, Syria's uprising led to a full-blown civil war, the spread of terrorist groups, and widespread regional instability. Most of the country, especially the northern and eastern regions, fell into the hands of terrorist organizations such as *Jabhat Al-Nusra*, *Ahrar Asham*,<sup>174</sup> and Islamic State (IS), also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL), or the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).<sup>175</sup> What began as a non-violent civil protest in the southern city of Dera'a, was transformed -- after a brutal crackdown by the Syrian authoritarian regime -- into a bloody sectarian conflict between the country's Sunni majority and the regime's Shi'a Alawites.

The Syrian conflict did not remain internal, and soon spread regionally along sectarian lines. The conflict spilled over into neighboring countries such as Iraq and Lebanon; soon after, the hostilities were joined by several regional powers: Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar -- thus transforming Syria into the stage for a proxy war.<sup>176</sup> While Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey supported the Syrian armed opposition known as the Syrian Free Army (SFA); Iran and Russia backed the Syrian regime.<sup>177</sup>

The rise of terrorist groups further complicated the Syrian conflict.<sup>178</sup> As violent Sunni extremist groups joined the Syrian armed opposition, Hezbollah, Iran's Revolutionary Guard, and Baseej forces fought alongside the Syrian regime.<sup>179</sup> Meanwhile, the Kurdish Peshmerga and fighters of Kurdistan's Workers' Party (PKK) (listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S., NATO and the European Union) supported the Syrian Kurdish fighters, known as the People's Protection Units (YPG), in their fight against ISIS.<sup>180</sup>



Issues in the region cannot be analyzed or looked at from a black and white perspective; rather, there are many shades of gray. While all of these rivals are supporting different players in Syria, many adversaries are fighting not just each other, but also the same enemy (ISIS, for example). Some consider ISIS to be the top threat to the region and the world, while other countries such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar view Iran's influence in the region as more dangerous than ISIS terror.<sup>181</sup>

## Terrorism and Militant Groups

America's top security concern in this region is the persistent threat of terrorism and violent extremism posed by groups such as the Taliban, ISIS, al-Qaeda (and its various affiliates): *Lashkar-e-Jhangvi*, *Ahl al-Sunnat Wal Jama'at* (previously known as *Sipah-e-Sahaba*), and *Jundallah* in Pakistan<sup>182</sup> to name few. Extremism is no longer local; it is a transnational, 'borderless threat' that has spread throughout many countries and regions, and has attracted foreign fighters from all over the world. Furthermore, the civil uprisings in the greater Middle East have emboldened many local terrorist groups<sup>183</sup> to openly promote their militant ideologies under a broader organizational umbrella such as al-Qaeda and Taliban.<sup>184</sup>

For ISIS and al-Qaeda, the rise of local militancy fulfills a broader vision of establishing a larger foothold in the region and beyond. The competition between al-Qaeda and ISIS, and their expansion into West South Asia and the greater Middle East, was made easier by the collapse of security in the region, especially in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya. This expansion was accelerated by the availability of weapons, and the group's ability to capitalize on the grievances of some marginalized groups, including refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and its affiliate jihadi groups are responsible for many attacks across West South Asia and the Middle East; they have targeted civilians, minorities, Shi'a communities, and government personnel and institutions. In addition to security and stability threats posed by these terrorist jihadist groups in the region, Taliban, al-Qaeda, and its affiliates are often involved in numerous illegal activities in order to fund their operations: drug and human trafficking, kidnapping for ransom, extortion, and robbery.



Taliban in Afghanistan (Source: Wikimedia)

Most of these groups are jihadist, apocalyptic in nature, and possess a Sunni revolutionary violent extremist ideology. Some regional Sunni militant groups, like the Taliban, have managed to seize and control territories in Afghanistan and exert significant influence in Pakistan.

An important aspect of this conflict is that the traditional definitions of "armed conflict" ("enemies," "allies," "insurgencies," and so forth) no longer apply, as there are no permanent allies or enemies. In

West South Asia, and greater Middle East, alliances between militant groups and warlords frequently shift according to temporary interests and gains.

A good example of a group with unpredictable loyalties is Quetta Shura Taliban (QST) in Pakistan. QST considers itself “the legitimate representative authority of Afghanistan in exile.”<sup>185</sup> But while the QST is a regional militant group, it is also affiliated with al-Qaeda, which is an international terrorist group. Additionally, the group has strong ties and enjoys significant support in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) along the Pakistan-Afghanistan borders. The QST has launched several attacks for control of Helmand and Kandahar.<sup>186</sup> The latter area is considered the spiritual home of QST, and was the Taliban’s stronghold prior to U.S. invasion of 2001. International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and Afghan forces, have been able to deter and curtail QST’s attempts to control the provinces.<sup>187</sup> However, growing public dissatisfaction with the performance of the Afghan government offers QST a perfect opportunity to mobilize the people and attract recruits to join their ranks.<sup>188</sup>

With strong ties to al-Qaeda, and alliance with the QST, under the larger Taliban umbrella, the Haqqani Network is Afghanistan’s most established insurgent group. Based in Miram Shah, the capital city of North Waziristan of Pakistan, the Haqqani Network recruits and trains young people from surrounding areas. From its stronghold in Pakistan, this group routinely launches attacks into southeast Afghanistan against ISAF and Afghan forces.<sup>189</sup>

The Haqqani Network is allegedly supported by the Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI). It has also been reported that the Pakistani army refuses to target the group’s stronghold or fighters in North Waziristan despite their cross-border operations into Afghanistan.<sup>190</sup> Pakistan’s security authority remains friendly with proxy groups like the Haqqani Network in order to maintain its influence and interests in Afghanistan.

In 2012, the Haqqani Network was declared a “foreign terrorist organization” by the U.S. Department of State;<sup>191</sup> that same year, the United Nations designated this group as a “Proscribed Terrorist Organization.”<sup>192</sup> Despite many years of protest from the West, Pakistan’s support for the Haqqani Network continued. Understandably, Haqqani’s attacks against Afghanistan, India, and U.S. regional interests have strained U.S.-Pakistan relations. It took a bloody attack by the Taliban on a school in Peshawar (that left 134 children dead) to finally convince the Pakistani government to officially outlaw the Haqqani Network.<sup>193</sup>

Meanwhile, the Taliban movement of Pakistan, known as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), is a coalition of militant groups from the FATA; it was formed in 2007 in opposition to the Pakistan’s government and armed forces. TTP is Pakistani-focused group<sup>194</sup>

TTP’s main goals are: full control over the FATA and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistan, and enactment of a strict interpretation of sharia law throughout Pakistan, and only when these main goals are met, an anti-ISAF policy to drive them out of Afghanistan.

TTP largely seeks to overthrow Pakistan’s government and replace it with an Islamic caliphate.<sup>195</sup> The group maintains close ties with al-Qaeda and its senior leaders, as well as the Haqqani Network. TTP has been responsible for many terrorist attacks against Pakistan’s government and civilians. TTP was behind the attempted assassination of education rights activist Malala Yousafzai in 2012. TTP has also targeted U.S. forces and interests in Afghanistan; it claimed responsibility for the failed car bomb

attack in New York's Times Square in 2010.<sup>196</sup> TTP's violence has prompted the Pakistani government to launch several large-scale military campaigns against the group's stronghold in the FATA region.<sup>197</sup>

## Drug Trafficking

Afghanistan is the world's largest producer of opium and hashish, which makes drug trafficking a major issue, locally, regionally, and internationally. According to the 2014 *World Drug Report*, published by the United Nations office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), it is estimated that opium production in Afghanistan accounts for 80 percent of the global total.<sup>198</sup>

There are ongoing efforts by the U.S. and Afghanistan government to persuade, discourage, and ban local farmers from growing opium. However, with wheat selling locally for \$0.41 a single kilogram (approximately 2.2 U.S. pounds), compared with opium, which sells for \$160-\$200 per kilogram,<sup>199</sup> poppy cultivation, hence, is the preferred cash crop.

According to the UNODC, Afghan farmers cultivated poppies on a record 553,000 acres (224,000 hectares) in 2014, a 7 percent increase from the previous year.<sup>200</sup> According to a 2013 UNODC report, opium production increased by nearly 49 percent from 2012. An unfortunate indication that Afghanistan's "war on drugs" is failing is seen in the fact that two northern provinces previously declared "opium free" lost that status by 2012.<sup>201</sup> Lack of security, epidemic corruption, poverty, and instability continue to undermine Afghanistan's counterdrug efforts.

Eighty nine percent of Afghanistan's cultivated opium poppies are grown in nine insecure provinces in the country's southern and western regions. Helmand Province is the biggest cultivator of opium poppies.<sup>202</sup>



Voice of America reporter interviewing poppy cultivators  
(Source: Voice of America; Wikimedia)

Many of opium-cultivating areas in Afghanistan are controlled by the Taliban and other criminal networks. This should not come as a surprise that the Taliban and other militant groups are involved in the opiate trade. The lucrative opium trade not only generates revenue, it also offers these militant groups the means to control local farmers.

Efforts by Afghanistan's government to reduce or eradicate opium crops have created long-term problems, and have also benefited the Taliban. Many of these poppy farmers sell their crops or future crops in advance. When the government destroys a poppy crop that has been offered as collateral, the farmer is left with debt for the advanced cash received for the destroyed crops, which makes him more vulnerable to Taliban recruitment. Therefore, not only does the Taliban benefit from growing opium to generate funding, it also benefits from official efforts to eradicate it. Moreover, it is very common for violence to break out during government-led opium crops eradication operations; 143 people were killed in 2013.<sup>203</sup>

Poppy eradication government campaigns were less effective in 2014. According to the UNODC, a total of 6,652 acres (2,692 hectares) of poppy eradication was conducted in 2014, which is a 63 percent

decrease from the previous year, when 18,157 acres (7,348 hectares) of poppies were eradicated in the same 17 provinces.<sup>204</sup>

The flood of Afghanistan's opium onto the global market has caused the price of this illegal drug to plummet, yet the cultivation of poppies is still more lucrative than growing wheat or other legal crops. While most of the heroin consumed in Europe and Eurasia is derived from Afghanistan's opium, the country also struggles with a domestic drug addiction problem.<sup>205</sup>

Pakistan's geographic proximity to the world's largest producer of opium (it shares a porous, 1,510 mi-long [2,430 km-long] border with Afghanistan), also makes it vulnerable to illegal drug trafficking. Pakistan is a significant transit area for Afghanistan's opium. Illegal drugs grown, processed, trafficked from Afghanistan, and shipped from Pakistan include heroin, morphine, and hashish. These illicit substances are destined for Iran, the Gulf States, Africa, Asia, and markets in the West.

Each year, Pakistan has an estimated 2,471 acres (1,000 hectares) of opium poppies under cultivation, mostly in the FATA region on the border area with Afghanistan. According to UNODC, it is also estimated that Pakistan is the destination and transit country of approximately 40 percent of Afghanistan's opiates production.<sup>206</sup> Most of the regionally trafficked cannabis is produced in Afghanistan and processed in small, mobile laboratories in the FATA region. Countries with established drug trafficking routes often experience rising rates of drug use and addiction, and crime rates that associate the drug culture. Drug trafficking and smuggling continues unchecked in Pakistan, which suggests corruption or incompetence among Pakistani officials and border security forces.

Iran's 1,194-mi (1,923-km) porous eastern border with Afghanistan and Pakistan makes it a major transit country for illicit drugs bound for Europe.<sup>207</sup> The country has built an effective counter-narcotics enforcement capability. According to the UNODC, Iran accounted for 74 percent of the world's opium seizures in 2014; in 2012, Iran made 25 percent of the world's heroin and morphine seizures.<sup>208</sup> Despite the country's substantial efforts and extensive control measures, illegal drugs still travel through Iran to Turkey and Europe, with a large portion being consumed domestically. While Iran imposes the death penalty on drug offences, it struggles with one of the highest drug addiction rates in the world, as well as high numbers of people addicted to synthetic drugs.<sup>209</sup>

## **Trafficking in Persons**

Trafficking in persons is a major security issue in all three countries of West South Asia. Human trafficking is a major human rights violations and a multi-dimensional threat that stokes the growth and spread of organized crime, damages economies, and destroys the credibility of all nations involved.

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery involving victims who are forced into labor or are sexually exploited.<sup>210</sup> According to the International Labor Organization and the United Nations, there are an estimated 12.3 million people worldwide enslaved in forced labor, bonded labor, forced child labor, sexual servitude, and involuntary servitude.<sup>211</sup>

*Trafficking in Persons Report*, an annual assessment by the U.S. Department of State (DoS), summarizes the human trafficking situation and governments' responses in approximately 150 countries where this activity is known to occur.



The countries named in this DoS report on the issue of global human trafficking are assigned the following ratings:<sup>212</sup>

**Tier 1:** countries whose governments fully comply with the Trafficking Victims Protection Act's (TVPA) minimum standards.

**Tier 2:** countries whose governments do not fully comply with the TVPA's minimum standards, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards.

**Tier 2 Watch List:** countries whose government do not fully comply with the TVPA's minimum standards, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards, and: the absolute number of victims of severe forms of trafficking is very significant or is significantly increasing; there is a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year; or the determination that a country is making significant efforts to bring itself into compliance with minimum standards was based on commitments by the country to take additional future steps over the next year.

**Tier 3:** countries whose governments do not fully comply with TVPA's minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so.<sup>213</sup>

Iran is classified as Tier 3 country. The government does not share information on its anti-trafficking efforts. Iranian law does not clearly and strictly prohibit any form of human trafficking. This, combined with Iran's systematic corruption, lack of transparency, and consistent refusal to cooperate with or share its anti-trafficking efforts with the international community, makes it difficult to accurately assess the country's human trafficking situation. Iran is a source, transit point, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor. It is reported that Iranian women and children are subjected to sex trafficking in Iran, Pakistan, the Persian Gulf, and Europe.<sup>214</sup> Azerbaijani and Uzbek women and children are subjected to sexual exploitation inside Iran as well. Moreover, Iranian and Afghan boys are reportedly being forced into prostitution in male brothels inside Iran, or trafficked to Afghan and Pakistani warlords.<sup>215</sup> It is also reported that Iranian children are being forced, often by their families or criminal networks, to beg on the streets or to work at factories. Men and women from Pakistan and other countries in the region voluntarily migrate to Iran seeking work, but -- upon arriving -- are frequently diverted by organized criminals into forced labor or a subjected to debt bondages.<sup>216</sup>

According to the 2013 DoS *Trafficking in Persons Report*, Afghanistan is classified as a Tier 2, Watch List country. It is a source, transit point, and destination country for men, women, and children who are subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking—mostly internal trafficking. Most human trafficking victims in Afghanistan are children subjected to forced labor in carpet and brick kiln factories.<sup>217</sup> They are also subjected to domestic servitude and begging and transregional drug smuggling within Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Some Afghan boys are either kidnapped or sold by their families to be *bacha baazi*, to be used as sexual entertainers for wealthy men and influential warlords, including government and security officials.<sup>218</sup> It is reported that some families are forced to sell their children to settle tribal conflicts or payback debts with drug traffickers. Moreover, insurgent groups in Afghanistan often force older children to become suicide bombers.<sup>219</sup>

**Bacha baazi:** means “boy play,” “pedophile” in Farsi. It is a form of sexual slavery, pederasty, and child prostitution, where little boys -- often poor or orphaned -- are used for sexual entertainment by wealthy and influential Afghan warlords, government officials, and military commanders. This practice, which is considered a social status for wealthy influential men known as ‘masters,’ is an ancient Central Asian origin custom that has been recently revived in Afghanistan.

Pakistan is classified as a Tier 2 country according to the 2013 *Trafficking in Persons Report*. It is a source, transit point, and destination country for people of all ages and genders who are subject to forced labor and sex trafficking mainly taking place inside the country. Due to the damaging effects of natural disasters, a shaky economy, political instability, and deteriorating security, trafficking in persons, particularly of children, remains high.<sup>220</sup>

Bonded labor is one of the main problems in Pakistan where men, women, and children are forced to work in brick-making, mining, carpet-making, and agriculture. It is reported that children are often forced—bought, sold, rented—into begging rings, domestic servitude, and prostitution circles. Furthermore, militant groups oftentimes kidnap, recruit, or force their parents into selling their children to spy, fight, or become suicide bombers in Pakistan and Afghanistan.<sup>221</sup>

## The Kashmir Stalemate

Since the partitioning of countries -- India and Pakistan -- beginning in 1947, the region has seen an uptick in territorial disputes. These are primarily disputes over borders and regions where dividing of states was administered by outside parties. Disputes between India and Pakistan have been ongoing for decades. These disputes are complicated, especially since historic territorial divisions are often unclear or undocumented, and often ethnic groups span across territories.

Kashmir is a disputed region located at the northern borders of India and Pakistan, just south of China. There are few bilateral conflicts that have been as resistant to mediation as the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan. Almost



The Kashmir region districts (Source: Wikimedia)

immediately after partition, South Asia’s newly established states became embroiled in territorial disputes. Kashmir’s population is majority Muslim, but at the time of partition, the region’s Hindu

ruler announced Kashmir's succession to India.<sup>222</sup> This led to both countries claiming sovereignty over the area of Kashmir. India wanted to keep the Muslim-majority state as part of its territory to demonstrate its tolerance as a secular state. For the same reason, Pakistan believed that Kashmir should its sovereign territory because the decision of statehood should be decided by its Muslim majority population.

“The United States strongly supports all efforts between India and Pakistan that can contribute to a more stable, democratic, and prosperous region, but this is an issue that must be determined by the two sides. We believe India and Pakistan stand to benefit from practical cooperation and we encourage them to engage in direct dialogue aimed at reducing tensions.” – State Department official statement

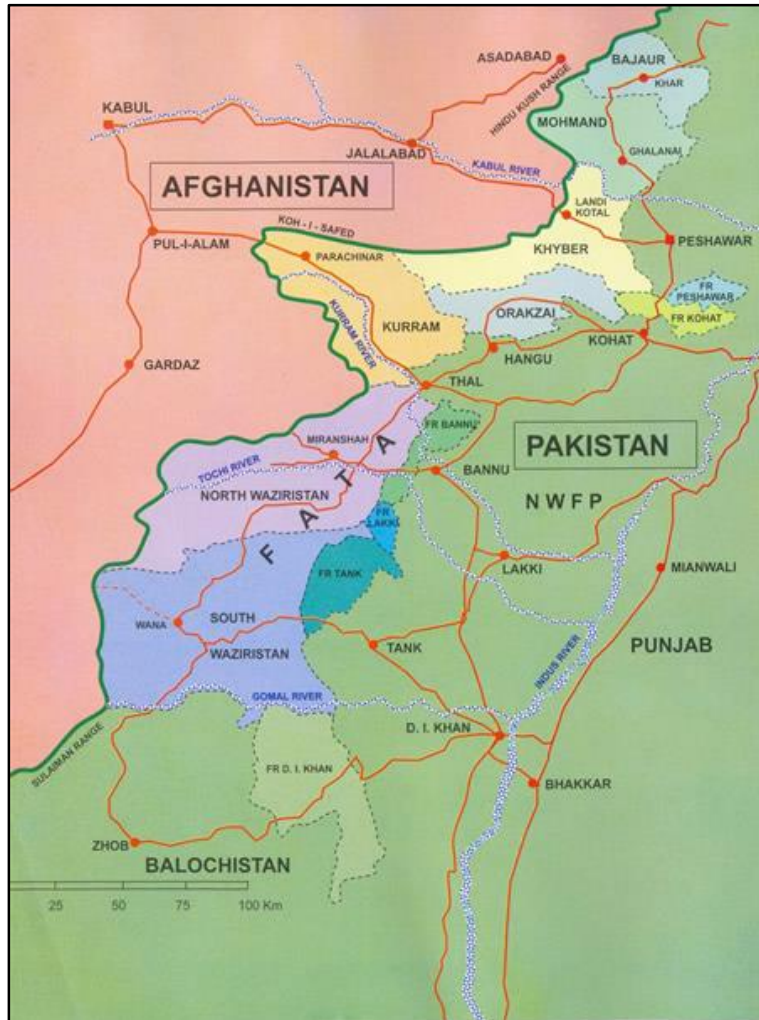
The two countries fought two wars over Kashmir, first in 1947-48, and again in 1965. Following the break-up of Pakistan in 1971 (when Bangladesh became an independent state) Pakistan lost ground on its Kashmir claim. Reaching a stalemate and succumbing to international pressure, Pakistan and India accepted a ceasefire. By 1987, however, Kashmiri Muslims were dissatisfied with the lack of autonomy, and what many perceived as a meddling by India in internal politics. Tensions resurfaced when Pakistan began to not only support insurgents in the region, but provide Islamist fighters from Pakistan and other neighboring countries.<sup>223</sup> The dispute evolved into a full insurgency in 1989, and the conflict has ensued off and on ever since. While the politics and the people involved have changed, the basic issues remain and both countries consider the Kashmir dispute a core interest. Pakistan controls roughly one-third of the state, referring to it as Azad Kashmir; India controls the remaining territory, calling it the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

### **The Federally Administrated Tribal Areas**

Most of the population along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border is tribal. The northwest border area of Pakistan has never been under the full control of either the Afghanistan or Pakistan government and is an area referred to as the FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas). The FATA is divided into seven districts known as ‘tribal agencies’ and six frontier regions. Each agency has its own dominant ethnic group, political structure, and economic base. The FATA straddles the Durand Line, which was imposed over a century ago by the British, and which to this day, Afghanistan says it does not formally recognize.

Many of the agencies in the FATA have a centuries-old history of violent ethnic conflict between Sunni and Shi’a tribes. The two main tribal groups, the Pashtun who reside along the northern border and the Baluch who inhabit the southern half, have histories of protests and separatist actions, therefore both groups are extremely relevant to ongoing stability efforts. There is an overwhelming Pashtun sentiment for an independent “Pashtunistan,” which would encompass the more than 40 million people spread across the Pakistan/Afghanistan border. To complicate the problems in the region, in the last couple of decades, this area has become the main transit point for Taliban fighters moving between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Furthermore, the Pakistan military is made up almost entirely of ethnic Punjabis, while the Taliban is made up of Pashtuns. The presence of Punjabi soldiers in the region fighting jihadists threatens to push Pakistan into an ethnic civil war. Because of its complicated history, the FATA remains largely ungoverned and a fertile area for conflict and instability.

The FATA is divided into seven districts known as ‘tribal agencies’ -- Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, North Waziristan, and South Waziristan -- and six frontier regions: Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu-Mir Ali, Lakki Marwat, Tank Jandola, and Dera Ismail Khan.



The Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (Source: Wikimedia)



## Case Study: The Burosho People of Pakistan's Hunza District

The case study in this chapter introduces a culture from the West South Asia region, using the concepts introduced in the Operational Culture General (OCG) document (see attached document).

### Introduction

Pakistan is home to a diverse population comprised of numerous ethnic, religious, and other cultural groups. While the country's majority populations are ethnic Punjabis, Pashtuns, and Sindhis, there are dozens of other smaller minority groups living in all of Pakistan's provinces. The Hunza District lies at the far northeast edge of Pakistan's border with China and Afghanistan, and is home to several unique ethnic groups. Unlike the majority of the Pakistan population, many of the people of Hunza features unlike other ethnic groups in the Southeast Asia region, including red or blonde hair and blue eyes.

The total population of the Hunza District is around 70,000 and is divided among three main valleys and three main ethnic groups.<sup>224</sup> The lower valley in the south is inhabited by the Shinaki ethnic group, who speak a language known as Shina. The northern part of the valley is home to the Wakhi ethnic group, who speak a dialect of the Persian language. The central part of the district is populated by the ethnic Burosho, also known as Hunzakuts, who make up the majority population of the Hunza district, and speak a distinct language known as Burushaski.

For most of the nineteenth and twentieth century, most scholars believed the Burosho are descended from soldiers who came to the region with Alexander the Great's army in the fourth century BCE. The ruling families in Hunza also unofficially claim to be direct descendants of Alexander the Great. While the ethnic groups of Hunza do not have a tradition of written history, their oral folklore tells of a European ancestry; the physical characteristics of the people in the region do seem to support this claim.

Before the arrival of the British in the late 1800s, the various tribes of Hunza conducted raids throughout Central Asia. During the period when Hunza was a state, the ethnic Buroshos made up the elite classes, and the more powerful Burosho families were exempt from taxes.<sup>225</sup> This case study will focus on the Burosho people.

## Physical Geography

The Hunza District lies in the Pakistan-administered area of disputed territory of Kashmir. Pakistan's Jammu and Kashmir state is comprised of Jammu, the Hunza District; Ladakh (on the Indian side) and Azad Kashmir and Northern Areas (on the Pakistani side). The Hunza District also shares a border with Afghanistan and China. Hunza was an independent principality for centuries; in the seventeenth century it became a tributary and ally to China. The region was ruled by a *Mir*, which is derived from the Arabic title *Emir*, meaning prince. Hunzas raided mountainous places where some groups of the nomadic Kyrgyz were the main inhabitants; they regularly sold Kyrgyz slaves to the Chinese. The region was a princely state while it was in an alliance with British India from 1892 to August 1947;

was officially unaligned for three months; and then, from November 1947 until 1974, was a princely state of Pakistan. The modern-day boundaries of Hunza remain largely unchanged since the seventeenth century: today, this region is located in the northeastern part of Pakistan's Gilgit-Baltistan Agency.



Source: CAOCL

A princely state referred to those states on the subcontinent with a nominally sovereign monarchy under a local ruler in an alliance with a greater state power.

Gilgit-Baltistan covers an area of 28174 sq mi (72,971 sq km).<sup>226</sup> The region's high elevation and its distance from the sea determines its climate. It is also the meeting place of the world's three highest mountain ranges: the Karakorum, the Hindukush and the Pamirs. Historically, these nearly impassable mountain ranges played a significant role serving as a geopolitical buffer zone in the time of The Great Game between the British and Russian Empires.

Russia's advance southward marked a century-long struggle between Russia and Great Britain for dominance over Central Asia. This struggle is often referred to as "The Great Game."

The Hunza region itself is approximately 5,000 sq mi (12,950 sq km).<sup>227</sup> The watersheds in the mountainous region of Hunza provide freshwater flows to sustain the agriculture-based societies, and directly or indirectly benefit more than 150 million people living in Pakistan. Terraced planting fields, interspersed with fruit trees, provide a visual reminder of the Burosho's rich agrarian history. The topsoil is relatively fertile, but climate and a wide range of temperatures limit the variety of agricultural products cultivated in this region.

## Social Structure

### *Ethnic Identity*

Historically an agrarian society, the Burosho population was divided between crop cultivators and those who earned a living in animal husbandry. Burosho people share very few physical characteristics with the majority of Pakistanis. The Burosho people often have red or blond hair, blue or green eyes, and light skin color. They also speak a language totally unintelligible to their neighbors. In addition to linguistic differences, many facets of the Burosho peoples' identity are rooted in Ismaili Shi'a Islam, rather than the Sunni principles adhered to in most other parts of Pakistan. The Burosho strength of ethnic identification, their unique traditions, and Ismaili identity set them apart from the other majority ethnic groups in Pakistan.



Young Burosho girl (Source: WikiCommons)

In part because of their unique culture, physical features, and perceived healthy lifestyle, the Burosho enjoyed a small degree of Western notoriety at the beginning of the twentieth century. The British doctor Robert McCarrison, a pioneer in nutrition research, was assigned as a medical officer to Indian troops serving in the northwest mountain region of India. During that time, Dr. McCarrison worked in the Gilgit-Baltistan Agency and occasionally treated people from Hunza. He noticed that the people of the region seemed to age slower and live longer than the average for that time. He surmised that this was because of the regional diet, which consisted mostly of fruits and vegetables, whole wheat products, and dairy, -- but very little meat. At that time, this type of diet was nearly unheard of in the West. Back in his homeland, the British government was concerned with the health and well-being of citizens in its own country, as industrialization and the resulting pollution was contributing to deteriorating health conditions in Britain. Dr. McCarrison's research and writings gained great notoriety back home, and introduced many Westerners to the people and culture of Hunza.

As this region became more geographically accessible, the people of Hunza acquired a romanticized reputation; people began to regard the Hunza people as being somehow superior to many of the larger ethnic groups found elsewhere on the Indian subcontinent. Emily Lorimer, wife of British India political official David Lorimer, wrote that the people of Hunza were “non-Oriental” and “free from inhibiting superstitions.”<sup>228</sup>



## ***Family***

Burosho villages are built several hundred feet above the Hunza River gorge and are heavily fortified. The only access to these villages is by traveling on narrow one- or two-lane roads, located high above the river basin. Homes are built in very close proximity to one another and are constructed of rock and/or clay. The lower floor of a home has two sections: an uncovered courtyard for animals, and a living space for families. This traditional structure, known as a *ha*, houses a small extended family, usually comprised of 10-12 people, where household chores are divided among the group, and each family member has a defined set of tasks. However, with development moving into the region, traditional *has* are increasingly being torn down to make way for modern housing.

The Burosho population is made up of four major clans and several minor ones. The major clans primarily inhabit the urban center of Baltit, while the minor clans are dispersed in other settlements.

Intermarriage involving other ethnic groups is rare. Child marriage is also taboo. The average age for marriage in the Burosho culture is 17, for both males and females. Divorce is permitted, but is rare. Men are allowed to divorce their wives in cases of adultery. Women are not permitted to ask for divorce.

## ***Gender***

In many pastoral/agrarian societies, raising or herding livestock. This is a male-dominated activity in neighboring cultures, like that of the Pashtun. The manner in which Burosho men and women are responsible for household tasks is different from other majority cultures in the region: chores are shared equally, and family cooperation is stressed. Although there are no gender restrictions on who performs certain tasks, manual labor tends to be done by males; tasks such as child-rearing, food supply management, and light gardening are typically the responsibility of female members of the household.

On average, the highest level of education achieved by females in Pakistan is low. Nearly 45 percent of the country's population is illiterate. In many regions, girls are prevented from attending school. However, in Hunza, at least three-quarters of the people – male and female – can read and write. Equal education has been a standard since 1934, when the first public school system was created in Hunza by the Aga Khan; as a result, every child in Hunza attains at least a high school education. Many Hunza youth continue their education at universities domestically and abroad.<sup>229</sup>



Traditional Burosho ha (Source: WikiCommons)



## ***Language***

The Burushaski language is considered an “isolate,” meaning that it has no similarities with the other languages in Hunza, or with any of the Indo-Aryan or Indo-Iranian languages in the region. However, some Arabic and Persian loanwords can be found in Burushaski because of the influence of Islam. The written Burushaski language has evolved over the centuries, but remains primarily an oral language. This, combined with the fact that Urdu, not Burushaski is being taught in schools, means that the language is at a greater risk of extinction than those that have a rich written history.

While there are no official numbers, the modern-day speakers of this language are estimated to be less than 90,000,<sup>230</sup> most of which live in Hunza in Pakistan, along with a small number of Burushaski speakers living in India. However, Urdu is the *lingua franca* of the region and the language of literacy; therefore, Buroshos are pressured to shift to the use of Urdu.<sup>231</sup> With globalization and improved mobility, the younger generation of Buroshos are moving to urban areas for better education and employment opportunities. As a result of this migration, many city-dwelling Buroshos have a limited proficiency in Burushaski.

## **Belief System**

Pakistan, after Iran, is home to the world’s second largest Shi’a Muslim population, but Shi’ism is still a minority religion in the country. The majority of Shi’as in the region belong to the *Ithna-Ashari* (Twelver) sect of Shi’ism. Other than a small handful of Shi’a villages in the central part of Hunza, all of the people of this region are Nizari Ismailis, a branch of Ismaili Islam which is itself an offshoot of Shi’a Islam. While Sunni Islam is the majority sect in the Southeast and South West Asia region, other pockets of Ismailis can be found in Karachi and parts of India.

The Burosho Nizari Ismailis differ from the Twelver Shi’a primarily due to a difference in what each sect believes to be the legitimate lineage of authority and leadership of the community after Islam’s Prophet Mohammad. As Shi’as, both groups believe in the lineage of authority (imams) resting solely with the descendants of the family of Mohammad. Therefore, while the first six Imams that both groups accept are the same, the Ismailis get their name from their acceptance of Ismail Ibn Ja’afar as the legitimate successor of the sixth imam, while the Twelver Shi’as accept Musa al-Kadhim, the younger brother of Ismail, as the legitimate imam. The Twelvers only accept the authority of a line of spiritual succession that ended with the 12<sup>th</sup> imam. However, it is the belief of many Ismailis in this region – especially among the Nizari Ismailis -- that the succession of spiritual leadership continued over the centuries, and that this role is currently filled by the Aga Khan.

Buroshos were converted to Ismaili Islam in the sixteenth century by missionaries from Central Asia. Since Buroshos live in physical isolation from the more populated regions in Pakistan, they have historically been able to retain their unique traditions and belief system. Muslims dwelling in Hunza are different from a majority of Muslims living elsewhere in Pakistan: Islam, as it is practiced by the Hunza people, is observed in conjunction with indigenous sacred traditions and practices. Because of their apolitical stance on most issues, the Buroshos have been largely spared from scrutiny by the Pakistan government. However, like all minority religions in Pakistan, the Burosho Ismailis are always under the potential threat of persecution by the Sunni majority and extremist groups operating in nearby territories.

It was in the eighteenth century during the reign of the Persian Qajjar dynasty that the title of Aga Khan was first given to the Nizari Ismaili imam. The first Aga Khan moved to Bombay India and firmly established the Ismaili community there. Subsequent Aga Khans, including Sir Sultan Mohammad Shah, played a major role in Pakistan's independence movement.<sup>232</sup> Nizari Ismaili Muslims are scattered throughout the world and only account for a small religious minority in any state. Nizaris seek all manner of guidance from the Aga Khan, who they believe to be the only true interpreter of Islam.

The current Nizari Ismaili imam, Prince Karim Aga Khan, lives in a village outside Paris. He serves as the spiritual leader of the Nizaris, and leads numerous philanthropic organizations serving the needs of Burosho Nizari Ismailis and members of the Nizari Ismailis living in Asia and Africa. For Buroshos, the Aga Khan is the region's primary financial benefactor as well as a spiritual leader.

While Ismaili Islam is the belief system adhered to by nearly all of the population of Hunza, traditional superstitions still exist and play a significant role in Burosho society. Contrary to the assumptions of Emily Roberts in the early twentieth century, the Burosho maintain traditions and beliefs that pre-date their Islamic history. Buroshos still consult shamans and believe in mountain spirits. Shamans, known as *bitans*, possess spiritual powers, and are able to communicate with supernatural beings. They inhale the smoke of burning juniper branches, dance to a special music, drink blood from a freshly severed goat head, and enter into ecstatic trances.<sup>233</sup> *Bitans* are said to run in certain families. Today's *bitans* are often the children, grandchildren of other *bitans*. Historically, *bitans* were both male and female in Hunza, but with the influence of Pakistan's modern culture, *bitans* are primarily male. In Burosho culture, these shamanistic rituals have no conflict with Islam, as the two systems are seen to complement each other.

## Political Structure

Even before partition, the governing of this territory was ambiguous. In 1935, the British acquired a sixty-year lease on Gilgit-Baltistan Agency from the maharaja of Kashmir. At the time of partition, the British left control of the region to a Kashmiri governor. In November of 1947, the local army, known as the Gilgit Scouts, joined other Muslim fighters from the FATA, North West Frontier Province (NWFP), and Kashmir in a fight for Kashmir autonomy. In a matter of weeks, they expelled the Kashmir army from Gilgit and asked the Pakistan government to take over the administration of the region.



Baltit Fort, the former residence of the Mirs of Hunza (Source: WikiCommons)

By swearing allegiance to Pakistan, the Gilgit Agency expected more active participation and representation in the government. However, from 1947-74, Pakistan governed Hunza as it had been governed by the British under the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR), a system established for the

limited purpose of suppressing criminal activity. For nearly 30 years, the district was largely autonomous and had no representation in Pakistan's parliament. In 1974, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto eliminated the FCR and the princely status of Hunza, but its integration into Pakistan's governance structure has never fully been realized. In other words, Hunza maintains a high degree of political autonomy and governs itself with very little interference from authorities in Islamabad.

There is no deliberate age or gender stratification in the Burosho political system. The traditional head of state is the *mir* (now called governor) and is responsible for the distribution of justice as well as the maintenance of local customs and tribal festivals. Each village appoints a chief and a sergeant at arms to enforce local laws and traditions. The *mir* also appoints several men -- *kehalifas* -- to officiate at important social events such as weddings and naming ceremonies. However these are limited appointments, as individuals do not perform these duties on a full-time basis. The last *mir* to officially hold the title was Mir Muhammad Jamal Khan. While the title has been officially changed to governor, the holder of this position still uses the honorary title of *mir*, and the local government functions in much of the same way it has functioned for hundreds of years. Mir Ghazanfar Ali Khan, the current governor of Gilgit-Baltistan, is the son of Mohammad Jamal Khan. Local government officials and bureaucrats appointed by the *mir* also function in traditional capacities.

Despite the lack of political integration, Hunza has seen significant civil and military integrations. Mid-level and senior bureaucrats frequently travel to Islamabad to attend governance training programs, and government political jobs in Hunza are highly coveted. Younger Buroshkos are leaving the area to join the military, but return to troops stationed in the region. The constant threat of an India-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir, combined with the threat encroachment by neighboring extremist groups ensure a constant military presence in the Gilgit Agency.

### The Economy of the Culture

Due to physical and cultural isolation, the region is relatively underdeveloped economically. Nevertheless, the region has always been self-sufficient due to its agriculture sector and natural resources. The Burosho engage mostly in subsistence farming. Livestock such as cattle, yaks, and goats, are kept in farms; men also hunt small fowl. Main agricultural crops include potatoes, garlic, beans, peas, carrots, tomatoes, leafy vegetables, mulberries, apples, walnuts, almonds, plums, pears, cherries, grapes, millet, wheat, barley, rye, buckwheat, rice, spices, cucumbers, tobacco, and flax.<sup>234</sup> Fields are terraced and are irrigated by a complex system of drainage conduits.



Potato fields in the Hunza Valley (Source: WikiCommons)

Dowries are still commonplace in Pakistan, as in many other areas of the world, with more than 95 percent of all marriages involving some sort of dowry being paid from the bride's family to the family of the groom.<sup>235</sup> Today, dowries in West South Asia are primarily composed of jewelry, money, and clothes. However, traditionally dowries more commonly included property and livestock. Therefore, the dowries contribute significantly to the economic health of the household.

The region is economically marginalized for several reasons: because of its geographic distance from Pakistan's political and economic centers, because of its minority population, and because of its harsh climate. Trade has historically never contributed in any significant way to the region's economy. Prior to British control, the Burosho would occasionally provide labor services for Chinese caravans in exchange for cooking tools, cloth, tea, and silk.

Most of the economic development in the region has occurred post-partition, with assistance from Aga Khan development networks. Many Burosho are employed by the Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP), whose mission is to work as a "catalyst for equitable and sustainable rural development in Northern Pakistan."<sup>236</sup> Tourism is one of the primary economic drivers for the region today. The Aga Khan Historic Cities Program (AKHCP) in Pakistan has restored a number of major forts, traditional settlements, mosques, and public spaces in the high valleys of Gilgit-Baltistan Agency.<sup>237</sup>

## **Conclusion**

You might have noticed that the case study does not include all, or even many, of the concepts discussed in the Operational Culture General document. This is only natural; a comprehensive body of literature devoted to the study of a single culture is rare. In fact, Marines are frequently called upon to operate in areas where current information on local culture is scarce. What the OCG and the chapters in this document do is help Marines learn about their assigned region and acquire skills and concepts that will assist them in operating effectively in complex cross-cultural situations in any part of the globe when information is scarce or rapidly changing.



## Endnotes

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