

## COUNTRY PROFILE: AFGHANISTAN

February 2005

### COUNTRY

**Formal Name:** Islamic Republic of Afghanistan  
(Dowlat-e Eslami-ye-Afghanestan).

**Short Form:** Afghanistan.

**Term for Citizen(s):** Afghan(s).

**Capital:** Kabul.

**Major Cities:** Herat (Hirat), Jalalabad, Kandahar (Qandahar), Konduz (Kunduz), and Mazar-e Sharif.

**Independence:** Afghanistan recognizes its independence day as August 19, the date in 1919 when the country became fully independent of British rule.

**Public Holidays:** The date of celebration of Afghanistan's Muslim holidays varies because the Islamic calendar is 354 days rather than 365. The holidays in this category are Eid al Adha (Feast of the Sacrifice); Ashura (the martyrdom of Imam Hussein); the birthday of the prophet Muhammad; and the beginning and ending of Ramadan. Holidays observed on fixed dates are Nawros (New Year's, on the vernal equinox), Victory Day (April 28), and Independence Day (August 19).

### Flag:

The background of the Afghan flag is three equal vertical sections of black, red, and green from left to right. In the center of the flag in yellow is the national coat of arms, which includes a mosque with a banner and a sheaf of wheat on either side. In the upper-middle part of the insignia are the phrases "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet" and "Allah is Great," together with a rising sun. The word "Afghanistan" and the year 1298 (the Muslim calendar equivalent of the year of independence, 1919) are located in the lower part of the insignia.



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### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

**The Pre-Islamic Period:** Archaeological evidence indicates that urban civilization began in the region occupied by modern Afghanistan between 3000 and 2000 B.C. The first historical documents date from the early Achaemenid Dynasty, Iranian rulers who controlled the region from 550 B.C. until 331 B.C. Between 330 and 327 B.C., Alexander the Great defeated the

Achaemenid emperor Darius III and subdued local resistance in what is now Afghanistan. Alexander's successors, the Seleucids, continued to infuse the region with Greek cultural influence. Shortly thereafter, the Mauryan Empire of India gained control of southern Afghanistan, bringing with it Buddhism. In the mid-third century B.C., nomadic Kushans established an empire that became a cultural and commercial center. From the end of the Kushan Empire in the third century A.D. until the seventh century, the region was fragmented and under the general protection of the Iranian Sassanid Empire.

**The Islamic and Mongol Conquests:** After defeating the Sassanids at the Battle of Qadisiya in 637, Arab Muslims began a 100-year process of conquering the Afghan tribes and introducing Islam. By the tenth century, the rule of the Arab Abbasid Dynasty and its successor in Central Asia, the Samanid dynasty, had crumbled. The Ghaznavid Dynasty, an offshoot of the Samanids, then became the first great Islamic dynasty to rule in Afghanistan. In 1220 all of Central Asia fell to the Mongol forces of Genghis Khan. Afghanistan remained fragmented until the 1380s, when Timur consolidated and expanded the existing Mongol Empire. Timur's descendants ruled Afghanistan until the early sixteenth century.

**The Pashtun Rulers:** In 1504 the region fell under a new empire, the Mughals of northern India, who for the next two centuries contested Afghan territory with the Iranian Safavid Dynasty. With the death of the great Safavi leader Nadir Shah in 1747, indigenous Pashtuns, who became known as the Durrani, began a period of at least nominal rule in Afghanistan that lasted until 1978. The first Durrani ruler, Ahmad Shah, known as the founder of the Afghan nation, united the Pashtun tribes and by 1760 built an empire extending to Delhi and the Arabian Sea. The empire fragmented after Ahmad Shah's death in 1772, but in 1826 Dost Mohammad, the leader of the Pashtun Muhammadzai tribe, restored order.

**The Great Game:** Dost Mohammad ruled at the beginning of the Great Game, a century-long contest for domination of Central Asia and Afghanistan between Russia, which was expanding to the south, and Britain, which was intent on protecting India. During this period, Afghan rulers were able to maintain virtual independence, although some compromises were necessary. In the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839–42), the British deposed Dost Mohammad, but they abandoned their Afghan garrisons in 1842. In the following decades, Russian forces approached the northern border of Afghanistan. In 1878 the British invaded and held most of Afghanistan in the Second Anglo-Afghan War. In 1880 Abdur Rahman, a Durrani, began a 21-year reign that saw the balancing of British and Russian interests, the consolidation of the Afghan tribes, and the reorganization of civil administration into what is considered the modern Afghan state. During this period, the British secured the Durand Line (1893) dividing Afghanistan from British colonial territory and sowing the seeds of future tensions over the ensuing division of the Pashtun tribes. Abdur Rahman's son, Habibullah (ruled 1901–19), continued his father's administrative reforms and maintained Afghanistan's neutrality in World War I.

**Full Independence and Soviet Occupation:** In 1919 Afghanistan signed the Treaty of Rawalpindi, which ended the Third Anglo-Afghan War and marks Afghanistan's official date of independence. In the interwar period, Afghanistan again was a balancing point between two world powers; Habibullah's son Amanullah (ruled 1919–29) skillfully manipulated the new British-Soviet rivalry and established relations with major countries. Amanullah introduced his

country's first constitution in 1923. However, resistance to his domestic reform program forced his abdication in 1929. In 1933 Amanullah's nephew, Mohammad Zahir Shah, the last king of Afghanistan, began a 40-year reign.

After World War II, in which Afghanistan remained neutral, the long-standing division of the Pashtun tribes caused tension with the new neighboring state of Pakistan. In response, Afghanistan shifted its foreign policy toward the Soviet Union. The prime ministership of the king's cousin, Mohammad Daoud (1953–63), was cautiously reformist, modernizing and centralizing the government while strengthening ties with the Soviet Union. However, in 1963 Zahir Shah dismissed Daoud because his anti-Pakistani policy damaged Afghanistan's economy.

A new constitution, ratified in 1964, liberalized somewhat the constitutional monarchy. However, in the ensuing decade economic and political conditions worsened. In 1973 Daoud overthrew the king and established a republic. When economic conditions did not improve and Daoud lost most of his political support, communist factions overthrew him in 1978. In 1979 the threat of a tribal insurgency against the communist government triggered an invasion by 80,000 Soviet troops, who then endured a very effective decade-long guerrilla war. Between 1979 and 1989, two Soviet-sponsored regimes failed to defeat the mujahideen guerrillas. In 1988 the Soviet Union agreed to create a neutral Afghan state, and the last Soviet troops left Afghanistan in 1989. The agreement ended a war that killed thousands, devastated industry and agriculture, and created 5 to 6 million refugees.

**Civil War and the Taliban:** The 1988 agreement did not settle differences between the government and the mujahideen, and in 1992 Afghanistan descended into a civil war that further ravaged the economy. Among the leaders of the warring factions were Ahmad Shah Massoud, an ethnic Tajik; Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a Pashtun; and Abdul Rashid Dostum, an Uzbek. Despite several temporary alliances, struggles among the armed groups continued until one Islamic fundamentalist group, the Taliban ("pupils") gained control of most of the country in 1996. The Taliban used an extremist interpretation of Islam to assert repressive control of society. The economy remained in ruins, and most government services ceased.

The Taliban granted the Arab terrorist organization, al Qaeda, the right to use Afghanistan as a base. As al Qaeda committed a series of international terrorist acts culminating in attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, the Taliban rejected international pressure to surrender al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. When the United States and allies attacked Afghanistan in the fall of 2001, the Taliban government collapsed, but Taliban and al Qaeda leaders escaped. A United States-led International Security Assistance Force began an occupation that remained in place in early 2005.

**Rebuilding the Country:** In December 2001, Afghan leaders in exile signed the Bonn Agreement, forming an interim government under the leadership of the Pashtun moderate Hamid Karzai. In 2002 Karzai was selected president of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan, whose ruling council included disparate leaders of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance force. A new constitution, written by a specially convened Loya Jirga, or constituent assembly of regional leaders, was ratified in early 2004. In October 2004, an overwhelming popular vote elected Karzai president of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. However, regional warlords and large areas of Afghanistan remained beyond the control of the Karzai government. Despite substantial

international aid, the Afghan government, which included representatives from many factions, was unable to address numerous social and economic problems.

## GEOGRAPHY

**Location:** Afghanistan, which is landlocked, is located in Central Asia, north and west of Pakistan, east of Iran, and south of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The narrow Wakhdan Corridor extends from northeasternmost Afghanistan to meet with China.

**Size:** Afghanistan occupies approximately 647,500 square kilometers, slightly less than Texas.



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**Land Boundaries:** The countries having common boundaries with Afghanistan are: China, 76 kilometers; Iran, 936 kilometers; Pakistan, 2,430 kilometers; Tajikistan, 1,206 kilometers; Turkmenistan, 744 kilometers; and Uzbekistan, 137 kilometers.

**Disputed Territory:** Afghanistan has no boundary disputes; ongoing incursions, smuggling, and terrorist movement across the Pakistan border are negotiated in regular meetings.

**Length of Coastline/Maritime Claims:** Afghanistan is landlocked.

**Topography:** The terrain of Afghanistan is dominated by rugged mountain ranges, which generally run from the northeast to the southwest. Mountains occupy all but the north-central and southwestern regions of the country. Nearly half the country has an elevation of 2,000 meters or more, and the highest peaks in the northeastern Hindu Kush range are above 7,000 meters. Historically, mountain passes along the northeastern border with present-day Pakistan have been of great strategic importance. Two regions, the north-central and the southwest, are mainly plains. Significant parts of the southwestern plains region are desert.

**Principal Rivers:** The main rivers are the Amu Darya, 800 kilometers; the Harirud, 850 kilometers; the Helmand, 1,000 kilometers; and the Kabul, 460 kilometers. Afghanistan's chief tributaries to the Amu Darya, which forms the country's northeastern border, are the Koshk and the Qonduz.

**Climate:** Afghanistan's climate generally is of the arid or semi-arid steppe type, featuring cold winters and dry, hot summers. The mountains of the northeast have subarctic winter conditions. Farther south, monsoon effects moderate the climate near the Pakistan border and increase rainfall as far inland as central Afghanistan. The highest precipitation occurs in the Kabul region of the northeast. The highest temperatures and lowest precipitation are in the southwestern plains region, where summer temperatures reach 49°C. Low temperatures in the northeastern mountains range from -15°C in winter to 0°C in summer. The climate of the north-central Turkistan Plain is increasingly arid closest to the northern borders with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

**Natural Resources:** Agricultural resources are primarily grazing land; fertile crop-growing land is concentrated in Kondo Province in the north and Helmand Province in the south. Afghanistan is known to have major deposits of chrome, coal, copper, iron, and salt, as well as lesser amounts of a wide variety of minerals including gold, silver, and uranium. Natural gas is the most abundant hydrocarbon resource. Substantial oil deposits are recognized but not yet quantified. Water for all purposes is in critically short supply.

**Land Use:** Some 12.1 percent of Afghanistan's land is classified as arable; however, in the early 2000s a four-year drought cut that figure in half. In 2004 only 0.2 percent of the total was planted to permanent crops.

**Environmental Factors:** Although little studied before recent times, the environment of Afghanistan is assumed to have been spared large-scale disturbances until the Soviet invasion of 1979. Since that time, however, numerous events have caused severe damage. Afghanistan, which has no appreciable bodies of water, suffers from a limited freshwater supply that makes potable water unavailable to more than half the population. In recent years, groundwater quality has deteriorated because of agricultural and industrial runoff, and water quantity has been diminished by large-scale land clearing and desertification. Because of insufficient water treatment, the incidence of water-borne diseases is very high. Widespread overgrazing, soil erosion, salinization, and waterlogging have reduced agricultural productivity. Although Afghanistan has little industry, particulate pollutants from the Aral Sea and industrial complexes in Iran, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan contaminate the atmosphere in northern Afghanistan. Chemical use and physical destruction in recent military conflicts have damaged the environment, and landmines and unexploded shells are residual hazards in many areas.

**Time Zone:** Afghanistan is four and one-half hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time.

## SOCIETY

**Population:** In mid-2004, the estimated population of Afghanistan was 28.5 million. Aside from the impacts of recent wars, estimates of the population growth rate ranged between 3.4 and 4.9 percent per year. The population is approximately 80 percent rural; in 2004 the six most populous cities accounted for less than 10 percent of the population. In 2004 the net out-migration was 23 per 1,000 population. After heavy out-migration and internal displacement in the 1980s and 1990s, an estimated 2.5 million Afghans returned to Afghanistan in 2003–4, and another 600,000 internal refugees returned to their place of origin. In 2004 about 2.5 million Afghans were living outside the country, mainly in Pakistan and Iran, and an estimated 200,000 were internally displaced because of drought and instability.

**Demography:** Some 44.7 percent of the population is younger than 15 years of age, and 2.4 percent is older than 64. In 2004 the estimated birthrate was 47.3 per 1,000 population, and the estimated death rate was 21.1 per 1,000 population. The infant mortality rate was 166 deaths per 1,000 live births. Life expectancy was 42.3 years for males, 42.7 years for females. The fertility rate was 6.8 children per woman.

**Ethnic Groups:** The main ethnic groups are Pashtun, 42 percent; Tajik, 27 percent; Hazara, 9 percent; Uzbek, 9 percent; Aimak, 4 percent; Turkmen, 3 percent; and Baloch, 2 percent. The largest remaining nomadic group is the Kuchis, a Pashtun group whose population has dwindled to about 1.5 million since 1979. The Pashtuns are the major ethnic group of the south and the east, the Tajiks in the northeast. The predominant groups in north-central Afghanistan are the Hazaras, Tajiks, and Uzbeks.

**Languages:** More than 30 languages are spoken in Afghanistan. The official language, Pashtun, is spoken as a first language by 35 percent of the population. Other major languages are Afghan Persian (Dari), 50 percent; and Turkic languages (primarily Turkmen and Uzbek), 11 percent. Of the languages spoken by smaller segments of the population, the most important are Balochi and Pashai. Many Afghans speak more than one language; Dari is the most common second language.

**Religion:** Virtually the entire population is Muslim. Between 80 and 85 percent are Sunni, and 15 to 19 percent are Shia. The minority Shia are economically disadvantaged and frequently discriminated against. Small numbers of Hindus and Sikhs live in urban centers. A Jewish population that numbered 5,000 in 1948 has entirely left Afghanistan.

**Education and Literacy:** The government of Mohammad Zahir Shah (ruled 1933–73) significantly improved Afghanistan's education system, making primary schools available to about half the population less than 12 years of age and expanding the secondary school system and the national university at Kabul. Despite those improvements, in 1979 some 90 percent of the population remained illiterate. Beginning with the Soviet invasion of 1979, successive wars virtually destroyed the education system. Most teachers fled the country during the Soviet occupation and the subsequent civil war. By 1996, only about 650 schools were functioning.

In 1996 the Taliban regime banned education for females, and the madrassa (mosque school) became the main source of primary and secondary education. After the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, the interim government received substantial international aid to restore the education system. In 2003 some 7,000 schools were operating in 20 of the 34 provinces, with 27,000 teachers teaching 4.2 million children (including 1.2 million girls). Of that number, about 3.9 million were in primary schools. When Kabul University reopened in 2002, some 24,000 students, male and female, enrolled. Five other universities were being rehabilitated in the early 2000s. Since the end of the dogmatic Taliban era in 2001, public school curricula have included religious subjects, but detailed instruction is left to religious teachers. In 2003 an estimated 57 percent of men and 86 percent of women were illiterate, and the lack of skilled and educated workers was a major economic disadvantage.

**Health:** Beginning in 1979, military conflict destroyed Afghanistan's health system. Most medical professionals left the country in the 1980s and 1990s, and all medical training programs ceased. In 2004 Afghanistan had one medical facility for every 27,000 people, and some centers were responsible for as many as 300,000 people. In 2004 international organizations provided a large share of medical care. An estimated one-quarter of the population had no access to health care. In 2003 there were 11 physicians and 18 nurses per 100,000 population, and the per capita health expenditure was US\$28.

At the same time, the physical and psychological effects of war have substantially increased the need for medical care. Infant, child, and maternal mortality rates are among the highest in the world. In rural areas, one in five children dies before reaching age five. Because of poor sanitation and insufficient potable water supply, infectious and parasitic diseases such as malaria and diarrhea are very common. Malnutrition and poor nutrition also are pervasive. The drought of 1999–2002 exacerbated these conditions. No statistics are available on the prevalence of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). However, in 2004 the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that an HIV/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) epidemic could occur in Afghanistan because of the high incidence of intravenous drug use, unsafe blood transfusion procedures, poor health facilities, and illiteracy. Despite large-scale international assistance, in 2004 the WHO did not expect Afghanistan's health indicators to improve substantially for at least a decade.

**Welfare:** Largely because of protracted military conflict, Afghanistan in 2004 had the highest proportion of widows and orphans in the world. Large numbers of disabled individuals and former members of regional militias also lack a means of support. However, the government provides very little welfare protection. Most of the welfare activity in the country has been provided by international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Afghan Health and Development Services, Afghan Women's Education Center, and Humanitarian Assistance Network and Development, and by United Nations organizations. Several NGOs also work with Afghan refugees in other countries, especially Pakistan.

## ECONOMY

**Overview:** Economic statistics for Afghanistan traditionally are inexact. Afghanistan's economy, which always has been heavily agricultural and one of the poorest in the world, was shattered by the wars of the 1980s and the 1990s. Industry, much of which depended on agricultural output, suffered as well. After the wars, small-scale trade in urban centers and agriculture in some regions revived quickly. However, damage to the infrastructure will take much longer to repair. The 2004 International Conference on Afghanistan pledged US\$8.3 billion for economic infrastructure reconstruction during the following three years. In 2004 some 16 U.S. provincial reconstruction teams were active in Afghanistan. A major economic problem is replacing the income generated by opium production, which in the early 2000s yielded more than 50 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). In early 2005, an important regional step was the establishment of the Economic Coordination Council by the governors of four provinces in resource-rich and strategically vital eastern Afghanistan.

**Gross Domestic Product (GDP):** Excluding illegal poppy production, for fiscal year (FY) 2002–3 (March 21, 2002–March 20, 2003) Afghanistan's GDP was estimated at US\$4.05 billion, or US\$186 per capita. In that year, agriculture contributed an estimated 49 percent to the GDP, services 29 percent, and industry and mining 21 percent. Following the economic standstill of the late 1990s, GDP growth rates in the early 2000s have been very high: 28.6 percent in FY 2002–3 and 16 percent in FY 2003–4. However, the starting points upon which such figures are based have been very low.

**Government Budget/Deficit:** The proposed budget for fiscal year (FY) 2003–4 called for expenditures of US\$500 million, of which some 40 percent was to be financed domestically and the rest from foreign sources. For FY 2004–5, the government’s operational budget was US\$600 million, with a separate National Development Budget of US\$4.2 billion to be paid by international donors. The revenue target for that budget was US\$300 million.

**Inflation:** Under the pro-Soviet regimes of the 1980s, inflation was high but limited by government controls. Inflation reached 150 percent per year during the civil war of the early 1990s, and it is believed to have remained high under the Taliban. After the currency reform of 2002, inflation has averaged about 10 percent per year.

**Agriculture:** Agriculture always has been the foundation of Afghanistan’s economy, employing as much as 80 percent of the workforce and contributing at least half of the gross domestic product (GDP). Although many displaced Afghan farmers returned to their land in the early 2000s, land mines and the destruction of irrigation systems had made much agricultural land unusable. Livestock raising, a vital part of the agricultural economy, was similarly decimated as grazing land disappeared. The drought of 1999–2002 devastated the rural population and further reduced all types of agricultural output. Beginning in 2003, output increased because of international aid and increased rainfall, except in the south, where the drought continued into 2004. National agricultural output was expected to rise by 25 percent in 2004. In 2002 the main legal crops were wheat, vegetables, grapes, rice, barley, corn, fruits, and potatoes. The main types of livestock were cattle, sheep, and goats; cow’s milk was the most valuable product of livestock raising.

The replacement of poppies by legal crops is a high international priority that had not been achieved as of 2004. Between 2003 and 2004, the area under poppy cultivation tripled, and the estimated value of the poppy crop more than doubled. In early 2005, the government reported that wheat had begun to replace poppies in three major opium-producing provinces.

**Forestry:** Most of Afghanistan’s mountains are barren rather than forested. In the mid-1990s, an estimated 2.9 percent of the land was forested, but war, illegal exploitation, and the need for firewood have removed an estimated 50 percent of that resource. There is no program of forest preservation or commercial exploitation.

**Fishing:** Afghanistan has no appreciable fishing industry. In 2001 some 800 tons of fish were caught.

**Mining and Minerals:** Most of Afghanistan’s mineral resources, which are believed to be substantial, remain unexploited. Because of transportation problems and insufficient investment, only barites, chromium, coal, copper, natural gas, and salt have been extracted commercially. The largest coal mining operation is at Karkar Dodkash in north-central Afghanistan. In the early 2000s, mineral prospecting and surveying have increased substantially.

**Industry and Manufacturing:** Before the wars, industry was based on the processing of local agricultural products, including textiles, sugar, and chemical fertilizers made from natural gas or coal. The main manufacturing center was the Kabul region. In 2004 all of Afghanistan’s



industrial sector had stopped producing or was producing at a substantially reduced rate. The reasons for this reduction in productivity are war damage, shortages of raw materials and spare parts, and the postwar priority of rebuilding overall infrastructure before industry. In the early 2000s, foreign investment in the industrial sector focused on small and medium-sized enterprises, predominantly in telecommunications. Some small plants in Herat, Kabul, and Mazar-e Sharif produce textiles, leather goods, and processed foods. Because of war damage, the construction sector expanded rapidly in the early 2000s and was seen as an important economic driver for the ensuing decade. However, that sector of the economy suffers from substantial corruption.

**Energy:** War damage depleted Afghanistan's energy generation infrastructure, particularly generators and power lines. In 2004 energy shortages were a critical obstacle in resuming economic activity. Given adequate extraction and distribution infrastructure, Afghanistan has sufficient domestic coal, natural gas, and oil resources to meet its energy needs, and the Kunar River provides untapped hydroelectric potential. In 2002 Turkmenistan signed an agreement to provide natural gas and electric power to Afghanistan, and Tajikistan and Uzbekistan also send power to some northern regions. In mid-2004 an international consortium completed an evaluation of Afghanistan's energy potential, focusing on natural gas and recommending future energy policy. Known natural gas reserves are 120 billion cubic meters, but another trillion cubic meters may exist. Oil reserves, estimated in the 1980s at 100 million barrels, now are believed to be substantially higher. Coal reserves are estimated at 73 million tons. Although Afghanistan is a natural pipeline route between Central Asian natural gas fields and the Arabian Sea and the often-discussed Trans-Afghan Pipeline would be an economic boon, security issues have prevented construction. Afghanistan's domestic pipelines connect gas fields only with local consumers.

**Services:** Afghanistan's banking system, which collapsed during the civil war of the early 1990s, was limited to financial transactions supporting retail commerce. With the collapse, money-changers became the main source of financing, and opium and wheat became the primary forms of capital for the agricultural population. Elimination of poppy cultivation means destitution for farmers relying on opium for credit. Since 2002 the government has encouraged recovery of a formal banking system. A set of commercial banking laws was passed in 2003, and banks from Britain, India, and Pakistan have opened branches in Kabul. In mid-2004, the Afghanistan International Bank (AIB) began operating with the backing of the Asian Development Bank and 75 percent ownership by Afghan businessmen. The AIB was scheduled to begin making corporate loans in 2004.

The smuggling and other illegal economic activity that were pervasive during the war periods left a very strong residual black-market economy specializing in moving goods illegally into Pakistan and moving illegal drugs northward into Central Asia and ultimately Russia and Western Europe. The opium production supporting the latter activity remained very high in 2004 (accounting for about 75 percent of the world supply), despite government efforts to reduce it.

Because security conditions in Afghanistan have remained inadequate, especially outside Kabul, the formerly prosperous tourism industry had not revived as of 2004. However, the same

conditions have spurred the growth of private security services that protect government officials and businesspeople.

**Labor:** Because of the very large black-market economy, statistics on the labor force are incomplete. In 2001 the labor force in the legitimate economy was estimated at 11.8 million. According to a 2004 estimate, about 80 percent of the workforce is in agriculture, 10 percent in industry, and 10 percent in services. Accurate statistics on unemployment are not available; no minimum wage has been set.

**Foreign Economic Relations:** The United States has given Afghanistan status as a least-developed beneficiary developing nation, which removes tariffs on several U.S. imports from Afghanistan. In 2004 the United States signed a bilateral Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, which will increase trade levels with Afghanistan. The European Union also gives Afghan products preferential trade status. Trade with Iran has increased substantially in the post-Taliban era. Iran has given Afghanistan the use of its Arabian Sea port at Chah Bahar under favorable conditions, despite U.S. objections. In 2003 Afghanistan, Iran, and Uzbekistan established a trans-Afghan trade corridor linking Uzbekistan with Chah Bahar and Bandar-e Abbas. Uzbekistan's border procedures have slowed commerce along the route, however. Trade with Pakistan is complicated by a high level of smuggling across the border; in 2004 an estimated 80 percent of goods entering Afghanistan from Pakistan were subsequently smuggled back into Pakistan. In 2002 the two countries revived their Joint Economic Commission, which had been moribund for 10 years, in order to improve commercial relations.

In 2003 the main purchasers of Afghanistan's exports were the United States, France, India, and Pakistan. The main suppliers of Afghanistan's imports were Pakistan, South Korea, Japan, Germany, Turkmenistan, Kenya, the United States, and Russia. Aside from opium, the main export commodities were fruits and nuts, carpets, wool, cotton, hides and pelts, and precious and semi-precious gems. The main imports were capital goods, food, textiles, and petroleum products. In 2002 Afghanistan's exports (not counting re-exports) were worth US\$98 million, and its imports were worth US\$1 billion, creating an unfavorable trade balance of US\$902 million.

**Balance of Payments:** For the fiscal year 2003–4, Afghanistan had a balance of payments surplus of US\$139 million, mainly because of US\$1.8 billion dollars in international grants.

**External Debt:** In 2004 Afghanistan had US\$8 billion in bilateral debt, owed mainly to Russia. Some US\$500 million also was owed to multilateral development banks.

**Foreign Investment:** To encourage foreign investment, in 2002 the government began allowing 100 percent foreign ownership of Afghan enterprises, with substantial tax benefits and unlimited transfer of assets out of the country. However, Afghanistan's highly corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy has limited investment. In addition, the liberalized policy does not apply to investment in pipeline construction, telecommunications infrastructure, the fuels and minerals industries, or other heavy industry. In the early 2000s, telecommunications was the most attractive economic sector for foreign investment. Most of Afghanistan's foreign direct

investment came from two multinational mobile telephone companies, AWCC and Roshan, which entered the Afghan market in 2002–3.

**Currency and Exchange Rate:** In February 2005, the exchange rate of the afghani was 42.8 to the U.S. dollar. The rate has remained stable since the currency reform of 2002. Acceptance of the afghani has been gradual, and in 2004 many foreign currencies were in circulation.

**Fiscal Year:** The fiscal year begins March 21.

## TRANSPORTATION AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

**Overview:** Afghanistan's transportation system, which prior to 1979 was rudimentary except for main roads, suffered severe damage during the ensuing two decades. In the early 2000s, the road system, which provided the only transport in most parts of the country, has been an urgent reconstruction project. No rail system exists. After suffering damage to most airports during the wars, the air transport system has been reviving in the early 2000s. A top priority is diversifying Afghanistan's access to seaports and to new markets in India by making new bilateral transportation agreements.

**Roads:** The main internal highway system that was built in the 1960s included about 2,000 kilometers of roads. In 1999 Afghanistan had a total of 2,800 kilometers of paved roads and 18,200 kilometers of unpaved roads. Heavily damaged in the 1980s and 1990s, the main arteries connect the cities of Ghazni, Herat, Kabul, and Kandahar with roads crossing the Pakistan border. Critical commercial and military roadways through the Salang and Tang-e Gharu mountain passes were badly damaged during the Soviet occupation and ensuing conflicts. A new highway connects Kabul with Kandahar, and in 2004 plans called for a new connector between Kandahar and Herat. Germany is financing a road connecting Jalalabad with the Pakistan border. India, Iran, and Pakistan have offered aid in constructing roads connecting Afghanistan with their respective national road systems. Links with countries other than Pakistan are considered vital to relieve Afghanistan's dependence on that country for access to the sea. Provincial roads also received heavy damage and generally have not been repaired since the end of hostilities. In 2000 only 6,200 passenger cars and 7,000 commercial vehicles were licensed. In 2002 some 33,500 taxicabs were in operation.

**Railroads:** In 2004 Afghanistan had no functioning railroads. For a variety of geopolitical and practical reasons, numerous plans for a trans-Afghan line failed to materialize in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Only five short domestic lines were built, with one line passing across the Friendship Bridge into Uzbekistan. Otherwise, lines built toward Afghanistan by surrounding countries stopped at the border. A 2002 plan would build a new line to link the major cities of Afghanistan with the Iranian port of Bandar-e Abbas and with Pakistan. However, in the early 2000s road building is a much higher priority of infrastructure restoration than is railroad building.

**Ports:** Afghanistan is landlocked; the main ports along its chief waterway, the Amu Darya River, are Kheyraabad and Shir Khan.

**Inland Waterways:** The most important inland waterway is the Amu Darya River, whose 800 kilometers along Afghanistan's border can accommodate vessels up to 500 deadweight tons.

**Civil Aviation and Airports:** In 2003 some 47 airports were in operation, of which 10 had paved runways and three had runways longer than 3,000 meters. Five heliports also were in operation. The military conflicts of 1979–2001 destroyed many of the aircraft of the national line, Ariana, and damaged most of the civilian airports. After a series of crashes in 1998–99, Ariana lost its international flight status; the airline regained approval for international flights in 2002. Beginning in 2002, Afghanistan has received substantial foreign assistance; India has trained flight staff and contributed three Airbuses. In 2003 the first private airline, Kam Air, began flights. Beginning in 2004, Ariana has offered regular flights to Delhi, Dubai, Frankfurt, Islamabad, Istanbul, and Moscow.

**Pipelines:** In 2004 Afghanistan had 307 kilometers of natural gas pipelines.

**Telecommunications:** In 2002 Afghanistan had 33,100 main telephone lines and 12,000 cellular phones. In 2002–3, two foreign-owned mobile telephone companies began operations, bringing investment commitments of US\$180 million and heralding a significant improvement in national telecommunications. By the end of 2003, their investment had brought the total of fixed lines and cellular subscriptions to 200,000. In the early 2000s, the ratio of telephone access increased from 2 to 8 per 1,000 population. However, expansion occurred almost entirely in mobile phones; between 2002 and 2004, only 7,000 new land lines went into service. Internet use also has expanded significantly since 2000, when an estimated 1,000 Afghans had Internet access. In 2003 the government proposed a nationwide system of public Internet facilities, and by 2004 such facilities were available in Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, and Mazar-e Sharif.

## GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

**Overview:** The adoption of a new constitution in January 2004 and the election of Hamid Karzai as president in October 2004 were considered major advances in Afghanistan's fragmented political life. Day-to-day control of the provinces has proved difficult both before and after the election, and substantial regional power centers remained in early 2005. At that time, the balance between the executive and legislative branches had not been determined because parliamentary elections were delayed. Particularly in the judicial branch, the role of Islamic precepts in governance remained extremely controversial in early 2005. Two opposite dynamics are at work in Afghanistan's government: on the one hand, the central government must gain control over de facto autonomous regions, in order to maintain order. On the other hand, those regions are de jure subordinate parts of a highly centralized state, and reformers eventually must find a way to increase rather than decrease their role in governance.

**Executive Branch:** The president and two vice presidents are elected as a ticket by popular vote to five-year terms. The first such election occurred in October 2004. President Hamid Karzai, who was elected at that time, is both chief of state and head of government. The president appoints ministers, subject to the approval of the National Assembly. The government includes 26 ministries, appointments to which have been distributed among the influential regional and

military groups. The president has applied the same principle in appointing the governors of the provinces. The National Defense Commission, headed by President Karzai, is a six-member advisory board that includes leaders of the main regional groups. The former king, Mohammad Zahir Shah, holds the honorific title “Father of the Country” and represents the country at some state functions, but he exercises no governmental power.

**Legislative Branch:** The constitution calls for a bicameral legislature, the National Assembly; for security reasons, the first parliamentary and local elections were postponed from October 2004 until April 2005. Because of this delay, the actual powers of the legislative branch vis-à-vis the executive branch have not been tested. Members of the lower house, the 249-member Wolesi Jirga (House of the People), are to be elected directly for five-year terms. The Wolesi Jirga is to have 249 members. The 102 members of the upper house, the Meshrano Jirga (House of Elders) are to be appointed by provincial councils (one member for each of 34 provinces, serving four-year terms), by district councils (accounting for another 34 members, each serving three-year terms), and the president. The constitution specifies that the 34 presidential appointees, who serve five-year terms, be one-half women and include two representatives of the Kuchis and two representatives of the disabled. Members of the Meshrano Jirga are to be appointed after the elections for the Wolesi Jirga. The government can convene a Loya Jirga (Constituent Assembly) to decide urgent matters of independence, national sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Such an assembly, which can amend the constitution and bring charges against the president, is to include members of the National Assembly and chairpersons of the provincial and district councils. A Loya Jirga chose the transitional government that took office in 2002, and a second one formulated the 2004 constitution.

**Judicial Branch:** Afghanistan’s judicial branch deteriorated during the Soviet occupation, and justice was administered by strict Islamic law during the Taliban era (1996–2001). To replace the ad hoc system in place under the transitional government, the constitution of 2004 stipulated that the Supreme Court include nine justices appointed by the president, with approval of the Wolesa Jirga, for 10-year terms. At the next level are high and appeals courts under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. A National Security Court handles cases of terrorism and other threats to national security.

**Administrative Divisions:** The major subnational administrative division is the province (*velayat*), of which there were 34 in 2004. Each province has between five and 15 districts; in 2004 there are 361 districts in all. Each province has one designated provincial municipality; some but not all provinces also have a single rural municipality. The municipalities fall under the direct jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior.

**Provincial and Local Government:** According to the constitution, provinces, districts, and villages are to be governed by directly elected councils. However, the first election of those councils was postponed from October 2004 until April 2005. The chief executive at province level is the governor, who is appointed by the president. Province and district administrations have the same basic structure as the national government. The constitution of 2004 prescribes that the central government, which theoretically stands at the center of a highly centralized system, delegate authority to the subnational jurisdictions in (unspecified) matters where local or regional action is more efficient. In actuality, the structure and government of the provinces have

varied greatly; in most cases, in 2005 provincial governance was based on the financial and military strength of local leaders as well as personal and tribal loyalties.

**Judicial and Legal System:** Although every province has a lower and a higher court, judicial procedures are influenced by local authorities and traditions and the supply of trained jurists is very limited. The transitional government established an education program to prepare judges, prosecutors, and defense lawyers, and in the early 2000s some individuals have received foreign training. However, the nominal requirements for participation in the judiciary are relatively high, and the pay is quite low. The respective roles of Islamic and secular law in the new national judicial system have not been well established; a large portion of the current law code is based on laws passed under the last king, Mohammad Zahir Shah (ruled 1933–73). In rural areas, where local elders and tribal authorities resolve criminal cases, Taliban laws have remained in effect, and verdicts often are based on Islamic and tribal law.

**Electoral System:** Suffrage is universal for male and female citizens 18 years of age and older. A new electoral and political party law went into effect in May 2004. About 77 percent of registered voters participated in the presidential election of 2004, which was managed by the Interim Election Commission appointed by Hamid Karzai, then the head of the interim government. Although some incidents of intimidation were reported in the election of the constitutional Loya Jirga in late 2003, the constitutional referendum of January 2004, and the presidential election of October 2004, monitors found those voting processes to be basically fair. The first parliamentary and local elections were planned for spring 2005, with technical assistance from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

**Politics and Political Parties:** All political parties must be registered with the Ministry of Justice. In 2004 some 38 parties had gained such recognition. At the time of the 2004 presidential election, the largest parties were the Islamic Party of Afghanistan, the National Congress Party of Afghanistan (represented in the presidential election by fifth-place finisher Abdul Latif Pedram), the National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan (represented in the election by fourth-place finisher Abdul Rashid Dostum), and the National Movement of Afghanistan (represented in the election by second-place finisher Yonous Qanooni). Other major parties are the Afghan Social-Democratic Party, the Communist Party of Afghanistan, the Liberal-Democratic Party of Afghanistan, the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan, and the Socialist Nationalist Afghan Party. President Karzai is not connected with a party. The Political Parties Law of 2003 requires that all parties observe the precepts of Islam. In 2004 the main non-party political pressure groups were the Society of Islam under former president Burhanuddin Rabbani and the Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan under military leader Abdul Rasul Sayyaf. The two groups were allied in 2004.

**Mass Media:** In 2003 Afghanistan had 21 AM, 23 FM, and 1 shortwave radio stations and about 10 television stations. A government-run national television station was located in Kabul, and nine provinces had regional stations. Most of the electronic news media are government-owned. Four cable stations appeared after the overthrow of the Taliban, carrying Indian and U.S. programs. However, in 2003 the Supreme Court banned cable television on moral grounds. Some government officials have used their positions to maintain their own communications facilities. In 2003 the state owned all regularly published newspapers; newspapers affiliated with

provisional authorities were published sporadically. The circulation of independent publications has been confined to the Kabul region. A media law, passed in 2004, nominally lifted restrictions on some media activity but reiterated the prohibition of criticizing Islam and insulting officials.

**Foreign Relations:** Traditionally a neutral country, Afghanistan mirrored the foreign policy of the Soviet Union during the decade of Soviet occupation (1979–89). Neither the Soviet-supported regimes nor the Taliban regime (respectively, 1979–89 and 1996–2001) received wide international recognition. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Afghanistan established diplomatic relations with most countries of the world. In December 2002, the six nations bordering Afghanistan signed a “Good Neighbor Declaration,” guaranteeing the country’s independence and territorial integrity.

Since its establishment in 1948 on Afghanistan’s southeastern border, Pakistan has been a key neighbor with which Afghanistan has had substantial differences. During the Soviet occupation, Pakistan was the main supply point for the mujahideen insurgency. In the late 1990s, Pakistan supported the Taliban regime, reversing its support only after the Taliban refused to surrender Osama bin Laden in late 2001. Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have been strained by the ongoing separation of the Pashtun tribes and by disagreements on border procedures and smuggling. A U.S.-sponsored Tripartite Commission is the main arena for discussion of these issues. Major current issues are the continued presence of Taliban and al Qaeda forces in Pakistan’s border provinces and Afghanistan’s willingness to have closer relations with India. Both partners have a vital stake in friendly relations: for Afghanistan, Pakistan remains a vital corridor to the Arabian Sea, and for Pakistan, Afghanistan is a vital connection to the hydrocarbon and other resources of Central Asia. In the early 2000s, Pakistan’s archenemy India has moved aggressively by offering a range of bilateral infrastructure projects and establishing diplomatic missions throughout Afghanistan in 2003.

Relations with Iran generally have been positive. Iran opposed the Soviet-backed and the Taliban regimes in Afghanistan, and it has actively supported the reconstruction efforts of the early 2000s. Trade relations also have improved in this period. The main bilateral issue is Iran’s long-standing claim to share the water resources of the Helmand River, which irrigates Afghanistan’s southern agricultural region before flowing into Iran. Other issues are the ongoing presence of Afghan refugees in Iran, Iranian support for certain warlords in Afghanistan’s border provinces, and Iranian concerns for the Shia minority in Afghanistan.

For Russia, Afghanistan has been a vital region since the early nineteenth century. Relations with the Soviet Union were close until the invasion of 1979, which aroused lasting hostility on the Afghan side. In the early 2000s, official relations have improved as Russia pledged assistance in building Afghanistan’s military and business establishments, landmine clearing, and development of oil and gas extraction. However, residual mistrust and issues such as Afghanistan’s outstanding debts to Russia have limited improvement.

Relations with post-Soviet Tajikistan were complicated by Afghanistan’s role in its neighbor’s long civil war of the 1990s. Tajik insurgents used Afghanistan as a base for military operations, and about 100,000 Tajiks took refuge in northern Afghanistan in the early 1990s. In the early 2000s, Afghanistan has sought improved commercial relations; a planned bridge over the Amu

Darya River will enhance the trade route north into Tajikistan. Relations with Uzbekistan have been limited by the harsh border controls enforced by Uzbekistan to prevent the entry of narcotics smugglers and Islamic fundamentalists from the south, and by Uzbekistan's ongoing support for Abdul Rashid Dostum, the Uzbek warlord who controls parts of northeastern Afghanistan.

Afghanistan became an important region for the United States with the Soviet invasion of 1979, but the Soviet occupation and the ensuing civil war and Taliban regime made normal relations difficult or impossible until the fall of the Taliban in late 2001. Since that time, the successive Karzai governments have received substantial U.S. support to reestablish the infrastructure and strengthen government control of outlying regions. The United States has granted Afghanistan substantial preferential trade treatment. Since entering Afghanistan in late 2001, the U.S. military's Operation Enduring Freedom has had the objectives of eliminating Taliban and al Qaeda forces from Afghanistan and providing humanitarian assistance.

**Membership in International Organizations:** Among the international organizations of which Afghanistan is a member are the Asian Development Bank, Economic Cooperation Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Group of 77, International Atomic Energy Agency, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, International Civil Aviation Organization, International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), International Development Association, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, International Finance Corporation, International Fund for Agricultural Development, International Labour Organization, International Monetary Fund, International Organization for Migration (observer status), International Telecommunication Union, Islamic Development Bank, Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (cooperative partner), Organization of the Islamic Conference, United Nations, United Nations Committee on Trade and Development, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, United Nations Industrial Development Organization, Universal Postal Union, World Federation of Trade Unions, and World Health Organization.

**Major International Treaties:** Among the multilateral treaties to which Afghanistan is a signatory are the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty; Convention on Biological Diversity; Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna; Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Techniques; conventions prohibiting the development, production, stockpiling, and use of biological and chemical weapons (known, respectively, as the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention); Geneva Conventions; Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer; Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons; United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification; and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Afghanistan has signed but not ratified the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, Convention on Fishing and Conservation of Living Resources of the High Seas, and United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. As of December 2004, Afghanistan had not signed the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.



## NATIONAL SECURITY

**Overview:** In 2005 the aim of the Karzai government's national security policy is to establish a credible armed force, the Afghan National Army (ANA), and a national police force that will include all the major groups in Afghanistan. In 2004 early steps had been taken; about 13,000 soldiers in the army's Central Corps had been trained by U.S. forces. In 2005 the air force still was in the planning stage. Afghanistan, a landlocked nation, has no navy. The long-term goal has been to prepare an army of 60,000 to 70,000, an air force of 8,000, a border guard force of 12,000, and a police force of 50,000. Some militia personnel have been integrated into the ANA and the police forces.

**Foreign Military Relations:** Afghanistan has depended almost entirely on U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces to provide security in and around Kabul. In late 2004, some 18,000 U.S. troops and 1,500 troops from other countries made up the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom. The International Security Assistance Force, which since 2003 has been under the rotating command of officers from NATO countries, included 6,500 troops from 37 countries. In 2003 Afghanistan received an estimated US\$191 million in foreign military assistance; in 2004 that figure increased to US\$413 million. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), of which Afghanistan became a cooperative partner in 2003, provides expertise on border security. The role of U.S. forces in drug interdiction activities remained undecided in early 2005.

**External Threat:** The only external threat is the movement of hostile forces and terrorists from staging areas across the porous Pakistan border.

**Defense Budget:** The estimated military expenditure for 2003 was US\$61 million.

**Major Military Units:** In 2005 all of Afghanistan's 13,000 military troops were in the Kabul-based Central Corps of the army, which consisted of three ground forces brigades. Plans called for an army headquarters command in Kabul, with regional commands in Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, and Kandahar. Militia forces of the Northern Alliance, estimated to total 15,000 personnel, have acted in conjunction with Afghan forces in some instances.

**Major Military Equipment:** Amounts and distribution of equipment, most of which is of Soviet manufacture, are not known. In 2004 the army had main battle tanks, reconnaissance vehicles, armored infantry fighting vehicles, armored personnel carriers, towed artillery, multiple rocket launchers, mortars, surface-to-surface missiles, recoilless rifles, antiaircraft guns, and surface-to-air missiles. The air force had five combat aircraft and five armed helicopters.

**Military Service:** Males are eligible for conscription at age 22, and volunteers can enlist at age 18. The term of service is 12 months.

**Paramilitary Forces:** Plans call for a border guard force of 12,000, which was not in existence in early 2005.

**Foreign Military Forces:** In late 2004, the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom included some 18,000 U.S. troops and 1,500 troops from other countries. The International Security Assistance Force, which since 2003 has been under North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) command, included 6,500 troops from 37 countries.

**Police:** Plans call for Afghanistan to have a national police force of 50,000. Although the police officially are responsible for maintaining civil order, local and regional military commanders continue to exercise control in the hinterland. Police have been accused of improper treatment and detention of prisoners. In 2003 the mandate of the International Security Assistance Force, now under command of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was extended and expanded beyond the Kabul area. However, in some areas unoccupied by those forces, local militias maintain control. In many areas, crimes have gone uninvestigated because of insufficient police and/or communications. Troops of the Afghan National Army have been sent to quell fighting in some northern regions lacking police protection.

**Internal Threat:** In 2004 a large part of the country remained without adequate security, and armed bands launched attacks in regions not controlled by the central government. Several extremist, antigovernment groups maintained a substantial presence in Afghanistan in 2005. They included surviving members of the Taliban, al Qaeda operatives, and the Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin, led by warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. In mid-2004, the international medical organization Doctors without Borders withdrew its aid workers from Afghanistan when five members were killed.

A major internal security factor has been criminal activity associated with the prosperous drug trade. Drug processing laboratories are located throughout the country, traditional informal financial networks launder narcotics profits, and some provincial and national government officials have been implicated in the drug trade. Afghanistan's estimated opium output for 2004 (4,600 tons), a substantial increase over the 2003 amount, made it the largest global producer of the drug. The government's goal for 2005 is to reduce opium cultivation by 30 to 50 percent through intensive eradication and aid programs. In early 2005, progress was reported in three major opium-producing provinces.

Incidents of abduction, violence, and terror continued in 2004, particularly in regions not under control of the national government. A government program to disarm 100,000 militia personnel in 2003 and 2004 resulted in disarming an estimated 11,000 by mid-2004. Abdul Rashid Dostum (who also is deputy defense minister) and Ismail Khan, governor of Herat Province, have been particularly intransigent warlords. Local fighting also has persisted over land resettlement questions.

**Terrorism:** Isolated terrorist acts occurred in 2004. In the early 2000s, President Karzai suffered two assassination attempts (one during his presidential campaign), and some government officials have been assassinated. Small-scale attacks on villages have been common. In early 2005, a series of attacks, including a rocket attack on the Jalalabad Airport, were attributed to the Taliban, perhaps in coordination with al Qaeda elements and the antigovernment forces of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Some of the attacks also may have been staged by other warlords. No large-scale terrorist attack occurred in 2004 or early 2005.

**Human Rights:** The Bonn Agreement of 2001 established the Independent Afghan Human Rights Commission to investigate human rights abuses and war crimes. However, in the early 2000s some types of human rights violations have continued, particularly outside the region controlled by the central government. The National Security Directorate, Afghanistan's national security agency, has been accused of running its own prisons, torturing suspects, and harassing journalists. The security forces of local militias, which also have their own prisons, have been accused of torture and arbitrary killings. Warlords in the north have used property destruction, rape, and murder to discourage displaced Pashtuns from reclaiming their homes. Child labor and trafficking in people remain common outside Kabul. Civilians frequently have been killed in battles between warlord forces. Poor conditions in the overcrowded prisons have contributed to illness and death among prisoners; a prison rehabilitation program began in 2003. In the absence of an effective national judicial system, the right to judicial protection has been compromised as uneven local standards have prevailed in criminal trials.

The government has limited freedom of the media by selective crackdowns that invoke Islamic law and has encouraged self-censorship. The media remain substantially government-owned. The nominally lesser restrictions of the 2004 media law have been criticized by journalists and legal experts, and harassment and threats continued after its passage, especially outside Kabul. No registration of religious groups is required; minority religious groups are able to practice freely but not to proselytize. Women's right to work outside the home, including political activity, has received increasing acceptance in the early 2000s. However, conservative elements in the judiciary have demanded separate education of the sexes and a strict dress code for women.