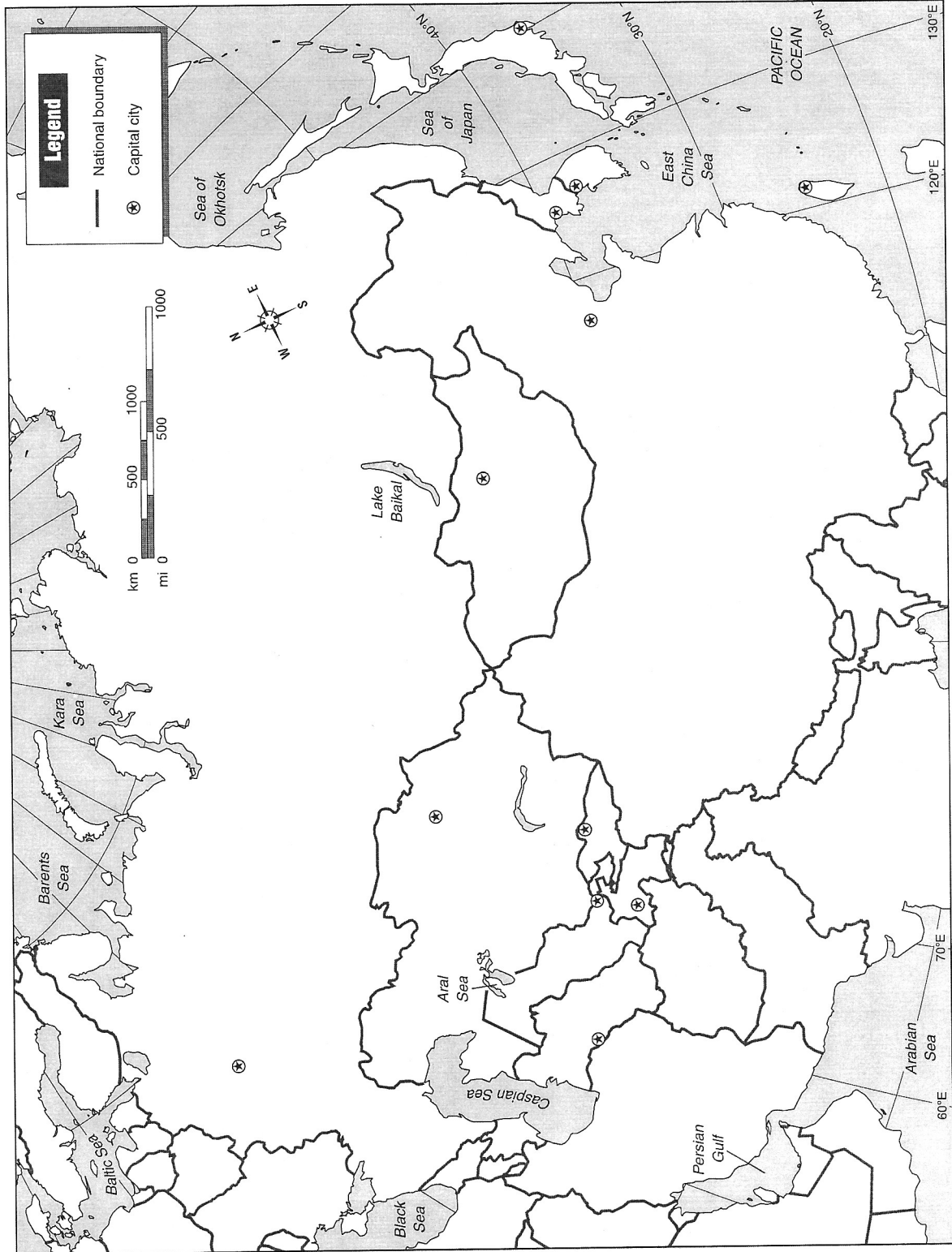


Central and Northern Asia: Political



Afghanistan

Official Name _____ Islamic State of Afghanistan
Capital _____ Kabul
Official Languages _____ Dari, Pashto
Population _____ 28,513,677 (2004 estimate)
Land Area _____ 250,000 square miles
(roughly the size of Texas)
Highest Point _____ Nowshak Peak (24,558 feet)
Border Countries _____ China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan,
Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
Official Religion _____ Islam (Sunni Muslims making up
80% of the population and Shi'a
with 19%, other religions 1%)
Main Exports _____ Cotton, fruits, nuts, carpets, hides,
pelts, wool, opium (world's largest
producer of opium)
Life Expectancy _____ 42 years
Current Average Age _____ 17 years
Government Type _____ Islamic Republic
(elections held in October 2004)
Head of Government _____ Hamid Karzai
(since 7 December 2004)
Constitution _____ New constitution drafted 14
December 2003–4 January 2004;
signed 16 January 2004
Independence _____ 19 August 1919 (from United
Kingdom control over Afghan
foreign affairs)¹

History

Afghanistan is a country with a long and rich history. Over the centuries, cultures have woven together to create the tapestry that is Afghanistan today. A basic understanding of Afghan history is helpful for reading *The Kite Runner*. Insights into characters and situations are understood more fully when evaluated against history. To distill the events, recent and ancient, includes thousands of years of history, a task not suited for this small *Reader's Guide*.

You can find many resources on Afghanistan at the Deschutes Public Library, and we encourage you to read further about the Afghan people, their culture and their vivid history. We have provided a list of resources in the back of this guide for further reading selections.

The following is a brief excerpt taken from the online *World Book* database available on the Deschutes Public Library website, www.dpls.us. We've included it as a jumping off point, in hopes of providing some basic information that might help get your study of Afghanistan started.

Afghanistan, a nation in southwestern Asia, has great mountains, scorching deserts, fertile valleys, and rolling plains. Afghanistan does not have a seacoast. The country is bordered by Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan on the north, China on the far northeast, Pakistan on the east and south, and Iran on the west.

Afghanistan is one of the world's least developed countries. Most Afghan workers farm the land, and many use old-fashioned farming tools and methods. Some of the people are nomads, who roam the country with their herds of sheep or goats. Kabul is the capital and largest city of Afghanistan.

Almost all the people of Afghanistan are Muslims. The religion of the Muslims, Islam, is the chief common link among them. The population of Afghanistan consists of about 20 ethnic groups, most of which are divided into several tribes. Most of the ethnic groups have distinct

languages and cultures. The variety of ethnic groups has made it difficult for Afghanistan to develop into a unified, modern nation.

Afghanistan has a long and troubled history. In early days, Persians, Greeks, Mongols, and other peoples conquered the region. In modern times, Afghanistan has continued to suffer foreign interference. The Soviet Union sought to occupy Afghanistan in a war that lasted from 1979 to 1989. In the 1990's, a conservative Islamic group called the Taliban came to power. The Taliban allowed international terrorist organizations to create training camps in Afghanistan. Following terrorist attacks against the United States in 2001; the United States and anti-Taliban forces within Afghanistan drove the Taliban from power. A transitional government was established to rule the country.²

¹ CIA-The World Factbook, 2005
www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook

² Thomas E. Gouttierre "Afghanistan." *World Book Online Reference Center*. 2004.
World Book, Inc. 2 Dec. 2004.
<<http://www.worldbookonline.com/wb/Article?id=ar006700>>.