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Culture Cards:
Afghanistan & Islamic Culture

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Culture Cards: Afghan and Arab Countries

These cards can be used in many different ways, but they are designed as "fillers" to be taken out of your ACU pocket and used between tasks or waiting for the next training to begin. Soldiers must understand how vital culture is in accomplishing today's missions. Military personnel who have a superficial or even distorted picture of a host culture make enemies for the United States. Each Soldier must be a culturally literate ambassador, aware and observant of local cultural beliefs, values, behaviors and norms. Why?

- Understanding local culture allows for better decision making through a better and more holistic picture of the operational environment.
- It reduces friction with local nationals.
- It allows better prediction and tracking of second and third order effects, helping avoid unforeseen and unintended consequences.
- Leaders who acquire a basic understanding of local history and culture can also recognize and effectively counter the threat's propaganda, based upon a misrepresentation of history.
- It allows for better operational planning and decision-making.
- It can save lives!

What is Cultural Competency?

- Cultural Knowledge or Fundamentals: Familiarization with cultural characteristics, history, values, and behaviors of foreign nations, another ethnic group, or religious group.
- Cultural Awareness: Knowledge and appreciation of the cultural differences as well as similarities of local nationals.
- Cultural Sensitivity: Sensitivity and understanding of another group including their attitudes, perceptions, values and beliefs.
- Culturally Appropriate Skills: The ability to adapt to cultural differences, sensitivity, and awareness to accomplish the mission in a culturally appropriate way.

What kinds of cultural questions should we ask about cultures during COIN or Stability Operations?

Culture is about how people perceive reality. It may not fit the true facts or history. Soldiers must not let personal prejudices cloud their judgment.

- What do we believe about ourselves? What are our motives and values?
- What do the green [pro-U.S.] local nationals believe about themselves? What are their motives and values?
- What do the amber [neutral] local nationals believe about themselves? What are their motives and beliefs?
- What do the red [anti-U.S.] local nationals believe about themselves? What are their motives and beliefs?
- How do the various groups of local nationals view the U.S.? What do they think our motives are?
- What are the current Cultural Centers of Gravity (CCOGs*)? Religion? Ethnicity? Population growth/youth bulges? Power brokers? Health? Open borders? Wealth distribution? Rural/urban? Tribal conflicts? Crime? Education? Corrupt government? Inefficient government? Outside Alliances? Economy? Social system?
- What are cultural narratives/history?

*CCOG; "What are the focal points that glue a combatant's entire system together and provide it with purpose and direction?" The Taliban's centers of gravity are: ideologic Islam, Geographic- Kandahar and sanctuaries in Pakistan, social -tribalism and clientism, ethnic- Pashtun mores/culture, economic- opium poppy money.

[Critical thinking: What Americans see as corruption and nepotism may be viewed differently in other cultures. If your mission requires buying goods and services from local nationals, how would you handle this aspect of local culture?]

What is Culture?

Culture is all the information passed between generations as people mature and learn the way to live within a particular group. Culture includes the traditions, values, beliefs, behaviors and norms of a nation, tribe, region, state or other group of people.

Culture is:

- Learned as a child.
- Shared by a group.
- Adaptive and responsive to environmental changes.
- Integrated or holistic in that if one part changes, all the other parts react.
- Based on symbols so meanings and perceptions are expressed through language, music, art and other forms of symbolic expression.
- The way people see and think about the world.
- Deeply embedded and regarded as normal or natural.
- The software inside our heads, and our heads act as the hardware.

Culture tells us how to behave and what is valued and what is not. It influences not only the way we act but also what we think and how we see the world around us.

The ability to use culture is what makes us human. Culture is all the things we learn and share within a group. Yet, it exists as an abstraction. It is not a concrete thing, it is an interconnected set of ideas, all the information passed on between generations through language, writing, mathematics and behavior. It is all around us. It is so habitual that we often do not notice culture, because we take it for granted as "just the way things are."

Humans are biologically equipped to create and use culture. Culture is all knowledge passed from one generation to another. Culture can be divided into symbolic culture and material culture. *Symbolic culture* is all of a group's ideas, symbols and languages. *Material culture* is tools, clothing, houses and other things that people make or use. It is all human inventions: from stone tools to spacecraft.

[Critical Thinking: What kinds of culture do we take for granted in everyday life?]

What are the cultural dimensions of any operating environment?

VBBN (Values, Beliefs, Behaviors and Norms), the basic Army Acronym of what makes up culture. It includes a peoples' history and religion, their use of body language and personal space, power distance between superiors and subordinates, time orientation, individualism, formality, perceptions, use of reason, belief in cause and effect vs. fate, as well as other variables. Try to understand the local differences in values and beliefs within the context in which you observe them.

VBBN provides a framework for society that tells us how to deal with others within our society as well as others around the world. Without this framework every day would be a new challenge, forcing us to relearn the rules for interacting with others. In essence, it eliminates some of the "guesswork" involved in dealing with others. With a common set of rules (both formal and informal), we often know what to expect in a given situation. In fact, if we observe others objectively and thoroughly, we can use culture to help us create strategies for dealing with others, and enable ourselves to better interact with those around us.

The acronym "SEARCH" (Society, Environment, Authority, Religion and Beliefs, Communication and History) provides a framework that organizes the basic dimensions of culture into a "map" that can be as simple or as complex as needed: keep in mind that all these factors work together to create any culture and the way people perceive their world. SEARCH provides a memory aid allowing us to examine any culture and better understand, influence and achieve mission success.

Culture is patterned (things fit together), changeable, and arbitrary. It influences how people make judgments about what is right or wrong, what is important and unimportant, and what attitudes and behaviors are appropriate. As we study the different cultures of the world, keep in mind the climate, the geographic location of the culture and the historical experience of the culture. Look for patterns and relationships.

[Critical thinking: How can an understanding of VBBN impact operational planning and mission execution?]

[Critical thinking: How would you use SEARCH in the field? In what kinds of cases would it be most helpful?]

Why are a people's beliefs important for Soldiers to understand?

Beliefs are shared views of reality. They are ideas about how and why things are as they are, how humans came to be, the origin of the universe, ideas of beauty and why people get sick. Beliefs influence the way people perceive their world; this resulting world view then influences how people behave. People are often unaware of the beliefs operating in their culture until those beliefs come under attack. Beliefs are so central to a culture that they seldom are subject to investigation or argument. Beliefs may differ amongst subcultures sharing a common majority culture. In a COIN or joint operating environment, we must understand the beliefs of our allies, of the local nationals and of the potential enemies in order not to offend people and to understand why they act as they do.

Cultures allow for a range of behaviors, but they impose sanctions on "bad" behavior and often reward "good" behavior. Culture is expressed through local nationals' words and behaviors. Constantly monitoring people's actions and words as we enter a new Area of Operation (AO) will uncover much about local culture. Sometimes what people say and what they do are quite different. Words and actions can be strong indicators of cultural values. As cultures change due to technology or events, behaviors will also change, and this will change the belief system. These changes may take generations. World War II brought women into the workforce in the U.S. in record numbers. This brought about a significant change in beliefs about gender roles and women working outside the home. What had been ideal behavior for a woman in the 1940s had changed dramatically by the 1990s. In areas like Afghanistan that have suffered from long periods of war, behaviors will have changed as people adapt to uncertainty and danger.

[Critical Thinking: How do beliefs influence behavior?]

What are Social Norms and Mores (mor-rays)?

A *norm* is a range of behavior that is considered permissible by a particular group. Norms tell us how to behave in certain situations. They are social guidelines that most people follow. Norms are not rigid and may be ignored with only minor repercussions. For instance, being late to a meeting does not mean that you will be put in jail or killed. Norms are "social lubricants" that help people interact smoothly. Shaking hands, bowing, and greetings are all norms that help us relate to others. There are norms for behavior, gender relations, voice loudness and body language, and almost everyone conforms.

Mores are a wider category than norms and include both local etiquette and the fixed customs and fundamental moral views of a human group. Mores give guidance on how to think and behave.

Norms and mores tell us about core emotional beliefs, such as child rearing practices, vengeance, the roles of patronage and corruption, or the roles of women and religion in daily life.

Culture acts as a form of glue to hold a group together; it does not stay the same—it changes over time as circumstances change. Culture defines us, but we also define culture. New events, technology, influences, and circumstances can all change our culture. Certainly, the invention of computers, the Internet, and instant communication has changed the culture of the average American. Culture reacts to technological change and is always influencing how we perceive change. It tells us who we are, but we reserve the right to modify our VBBN at any time to suit the circumstances.

[Critical Thinking: What are American and/or Army norms and mores? Have they changed in the last 50 years?]

What is Enculturation?

Learning one's culture is called *enculturation*. We learn the "proper way" to do things from a very young age by growing up in a particular culture. We are taught the right way to behave and accomplish basic activities by parents, relatives, teachers and friends. Today the Internet, movies and television provide new channels for enculturation. We learn most of the cultural rules unconsciously and assume that they are natural instead of culturally constructed. What we are taught at an early age becomes part of our thoughts and feelings and often results in an unquestioning acceptance of cultural assumptions. All humans are enculturated into their group's culture, and they learn the "correct" ways of doing things and understanding the world around them.

Children in any culture are taught the "way things are;" that is, "What to eat—How to eat—What is good—Who the Gods and Goddesses are—Proper etiquette and behavior and so on. Children absorb the information that their parents, relatives, peers and the media give them. We perceive our culture as "the way things are" so we are like fish swimming in water. We swim in a sea of culture and generally do not even realize that it is supporting all we do. Culture gives us beliefs that are the foundation for our values, values lead to the norms in any society and those norms influence the behavior of us all. Culture tells us what we are supposed to do or not do in any given situation.

[Critical Thinking: As you have matured, have you come to question old ways of thinking and behaving or has life strengthened your early convictions?]

What is Cultural Ethnocentrism?

Ethnocentrism is the assumption that the behaviors and values we learned growing up in our families is the correct and natural "way things are." Ethnocentrism is a human characteristic of seeing the world through the filter of our own culture and assuming that the way we were raised is the best way-that the values and norms of our culture are superior to others.

Because we are raised to understand that our "tribe's" way of thinking and behaving are correct, all humans are, to some extent, ethnocentric. Ethnocentrism is a common human characteristic that means to see the world through the filter of our culture and assume that the way we were raised is the best way—that the values and norms of our culture are superior to others.

If you disdain or ignore local nationals, they will see your lack of respect and be less willing to help you with your mission. The ancient Romans, Chinese, Aztecs, Incas and many others all believed that they were superior to the people they conquered. Ethnocentrism can also lead us to underestimate adversaries.

[Critical Thinking: Analyze this statement: "The English drive on the wrong side of the road."]

What is Cultural Relativism?

In order to avoid ethnocentrism and underestimation of potential adversaries, we must realize that a local society is based on its own culture and history.

Cultural relativism is the idea that different cultures as distinct and unique wholes have different VBBN from one another, and hence see and respond to the world in different ways.

Cultural relativism does *not* mean moral relativism. Moral relativism asserts that there are no absolute standards for right or wrong. Therefore one cannot judge anyone else or another culture as these standards vary according to culture, time and situation. This means that we reserve judgment of other cultures' beliefs and behaviors until we have a thorough understanding of why they act and believe as they do, based on a clear understanding of their history, religion, technology, and environmental situations.

Cultural relativism helps to get beyond stereotypes and is a method to limit the negative impact of ethnocentrism.

[Critical Thinking: Cultural relativism suggests that we understand the motivations behind practices. In some Islamic countries women wear burkas. Who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged by this and other customs? Does the moral question then become 'what, if anything, should be done about a particular practice?']

What is Globalization?

Globalization is the sum total of communication and transportation technologies that spread internationally, impacting values, attitudes and economies around the world. Globalization began in the 15th and 16th centuries as Europeans used new technologies for sailing ships and navigation to explore and colonize much of the world. Today the world economy is fairly integrated and Western standards of medicine, public health, accounting, airports, roads and computer technology have become the norm that many countries try to attain.

As technologies bring countries closer together, a new global culture is emerging. Multi-national corporations, the Internet, the mass media and a global network of finance, manufacture, and export and import, are working to homogenize the world. At the same time many groups and countries are fighting against cultural homogenization and trying to retain their unique cultures, religions and traditions.

Because of globalized technology, terrorists in remote ungoverned parts of the world can impact anywhere on the globe by using aircraft and the Internet. Some nations, religions and other groups reject globalization and see it as a kind of "Westoxification." Al Qaeda and others utilize modern technologies, but reject the associated western values such as democracy, secular government, freedom of religion and women's rights.

Cultures are integrated wholes, and no part of a culture can be really understood if it is isolated from the rest. In Muslim-majority countries, Islam impacts all aspects of social life. Their economy influences how people reckon kinship. The interdependence of one part of a culture on the others makes it difficult, if not impossible, to change or introduce a new idea or technology without a ripple-effect throughout a society.

[Critical thinking: What are pros & cons of globalization?]
Hint—cheap goods from Walmart/end of family-owned stores.

What is Culture Shock?

Culture shock is a feeling of dislocation, of being out of place in a new culture. When arriving in an alien environment with new smells, new languages, new faces and clothing, and new rules, Soldiers may commonly experience some culture shock. This can be particularly important if embedded with host nation forces. Culture shock usually passes through four stages:

Honeymoon Stage: The adventure of new places and opportunities.

Avoidance Stage: Marked by loneliness and frustration; the urge to avoid everyone and everything associated with the local culture.

Anger Stage: Stereotyping and disgust for the local culture.

Adjustment Stage: Creative interaction with the local culture.

After a long deployment or several deployments, a Soldier can experience reentry shock (reverse culture shock) upon returning home. He/she finds that it does not meet expectations or memories since things have changed in his/her absence. If not recognized as part of a normal return experience, this can lead to depression. It is important to recognize culture shock and reentry shock, to discuss them with friends and, if the conditions continue, to seek help and counseling.

Culture shock sometimes leads Soldiers to reexamine their values, priorities and what they think of themselves and the U.S. This also happens when returning home after a long absence. Reentry to home culture after a long absence can be difficult, as people can not restart their lives where they left off.

There are many techniques for coping with culture shock and reentry shock. The best way to cope with culture shock is to educate yourself about the culture you are being deployed to by reading books, seeing films and talking with natives and people who have been there. Talking about your feelings with others also helps. Reentry shock, or returning to your familiar society, also requires adjusting to the changes in oneself and those that have occurred in the home culture while absent.

[Critical Thinking: What are your experiences with culture shock? What might be the consequences of multiple deployments?]

What is a Social Taboo?

Taboos are mores specifying what actions are prohibited in a culture. Taboos are activities or uses of physical objects that are explicitly forbidden and are based on religious notions of what is permissible and what is not.

Drinking coffee for Mormons and eating pork for Jews and Muslims are all examples of food taboos. These taboos create boundaries between people and constantly remind believers that they belong to a certain group with group expectations.

All culture have an incest taboo prohibiting having sexual relations with close relatives, but different cultures may define who close relatives are differently. In most American states you cannot marry your uncle, aunt, niece or nephew. In past American Indian cultures a preferred marriage was one between one's mother's brother's child. In some traditionally Islamic Middle East cultures the preferred marriage pattern has been to marry one's father's brother's daughter. This keeps within the larger family the bride price that is paid to the father of the daughter. (See "Local Kinship System", below).

[Critical Thinking: Taboos are identity/membership markers and remind people that they are members of a certain group. Can you think of a taboo in your own culture and what makes it unacceptable?]

What are Rites of Passage?

All cultures celebrate the events of birth, coming of age, marriage and death. These and other rites of passage mark changes in a person's status. Rites of passage include baby showers, boot camp/basic training, quinceanera, (a Hispanic girl turns 15), Bar /Bat Mitzvahs, graduation ceremonies, and funerals. Rites of passage usually include three stages:

First Stage: The separation of the inductees from the normal population as in basic training where inductees get haircuts and new clothes.
Second Stage: The in-between stage where the inductees go through a period of training and tests as in the four years it usually takes to get a college degree.
Third Stage: The inductees reenter the normal population but now with a new status as a graduate, a married person, an adult.

Rites of passage can teach you much about a culture. In the Islamic world the most important rites of passage are marriage and the Hajj to Mecca. After completing the pilgrimage to Mecca, a person's new status is that of *Hajji*.

[Critical thinking: What are American rites of passage? Are they becoming more or less important? Why?]

What is a Tribe?

Tribe is a term that is often misused. Generally, *tribe* refers to a range of kinship-based groups that are politically integrated under some unifying factor, such as leaders, geography, language or history, and share or assume to share a common ancestry. Generally, tribes stress that all men are equal but in some tribes, "Big Men" have more influence than others. Leaders or tribal councils have little ability to enforce decisions. Often tribe is just one factor in a person's identity. Tribal conflicts often occur over resources, such as when two different tribes claim grazing land, trees on a mountain, or minerals.

In Afghanistan tribes are often called *Qawms*, *Qabila* or *Khels*. Khels tend to be smaller lineages or clans. Tribal leaders are often called Khans. Khan can also mean a large landowner or patron with a circle of dependent followers or clients.

[Critical Thinking: What are the pros and cons to using tribal militia for local security and COIN operations?]

Why is the local kinship system important for Soldiers to understand?

Families are formed through marriage, and marriage serves economic and social functions. Two or more families united through marriage can form alliances. Kinship refers to the relationships that are based on relatedness through descent and marriage. For tribes and much of the non-industrial world, kinship is the single most important fact of life. Identity, rights, obligations, status, and survival depend on kin. Kin often share resources, defend each other against outsiders, and intermarry.

Marriage is the bedrock of kinship and is a legal, sexual and economic union between men and women such that the children born to the woman are recognized as legitimate offspring of the parents. Marriage in the West revolves around romantic love, but traditionally marriage was an economic alliance between families or groups. People do not just get married to their spouse; they also assume obligations to their in-laws. In many parts of the Middle East couples tend to reside at the house of the husband's father, and a wife is under the close supervision of her mother-in-law until the wife produces a son.

(Kinship continued)

Many families around the world are headed by a senior man and his wife, their married sons and daughters, and unmarried sons and daughters. Anthropologists refer to this as an extended family. This keeps the costs of marriage down and the bridewealth/brideprice in the family. The groom's family may have to transfer $1,000 to $30,000 to the family of the bride to contract a marriage in Afghanistan. Bridewealth is the opposite of dowry which is payment to the groom's family. In Afghanistan young girls are sometimes given as brides to repay loans their fathers took to support the family while growing an opium crop.

In pastoral and farming societies, kin are often organized into extended families, lineages, clans, and tribes. Lineages are generally groups of people who interact regularly and know the genealogical connections. Clans are groups of lineages that are so large they may only interact once a year and do not know all the genealogical connections. Clans solve this problem by saying "We are all descendents of X." "X" may be a person or a totem animal. A totem animal is a way of bringing solidarity to a group with few political connections. The people believe they are all descendants of a human or animal spirit or ancestor. These spirits can be helpful or jealous and wrathful. Clans usually hold religious rites once or twice a year, which allows for people to meet and be married from different clans. War is another reason clans may come together—to defend communal territory.

Nepotism is common in much of the world and it is seen as natural that people take care of their children and friends. Networks of family members and friends can be analyzed and plotted, and this can be a powerful COIN technique.

[Critical Thinking: Societies with little government or ineffective governments use kinship and customs to organize their society. What effect would this have on COIN and stability operations?]

What is Informal Leadership?

In tribal societies all men are often considered equal and there may not be anyone like a chief. Formal leaders, such as elders, may not have any power to coerce their people to do or not to do anything. Informal leaders may not hold any office, but they may have more influence than formal leaders. In eastern Afghanistan you might ask "Who are the famous men?" in order to get the names of men who are key leaders but do not hold any offices. Sometimes these men are patrons with many clients who look to them for resources and protection.

Leaders in the Middle East and Central Asia traditionally extracted wealth from brigandage, road taxes and protection rackets, and then distributed subsidies to their supporters. This model of economic and social relations is still strong in the Pushtun belt along the Afghan Pakistan border and informs how Afghans behave and perceive their world.

Another way to see the reality on the ground in the Middle East and in Afghanistan, especially in nontribal areas, is through the model of enduring dyadic "patron-client" relations. Authority in these societies is based on prestige and access to various physical and political resources. Traditionally, the Shaykh, Khan or Malik are often landowners that are economically and politically powerful, and they may have private armed retainers or access to a state's military power. The patron is expected to act as a conduit of money and favors, and as a negotiator for his client group. They have social status whereas their clients are generally of humble origins and weak politically and economically. These relationships are often informal and flexible, but sometimes they are contractual.

[Critical Thinking: It is important to have the right people at any meeting. How do you know who are the key leaders of villages or tribes if they are informal leaders? Hint: If you have an attached Human Terrain Team, they can help.]

What are Negotiations?

"Negotiating is the process of communicating back and forth for the purpose of reaching a joint agreement about differing needs or ideas (Acuff 2008:6)."

…the process by which two or more parties strive to satisfy certain of their respective interests by endeavoring to come to some mutual agreement (Online Resource Centre, www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/skills10_11/).

The four main elements of negotiations:

1. The players and their relative situations.
2. Their styles of decision making.
3. Cross-cultural/national character aspects.
4. Translator's knowledge, skill and character.

When using a translator, speak slowly and clearly, avoiding slang and military acronyms. Ask questions, listen carefully, and summarize your understanding of The Other Side's [TOS's] position often. Unless you already have a strong relationship with TOS, avoid jokes.

General negotiation methods:

- Separate the people from the problem.
- Focus on interests, not positions.
- Invent options for mutual gain.
- Insist on using Objective Criteria [Fisher and Ury 1991:15].

This generic style of negotiating must be understood in order to adapt to the host nation's culture and environment. Formal and informal negotiations constantly arise during deployments and are critical to 21st century conflicts

[Critical Thinking: It is important to brief your translator prior to a negotiation. How might you know if the translator is interpreting correctly and he is not personally aggravating the other side?]

How do you negotiate with Arabs and Afghans ?

A negotiation becomes cross-cultural when the participants do not share common values, beliefs, and behavior patterns. The Other Side (TOS) may see reality quite differently than an American captain or brigade commander.

In the Arab/Afghan cultures, negotiations are indirect and complex. Rapport and relationships are often more important than positions. Greetings, small talk and pleasantries, and drinking tea are important. When negotiating with Arabs, pay close attention to body language, eye movement and hand gestures.

Relationship basics: Shake hands with the right hand and use the left hand to grasp the other person's elbow. (After the first meeting, an air kiss on the cheek is often acceptable.) Placing your right hand on your heart with a slight bow is a sign of respect along with "Salam Aleykum (Peace be upon you)" (Ibrahimov, Mahir 2011:71).

Many Arabs often show emotions to show their sincerity, while in the Afghan Pushtun culture showing emotions can be considered as a sign of weakness. Communications may be subtle and indirect (*ibid*, 72).

In the legalistic American culture, signing a contract is often seen as a goal, but Arabs tend to like to leave things vague and seek sustainable relationships more than contracts. They favor consensus-based decision making and avoid quick decisions (*ibid*, 72).

Face-saving is very important and compromises must allow the Arab or Afghan to maintain dignity and prestige and not appear weak. Honor and shame are critical in these cultures.

If in doubt as to who is senior, address the most elderly in the room. He may not be senior, but it shows good manners and respect for the elderly.

[Critical Thinking: You have been tasked to provide security and arrange contracts to build a girls' school in a Pushtun village that has never educated its girls before. The local Taliban has issues and writes letters warning that such a school will be targeted. How would you get buy-in from the local village elders and arrange for locals to help with construction and security?]

What does Islam mean?

Islam means "submission" to God, and Muslim means "one who submits." The religious tradition of Islam is based on the revelations received by Muhammad, considered by Muslims to be the last prophet of God. These cumulative revelations are known as the Qur'an ["recitation"].

Islam understands itself as comprising a total way of life, and therefore makes no distinction between religious and secular domains. All aspects of human activity are to be guided by Shari`a, which literally means the "path," consisting of God's intentions, expectations and values by which humanity should live. As such, Shari`a is far wider than any legal code, but Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) seeks to approximate Shari`a in a practical, codified way.

The Qur'an and the Sunna [reports of the sayings and actions of Muhammad and of the practices of the earliest Muslim community in Medina] are the two most important sources of fiqh. Only about 10 percent of the Qur'an directly deals with legal issues. In addition, Islamic legal scholars may appeal to analogy, consensus, custom and independent legal reasoning in formulating Islamic law. There are four main Sunni *madhabs* [legal schools of thought] and one major Shia one, which differ based primarily on the relative weight each gives to the individual sources of fiqh. One madhab tends to be more prominent in a particular geographic area, but each Sunni madhab considers the others to be fully orthodox, despite their interpretive differences. The laws of Muslim-majority countries generally seek explicitly to be in accordance with Shari`a, although governmental and legal structures may differ significantly among these countries.

Five Pillars of Islam

The Five Pillars of Islam are five key obligatory practices that characterize Islam. They are:

- *Shahadah*: the double profession that "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God," highlighting the core Islamic beliefs in the oneness of God, Allah ["THE God"], and Muhammad's role as the final prophet of God in receiving the Qur'an, understood by Muslims as God's definitive word to humanity, and his role as the model of human behavior.
- *Salat*: formal worship or prayer, that occurs five times a day.
- *Sawm*: fasting during the month of Ramadan, the holy 9th month of the lunar year.
- *Zakat*: the giving of alms for the poor and needy; it can also be given in the form of services donated or kindness and courteousness rendered.
- *Hajj*: pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a Muslim's lifetime, if financially and physically able, during a specified period in the 12th month of the lunar year.

[Critical Thinking: While the population is the center of gravity for COIN operations, Islam is the foundation of the population's perceptions of their situation.]

What is the Qur'an?

The Qur'an "recitation" is a book divided into 114 chapters, or *suras*. The suras are arranged from the longest to the shortest except for the first sura. They are not chronologically listed. Most Muslims believe that the Qur'an existed before time and was given to the prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. Al-Bukhari (d. 933 CE) said, "The Qur'an is the speech of God uncreated…." Muslims believe it to be the words of Allah channeled through the angel Gabriel to Muhammad between 610 CE and again in 632 CE. Muslims treat the Qur'an as the infallible word of Allah.

It is said that the first Caliph Abu Bakr ordered Zayd ibn Thabit to collect the "… bones, stones and palm leaves on which Quranic verses were written, to consult people's memories, and to transcribe the entire Qur'an into a single volume." Various versions of the Qur'an were compiled after the death of Muhammad in 632 CE. During the rule of the third Caliph, Othman Ibn Affan (Uthman), had some different versions destroyed.

The earliest source on the life of Muhammad was a biography by Ibn Ishaq, but his book is only partially available in the work of Ibn Hisham who died in 834 CE, 200 years after the death of Muhammad in 632 CE.

**CE: 'Common Era' is an alternative designation equivalent to AD.*

[Critical Thinking: Are there or have there been different versions of *your* religious books?]

What does "*Inshallah*" mean?

Inshallah means "If Allah wills it" or "if Allah lets it be." Allah has absolute power so one always notes that any aforementioned activity for the future is in Allah's hands. He is pure will. Reality is an outpouring of Allah's will; therefore some Muslims are very fatalistic and believe in predestination. This sometimes leads to a "*manana*" mentality: "the gun will fire if Allah wills it, whether I clean it or not."

Use of "Inshallah" can be traced to the 18th sura of the Qur'an where one is told to never say, "I will do so and so tomorrow without saying, so please Allah!" One should never rely upon their own resources so as to forget Allah.

Inshallah is also a convenient way of avoiding commitment. Amongst Arabs it sometimes means "no."

[Critical Thinking: If your job is to mentor Afghan troops or police, how will you deal with their fatalistic attitudes?]

What is the difference between Sunni and Shia Islam?

There are two major branches of Islam: the Sunni (comprising about 85 percent) and the Shia (about 15 percent), although there is also considerable diversity within each of these branches, including distinctive subgroups. The division originated over a dispute regarding who should succeed Muhammad after his death and the nature of that leadership. After that original division, though, the Sunni and the Shia developed in different directions, both legally and theologically.

The Shia maintain that leadership of the Muslim community should remain within the household and lineage of Muhammad. They claim that Muhammad specifically appointed his son-in-law and cousin, Ali, to be his successor. The Shia [“partisans” of Ali] started as a protest movement when Abu Bakr was chosen as Caliph [“successor”] by Muhammad’s Companions after Muhammad’s death, followed by Umar, and then by Uthman. Eventually Ali was selected as the fourth Caliph.

The first four Caliphs are often called “the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs” by the Sunni. From a Sunni perspective, leadership is primarily a political function. Caliphs were expected to support and protect Islam, but they did not have any specific religious authority. For the Sunni, the guidance of the Qur’an and of the Sunna [the normative sayings and practices of the Prophet and of the earliest Muslim community] was sufficient. For the Shia, however, leadership is primarily a spiritual matter. This spiritual authority is carried out by the Imams, who are in the bloodline of Muhammad and are viewed as possessing a special "Baraka" or spiritual energy, which gives them divinely-endowed wisdom. The Shia view Ali as the first Imam, rejecting the Sunni system of Caliphs.

Most Shia are part of the Imami (also known as Twelvers or as the Ithna Ashari); other subgroups of Shia include the Ismaili (also called Seveners) and the Zaydi. These subgroups differ in which branch of Muhammad’s subsequent family tree they follow, and have their own distinctive theological and legal traditions, often marked by their minority experience. Today Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Lebanon and Yemen have large populations of Shia.

Sunni Islamic theology became a coherent whole in the 9th Century CE. The four schools of Sunni jurisprudence differ in certain interpretations but there are no fundamental differences between them, with each viewing the others as fully orthodox. The Sunni Caliphate effectively ended when the Mongols attacked Baghdad in 1258 CE. Competing dynasties claimed the Caliphate over the next 600 years until the last, the Ottoman Caliphate, was abolished in 1924 CE.

Modern conflict between the Sunni and the Shia is often more the result of clashes regarding political power of the groups in an area, rather than primarily over religious beliefs and practices.

What festivals do Muslims celebrate?

Muslims celebrate various holidays, such as Muhammad's birthday, but they have two major festivals.

Eid al-Fitr: The Festival of Breaking the Fast at the end of the month of Ramadan, is somewhat like the festivities celebrated at the end of Easter/Lent to Christians. It lasts three days and is marked by meals, decorating the house and exchange of gifts. Alms are given to the poor and people visit the mosque. The traditional greeting for Eid is "*Eid Mubarak*," which means "blessed festival."

Eid al-Adha: The Feast of Sacrifice occurs on the 10th day of the 12th month of the lunar calendar marking the end of the yearly Hajj. It is said to commemorate the sacrifice of a ram in place of Ismael (Ishmael) by Ibrahim (Abraham) as a supreme example of submission to Allah. Families that can afford it sacrifice a goat, camel, sheep or cow and make a festive meal of it. They share the meat with the poor and needy.

[Critical Thinking: How would you anticipate and deal with Islamic holidays if you were deployed in an Islamic country?]

What is the Islamic month of Ramadan?

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar (based on lunar cycles) and the month that Muslims believe the Qur'an was first revealed to Muhammad. During Ramadan, Muslims fast (no food or water) from sunrise to sunset to purify themselves. Many mosques have a service that includes reading one-thirtieth of the Qur'an each night.

Fasting includes avoiding water, food, sex and refraining from all bad habits, words, places and thoughts. Fasting during Ramadan is said to remind the faithful of the sufferings of the poor. In the evening after sunset, a meal is served to break the fast (the Iftar meal), and families and friends eat together.

[Critical Thinking: If you were helping plan operations that included Muslim troops who are fasting, how would you adapt to Ramadan? Should operations be compromised during this time?]

What is Ashura?

The Shia observance of *Ashura* is one of the most important events in the Shia calendar. Ashura marks the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, son of Ali and grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. He and a small band of followers were killed and beheaded at Karbala in Iraq in 680 CE by the forces of the Caliph Yazid 1st.

Ashura occurs on the tenth day of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic lunar year. It is marked by passion plays, parades, pilgrimages to shrines and ritual mortification such as whipping and cutting oneself. This is said to unite the worshiper with the suffering of Husayn.

[Critical Thinking: Shia parades and pilgrimages during Ashura are often targets for Sunni bombers. How might you improve security during Ashura? How could this impact information operations?]

What is a Mullah?

Mullahs are people who are learned in Islamic law (*Shari'a*). In some Afghan villages, Mullahs manage a mosque and a Quranic school. Some have little education and others are highly educated in Islamic law, the life of Muhammad and the Qur'an. Mullahs and others form the *ulama,* or educated class of Islamic scholars that has jurisdiction over legal and social matters in Islam. Mullahs can be key leaders and may have influence over a large group of people.

In Afghanistan *`alim* means a graduate of a *madrassa* (Islamic School); *talib* is a student in a madrassa; a *Mawlawi* is a better educated Mullah; and a *Malang* or a *Qalandar* is a wandering mystic.

Mullahs are often key leaders in the community with influence, and sometimes land and wealth. Mullahs who teach in madrassas have a huge influence over their students. The government of Pakistan has founded over 400 new madrassas to counteract the effects of more radical schools (founded by Saudi funding) but the Afghan schools are underfunded and do not provide the quality of food or facilities that many of the Saudi funded schools in Pakistan do. The non-government schools in Afghanistan teach whatever the local Mullah wants without any government input. Some are still teaching the curriculum that was taught under the Taliban.

[Critical Thinking: How can you convince the Mullahs in your AO to support your mission?]

What things are taboo for Muslims?

- Pork.
- Alcohol.
- Gambling.
- Intoxicants.
- Premarital sex, adultery, homosexuality, abortion.
- Dogs are unclean.
- Idolatry—associating anything with Allah.
- Blood, semen are unclean.
- Muslim woman marrying a non-Muslim.
- Charging interest.

[**Critical Thinking: What are American taboos? Has "political correctness" created new taboos in American society?**

What is Jihad?

Jihad means "striving, exertion, or struggle." It is a wide-ranging term that includes the everyday spiritual and moral struggle to live a life submitted to God, the attempt to spread Islam by education and example, and the communal military defense of Islam and of Muslims when they are threatened or under attack. Today radical Muslim groups consider Islam to be perpetually under attack by the "secular West" – morally, spiritually, economically, politically and militarily. They thus consider military jihad as a constant necessity, and use jihad as a rallying cry to resist and attack all that is "un-Islamic."

[Critical Thinking: How can the concept of Jihad add legitimacy to the claims and aims of Al Qaeda and others?]

What are the roots of Radical Islam?

Radical Islamists read the Qur'an and Hadith literally. Much of modern radical Islam can be traced to the writings of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1329 CE) who believed the only valid Caliphs were the first four; no saints should be worshipped as the Shia do; government must conform to Sharia, and a leader could be killed who violated the basics of Islam even if he claimed to be a Muslim.

Ibn Taymiyya provided the foundation for the *Wahhabi* "reforms" in Arabia. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792 CE) allied himself with the Saud family. They then divided the government and religion between themselves. The puritanical Wahhabis rejected innovation (*bid`a*), Shi`ism, saint veneration, shaving the beard, smoking and many other practices. The Wahhabis continue to dominate religion in Saudi Arabia and actively spread their ideology by supporting universities and madrassas around the world.

The *Salafists* are neo-Wahhabists who condemn secular tendencies in Islam and look to the first four Caliphs, Muhammad, and the companions of Muhammad as their examples.

Who are the Sufis?

The *Sufis* are mystical brotherhoods that are centered around a charismatic figure called a *Pir* or *Murshid*. Chanting and music plays a big role in their meditations. They stress the loving nature of Allah and seek to mystically merge with him. They are considered unorthodox by the Saudi Wahhabis and most Salafists. Sufis have played a large role in the war against the Soviets and in other Jihads.

The basic objective of Sufi practice is to obtain a direct, personal connection with Allah. These practices include ritual prayer, meditation, and various ascetic or ecstatic activities. The central figure in Sufi practice, the *pir,* or spiritual leader, is thought to possess a special charismatic power, known as *karamat*, as well as the ability to bestow blessings, or *barakat*. Pirs act as mentors and spiritual guides to groups of students who form brotherhoods around their teachings. The *Qadiriyya* order is a popular brotherhood among Pashtun tribes.

Critical Thinking: Why do you think major religious traditions tend to have a plain version and a more mystical version?]

Who are the Taliban?

A *Talib* is a religious student in a madrassa. "Taliban" is the dual form of "Talib." Madrassas are religious schools where students are taught the Qur'an and other religious texts. As is the case with many institutes of learning, madrassas can be used for the indoctrination of students to particular political factions, depending upon the agenda of the person or group governing it and the basis of its funding.

After the Soviets left Afghanistan in 1989 CE, there was a bloody civil war that left much of the country ungoverned. By 1994 CE, the Taliban movement had been launched as it restored order with students in Pakistani madrassas flocking to the Taliban standard. The Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, performed a major propaganda stunt that caught the Muslim world's attention. The mosque in Kandahar houses a cloak that is said to have belonged to the Prophet Muhammad. The cloak had been brought to Kandahar in the 1700s (CE) by Ahmad Shah Durrani, a leader still referred to as the Father of Afghanistan. This cloak has been brought out into public view only rarely over the centuries.

Mullah Omar gathered hundreds of Afghan mullahs and brought out the cloak, put his hands into the sleeves, and held the cloak up in the air [source: New York Times interview with the man whose family guards the cloak]. His followers then called him "commander of the faithful." This phrase, "Amir-ul Momineen," implied that Mullah Omar was claiming leadership of all Muslims worldwide.

The Taliban philosophy includes a literalist reading of the Qur'an and Hadith, and elements of Salafist, Wahhabi and Deobandi thought.

Who are potential Key Leaders in Afghanistan?

A *Malik* is a village leader often elected by a council of elders (elders are called *masharon*). He is often better educated or richer than average. Another word for Malik is *Arbab*.

Village elders are somewhat influential, but an "elder" can be someone who is older or someone who is wealthy or educated and younger.

Tribal leaders are often called *Khan*.

Mullahs vary in their education and may run a local Quranic school and are often very influential.

Educated men may have more influence than elders. Wealthy men and large land-owners are usually patrons to less wealthy clients.

Government officials may have a good local network.

Who are the Pashtuns/Pushtuns/Pathans?

The Pushtuns are an organized people living in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Their homeland was split by the Durand line imposed by the British in 1893 CE to divide British India from Afghanistan. They constitute 38 percent of the Afghan population and are mainly in the east and south of the country. The Pushtuns use the suffixes *zai* and *khel* to mean either lineage or clan, implying descent from a particular male.

An Afghan might see himself as part of the Isa Khan family, the Muhammadzai clan and the Andar tribe, while also being a member of the bazaar merchants' guild of Ghazni and a Muslim. Kinship and tribal status are very flexible in practice. Unlike many hierarchical tribes in Iraq, the Pushtun tribal councils have little real power and only strong individuals who maintain gunmen can give orders and assume that they will be followed. The majority of the Taliban are Pushtuns.

The Pushtuns are a proud warrior culture with an economy based on agriculture, pastoralism and trade. Pushtuns are highly protective of their honor and especially protective of their women. Education is seen as important for sons and less important for daughters.

[Critical thinking: Given that the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan provides safe havens for the Taliban and is very porous, how does that affect COIN operations along the border?]

What is Pushtunwali?

Tribal peoples without formal, written law codes often have unwritten, customary laws. *Pushtunwali* is a code of behavior of the Pushtuns consisting of:

Melmastia:	Hospitality.
Nanawateh:	Asylum.
Badal:	Justice/Revenge.
Tureh:	Bravery.
***Sabat*:**	Loyalty.
Imandari:	Righteousness.
Isteqamat:	Trust in God.
***Ghayrat*:**	Self-Honor/Dignity.
Namusi:	Honor of Women.
De Pashtunwali Perawano:	Adherence to Pashtunwali.

While the Pushtuns are Muslim, Pushtunwali often trumps Islamic Shari'a Law. For instance, in Islam a sister inherits one-half of what each of her brothers inherit but under Pushtunwali only the brothers inherit. Mullahs are often called upon to mediate disputes over honor killings that were committed because of the mores of Pushtunwali.

[Critical Thinking: How can understanding Pushtunwali improve mission success and avoid casualties?]

Name five things you can discuss with Pushtun Afghans:

- Sons and family in vague terms; it is proper to ask about sons.
- Sports especially soccer, volleyball and cricket.
- Prices of goods.
- Weather.
- Your mission in general [no specifics] "We are here to protect you."
- Their problems.

Name five things to avoid when speaking to Pushtun Afghans:

- Discussing their wives or daughters.
- Religion (although once a friendship is established, this subject will open up).
- The corrupt Afghan government.
- Details of your mission.
- Sex.
- How poor and primitive Afghanistan is.

[Critical Thinking: People tend to be proud of their country, how could you use this idea to build rapport with Afghans?]

What is a Jirga? Shura?

A Pushtun tribal assembly of one's equals is a *Jirga*. The men sit in a circle to avoid any symbolic hierarchy. A national assembly of representatives is a *Loya Jirga* and, although there are precedents for it in Afghan history, the concept is somewhat artificial. Those meeting in a Jirga must come to a consensus. Decisions made in a Jirga are binding and penalties for violating the decisions usually start with burning a man's house down.

Shura (literally, council) is an Arab introduction to Afghanistan that usually entails long conversations amongst a group of men who may or may not be representative of all parties about a subject with no binding agreement. It provides a way for the opinions of all the men to be heard. It has been used so much since the days of the Taliban government that now some assume that shuras have some decision making ability.

[Critical Thinking: We often call for shuras to find out what people want or to announce policies and projects in Afghanistan. Most shuras end with nothing agreed on by the local Afghans.]

What are the two basic languages spoken in Afghanistan?

Dari is a form of Persian or Farsi and is considered as the language of the northern Tajik elites while *Pashto* is the language of Pushtuns spoken in the east and south of Afghanistan. Both are Indo-European languages that use different versions of the Arabic alphabet. Sometimes Pushtuns speak Dari as well but may not want to admit it.

Other local languages include Turkic spoken by the Uzbeks and Turkmen, along with various dialects of Nuristani and Pashai, Baluchi, Arabic, and small Pamiri language groups. Some older Afghans may speak Russian and many younger and more educated Afghans speak some English.

**Language training in Dari and Pashto Headstart 2 is available free on the Defense Language Institute website through AKO.*

What currency and measures are used in Afghanistan?

Currency: The Afghani: One U.S. dollar equals about 45 Afghanis (not a person from Afghanistan). In eastern Afghanistan the Pakistani rupee is also widely used. One U.S. dollar equals about 84 Pakistani Rupees (sometimes called a *Kaldar*).

Measures:
One *Laack* equals 100,000
One *Jerib* equals .5 acre
One *hectare* equals 10,000 square meters or 2.47 acres
One *seer* equals 2.057 lbs or .933 kg.
One *maund* equals 82,286 lbs. or 37,324 kg.

What are the characteristics of American Culture?

- Fast-paced.
- Punctuality.
- Women's rights.
- Egalitarian, belief in equal opportunity; not outcomes.
- Goal-oriented.
- Individualism.
- Pragmatism.
- Tolerance.
- Separation of church and state.
- Value work and personal success.
- Love of technology.

[Critical Thinking: Do you think these words describe American Culture? Why or why not? What words would *you* use to describe the character of American Culture? What do television commercials tell us about American culture?]

What are the characteristics of a culturally literate Soldier?

- Understands that culture affects their behavior and beliefs and the behavior and beliefs of others.
- Appreciates and generally accepts diverse beliefs, appearances and lifestyles.
- Knows about the major historical events of the local culture and understands how such events impact beliefs, behaviors and relationships.
- Understands the dangers of stereotyping and ethnocentricism.
- Communicates and works positively with individuals from other cultural groups.
- Understands that cultural differences exist and need to be accounted for in planning and executing operations.
- Understands the perspectives of mainstream and minority groups in the local culture.
- Is bilingual or working towards language proficiency.
- Understands that soldiers are often stereotyped and that they will encounter prejudices and biases that need to be overcome by correct behavior and rapport-building.
- Understands that culture gives meaning to acts that an outsider would find pointless. Therefore, to operate effectively in the "War on Terror," one must understand Islamic and Jihadist cultures.

[Critical Thinking: How can you become more culturally literate?]

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