

Cultural Understanding

A Guide To Understanding Coalition Cultures

Religious and Cultural Affairs Department

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A WORD FROM THE CHIEF OF THE RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

This training guide was developed at the direction of General Shir Mohammad Karimi, Chief of the General Staff of the Afghan National Army, to acquaint Afghan soldiers with Coalition customs in order to foster mutual understanding as we labor shoulder to shoulder with our Coalition partners. In addition, General Karimi tasked the Religious and Cultural Affairs Department to deliver this training to every soldier in the army. As a Religious and Cultural Affairs Officer, you are responsible for ensuring that this training is delivered to every member of your command. I recommend that you enlist and train other officers to assist you in this task. Ideally, an officer in every company will deliver the training to their soldiers and report completion to you, the Religious and Cultural Affairs Officer.

This training guide is divided into multiple sections. A series of discussion questions follows most of the sections. You should read each section carefully before attempting to deliver the training to others. Make sure you fully understand what each section says before you teach the material to the members of your command. I recommend that you highlight those portions of each section that you believe are most important. Feel free to restate those sections in your own words or to read the highlighted sections to your soldiers – whichever works best for you. Answer the discussion questions for yourself before asking them of others. That way you'll be prepared to share your own thoughts as you lead the discussion. But remember to give your soldiers an opportunity to answer and discuss the questions before sharing your own thoughts.

I recommend that you divide your training into three training periods of roughly 50 minutes each with 10 minute breaks in between. The following is an outline of the three training periods:

- Period One:
 - Introduction
 - ISAF: Many Nations – A Common Cause

- Period Two:
 - ISAF: Many Nations – Common Values
 - ISAF and the ANA: Common Army Values

- Period Three:
 - ISAF and the ANA: Shoulder to Shoulder but With Many Differences

- The Family
- Women
- Religion
- ISAF and the ANA: Dealing With Differences – Shoulder to Shoulder
- ISAF and the ANA: Shoulder to Shoulder

If you have less than three hours then I recommend that you delete either the section entitled “ISAF: Many Nations – Common Values” or the section entitled “ISAF and the ANA: Common Army Values.” The last three sections are probably the most important and should always be taught.

Remember, you have been tasked by the Chief of the General Staff and directed by me to deliver this training. It is vital that you do your best. Although there will be fewer ISAF partners in Afghanistan over the coming months, ISAF nations are committed to a strategic partnership for many years to come. So we can expect to work shoulder to shoulder with our ISAF partners well into the future. It is crucial that we continue to develop a strong partnership with our allies to ensure the success of our mission – shoulder to shoulder!

Brigadier General Mohammad Amin Nasib
Chief of the Religious and Cultural Affairs Department

ANA CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING TRAINING BOOKLET

INTRODUCTION

The Afghan National Army and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) have fought side by side for many years. ISAF was created in accordance with the Bonn Conference in December 2001. Afghan opposition leaders attending the conference began the process of reconstructing our country by setting up a new government structure, namely the Afghan Transitional Authority. The concept of a United Nations-mandated international force to assist the newly established Afghan Transitional Authority was also launched at this occasion to create a secure environment in and around Kabul and support the reconstruction of Afghanistan. On 11 August 2003, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) assumed leadership of the ISAF operation. ISAF's mandate was initially limited to providing security in and around Kabul. In October 2003, the United Nations extended ISAF's mandate to cover the whole of Afghanistan (UNSCR 1510), paving the way for an expansion of the mission across the country.¹

Although Afghan soldiers and ISAF forces have fought side by side for many years, how well do we really know each other? After all, ISAF forces come from many different countries and represent many different cultures. They look different, sound different, dress different, have different practices and speak with many different languages.

Although each ISAF nation has its own program for training troops prior to deployment, many of those nations require training on Afghan culture. For example, American troops normally take courses on the geography of Afghanistan, the history and government of Afghanistan, the culture of Afghanistan, the society and economy of Afghanistan, the rule of law in Afghanistan, and local Afghan governmental structures, along with introductory language studies.² But what about Afghan soldiers? What training have we received on Coalition cultures?

In February of 2012, The Chief of the General Staff of the Afghan National Army, General Shir Mohammad Karimi, directed the Army's Religious and Cultural Affairs Department to provide training to all Afghan soldiers to help the Afghan Army better understand their ISAF partners. This booklet is the result of General Karimi's guidance. It is designed to help strengthen our understanding of our ISAF counterpart. But more than that, it is designed to strengthen the bond between us and our ISAF allies with whom we are serving – shoulder to shoulder!

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you worked with soldiers from different ISAF countries? If so, which countries?
2. What things do you have in common with the ISAF soldiers you work with?
3. What differences do you notice between yourself and those soldiers?
4. What did you learn about ISAF countries by working shoulder to shoulder with ISAF soldiers?
5. What did you teach those soldiers about Afghanistan?

ISAF: MANY NATIONS – A COMMON CAUSE

How can we possibly provide in one brief booklet a comprehensive description of every nation that's a member of ISAF? That would be impossible. After all, there are a total of fifty troop contributing nations serving as part of the ISAF team.³ Currently there are troops from:

Albania	Armenia	Australia	Austria	Azerbaijan
Bahrain	Belgium	Bosnia/Herzegovina	Bulgaria	Canada
Croatia	Czech Republic	Denmark	El Salvador	Estonia
Finland	France	Georgia	Germany	Greece
Hungary	Iceland	Ireland	Italy	Jordan
Latvia	Lithuania	Luxembourg	Malaysia	Mongolia
Montenegro	Netherlands	New Zealand	Norway	Poland
Portugal	Republic of Korea	Romania	Singapore	Slovakia
Slovenia	Spain	Sweden	Macedonia	Tonga
Turkey	Ukraine	United Arab Emirates	United Kingdom	United States

Not only are there a total of fifty nations serving as parts of ISAF, but these nations come from four of the seven continents. Thirty-four of these countries reside in Europe, ten reside in Asia and the Middle East, three comprise Australia and islands in the Pacific, and three reside in North America.

As you can see, there is tremendous diversity among the fifty nations which comprise ISAF. Even so, some might think that all European countries are very much alike since they are all a part of Europe. But that is far from true. When people think of Europe they often think first of the larger European nations such as France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain or the United

Kingdom. Even these large European nations are very different from one another. But there are many other European nations besides these familiar ones who also contribute troops to ISAF.

Take, for example, the nation of Albania. Albania contributes nearly 300 soldiers to ISAF. Located on the coasts of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, it is less than 72 kilometers from Italy across the Strait of Otranto. Albania is not only a member of the United Nations and NATO but is also a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, an international organization composed of 57 member states which seek to promote the well-being of the Islamic community worldwide.^{4 5} This is just one example of the great diversity that is found in Europe.

But even the United States, the largest troop contributing nation in ISAF, is not composed of a single people or single culture. Among its more than 300 million citizens are large populations of Asians and African Americans, Latin Americans and American Indians, Native Alaskans, Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders. And each of these groups brings their own unique foods, art, music, literature, stories, histories, myths and legends, rituals, rites, ceremonies and celebrations to the national mix. It's a little like a lovely carpet. Different colored strands combine to make a beautiful whole.

So what do the fifty nations of ISAF really have in common? The one thing they most have in common is their diversity and difference! Each nation is different from all of the others. And this diversity is part of what makes ISAF so strong. Each nation brings its own special skills and abilities to the ISAF mission and ISAF is stronger as a consequence. Like the strands of a rope, many strands are stronger than just one!

Perhaps in this respect, ISAF is not so different from Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a country of tremendous diversity. It is composed of more than thirteen different ethnic groups to include the Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Aimaks, Turkmens, Balochs, Pashais, Nuristanis, Brahuis, Pamiris, Gujjars, Arabs, and others.⁶ Like ISAF, Afghanistan is like a work of art with each ethnic group bringing its own unique foods, art, music, literature, stories, histories, myths and legends, rituals, rites, ceremonies and celebrations to the national mix. The result is a beautiful nation. And like ISAF, when the various tribes and ethnic groups of Afghanistan work together like strands in a common rope then they create a strong and powerful nation.

So diversity is one thing that the ISAF nations hold in common. But there's something else that holds the various ISAF nations together. It's a common mission. It's a common cause. And what is that mission? What is that cause? It's the same cause that the Afghan Army is fighting for. You see, the main role of ISAF is to assist the Afghan government in the establishment of a secure and stable environment. To this end, ISAF forces conduct security and stability

operations throughout the country together with the Afghan National Security Forces. Furthermore, through its Provincial Reconstruction Teams, ISAF supports reconstruction and development in Afghanistan in order to make life better for all Afghan citizens.⁷

You see, ISAF shares the same mission as the Afghan National Army. Together, Afghanistan and the nations of ISAF fight for a world where they can be safe, secure, stable, prosperous, and free. Although the many nations of ISAF are very different from one another, and very different from the nation of Afghanistan, perhaps they are not that different after all. Perhaps the things we share in common are more important than the differences we share.

Discussion Questions:

1. If you could visit any ISAF country, which one would you most like to visit and why?
2. ISAF is very diverse. What are the advantages of diversity? What are the disadvantages?
3. Afghanistan is very diverse. What are the advantages of Afghan diversity? What are the disadvantages?
4. How can Afghans work together despite their differences to make Afghanistan stronger?
5. What mission does the Afghan National Army share with ISAF?

ISAF: MANY NATIONS – COMMON VALUES

After learning about the diversity of ISAF, it might come as a surprise to learn that these different nations share some common values. After all, how could fifty nations from four different continents possibly share any common values? But it's true. Although they have different values depending on their own culture, history, and place in the world, they also share some common core beliefs. What are they?

For one thing, they tend to have tremendous respect for religion. Several of the ISAF nations are Muslim majority nations to include Albania, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Jordan, Malaysia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. Many others have strong Muslim minorities. Most represent countries with strong religious populations. In almost every instance, religion plays a significant role in the lives of their people.

In addition to having a deep respect for religion, what other values or beliefs do the ISAF nations tend to hold in common? The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights is one expression of their shared beliefs and values. “The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948, was the result of the experience of the Second World War. With the end of that war, and the creation of the United Nations, the international community vowed never again to allow atrocities like those of that conflict happen again. World leaders decided to complement the UN Charter with a road map to guarantee the rights of every individual everywhere...The first draft of the Declaration was proposed in September 1948 with over 50 Member States participating in the final drafting.”⁸

“The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is generally agreed to be the foundation of international human rights law. It has inspired a rich body of legally binding international human rights treaties...Today, all United Nations member States have ratified at least one of the nine core international human rights treaties, and 80 percent have ratified four or more, giving concrete expression to the universality of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights.”⁹ In addition, throughout our own history, the various governments of Afghanistan have shown their support for six of these international treaties.¹⁰

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Because of this, ISAF values and Afghan values, though very different in many ways, are also similar in many respects. We see this in the similarity that exists between the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Constitution of Afghanistan. The Preamble to the Constitution says, “We the people of Afghanistan: With firm faith in God Almighty and relying on His lawful mercy, and Believing in the Sacred religion of Islam ...Observing the United Nations Charter and respecting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights...Have adopted this constitution in compliance with historical, cultural, and social requirements of the era, through our elected representatives in the Loya Jirga dated 14 Jaddi 1382 in the city of Kabul.”¹² Chapter Two of the Constitution then goes on to describe the Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens.

The chart below compares some of the Fundamental Rights and Duties of Afghan Citizens with similar Articles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.^{13 14} As you read them you will notice some differences and many similarities. Notice that when we interact with other cultures, we often begin by focusing attention on our differences. However, for the purposes of peace and reconciliation, it may be better to begin by focusing attention on those things we share in common. So as you read each list, look for shared values and common beliefs. We’ll explore our difference later in this booklet.

Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<p>Chapter 2 Article 1 Any kind of discrimination and privilege between the citizens of Afghanistan are prohibited. The citizens of Afghanistan – whether man or woman – have equal rights and duties before the law.</p>	<p>Article 2 Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.</p>
<p>Chapter 2 Article 2 Life is a gift of God and a natural right of human beings. No one shall be deprived of this right except by the provision of law.</p>	<p>Article 3 Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.</p>
<p>Chapter 2 Article 3 Liberty is the natural right of human beings. This right has no limits unless affecting the rights of others or public interests, which are regulated by law.</p>	<p>Article 3 Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.</p>
<p>Chapter 2 Article 12 The citizens of Afghanistan have the right to elect and be elected. Law regulates the conditions and means to exercise this right.</p>	<p>Article 21 Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives... The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections....</p>
<p>Chapter 2 Article 13 Freedom of expression is inviolable. Every Afghan has the right to express his thought through speech, writing, or illustration or other means, by observing the provisions stated in this Constitution. Every Afghan has the right to print or publish topics without prior submission to the state authorities in accordance with the law.</p>	<p>Article 19 Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.</p>
<p>Chapter 2 Article 14 The citizens of Afghanistan have the right to</p>	<p>Article 20 Everyone has the right to freedom of</p>

<p>form social organizations for the purpose of securing material or spiritual aims in accordance with the provisions of the law.</p>	<p>peaceful assembly and association. No one may be compelled to belong to an association.</p>
<p>Chapter 2 Article 15 The citizens of Afghanistan have the right to un-armed demonstrations, for legitimate peaceful purposes.</p>	<p>Article 20 Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. No one may be compelled to belong to an association.</p>
<p>Chapter 2 Article 16 Confidentiality and freedom of correspondence and communication whether in the form of letters or through telephone, telegraph and other means, are immune from invasion. The state does not have the right to inspect personal correspondence and communication unless authorized by the provisions of law.</p>	<p>Article 12 No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.</p>
<p>Chapter 2 Article 19 Property is immune from invasion. No person shall be forbidden from acquiring and making use of a property except within the limits of law. Nobody's property shall be confiscated without the provisions of law and the order of an authorized court.</p>	<p>Article 17 Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.</p>
<p>Chapter 2 Article 22 Education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan, which shall be provided up to the level of the B.A. (<i>lisâns</i>), free of charge by the state.</p> <p>Chapter 2 Article 23 The state shall devise and implement effective programs for balancing and promoting of education for women, improving of education of nomads and elimination of illiteracy in the country.</p>	<p>Article 26 Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.</p>

Discussion Questions:

1. Were you surprised by the similarities between the Fundamental Rights and Duties of Afghan Citizens and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? Why or why not?
2. Are there things in the Fundamental Rights and Duties of Afghan Citizens that you believe should be part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? If so, what?
3. Are there things in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that you think should be part of the Fundamental Rights and Duties of Afghan Citizens? If so, what?
4. Which one of the Fundamental Rights and Duties of Afghan Citizens or the Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights do you think is most important? Why?

ISAF AND THE ANA: COMMON ARMY VALUES

All of this talk about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Afghan Constitution may seem far removed from the life of the average soldier. After all, what soldier has time to study a United Nation’s document or even his own Constitution! But you might be surprised to learn that the Afghan National Army also shares similar soldier values with some ISAF soldiers. For example, the following chart compares the Army Values of the United States Army with our own Army values. Once again, look for similarities and differences as you read over the list:

Afghan National Army Values	United States Army Values
<p>LOYALTY</p> <p>We will follow the lawful orders of our commanders. We will be loyal to the oath we take and will comply with its provisions. We will support our fellow soldiers, commanders and teammates. We conduct our duty with trust and loyalty; preserve military secrets, weapons and equipment. We proudly wear the military uniform with Afghan pride.</p>	<p>LOYALTY</p> <p>Bear true faith and allegiance to the U.S. Constitution, the Army, your unit and other Soldiers. Bearing true faith and allegiance is a matter of believing in and devoting yourself to something or someone. A loyal Soldier is one who supports the leadership and stands up for fellow Soldiers. By wearing the uniform of the U.S. Army you are expressing your loyalty. And by doing your share, you show your loyalty to</p>

	your unit.
<p>DUTY</p> <p>Performance of duty is our honor and we will do it with honesty and courage. We fulfill our duty following our beliefs and ethical values and we perform our duty with complete impartiality and obedience to legitimate elected political authority of the state.</p>	<p>DUTY</p> <p>Fulfill your obligations. Doing your duty means more than carrying out your assigned tasks. Duty means being able to accomplish tasks as part of a team. The work of the U.S. Army is a complex combination of missions, tasks and responsibilities — all in constant motion. Our work entails building one assignment onto another. You fulfill your obligations as a part of your unit every time you resist the temptation to take “shortcuts” that might undermine the integrity of the final product.</p>
<p>RESPECT</p> <p>We will always respect and protect the rights and freedoms of the Afghan people under the Constitution and laws of Afghanistan. Our behavior with each other is based on the chain of command, manuals and mutual respect. Our duty as soldiers, NCOs and professional officers is to defend the country and national interests and ensure the security of the great Afghan nation.</p>	<p>RESPECT</p> <p>Treat people as they should be treated. In the Soldier’s Code, we pledge to “treat others with dignity and respect while expecting others to do the same.” Respect is what allows us to appreciate the best in other people. Respect is trusting that all people have done their jobs and fulfilled their duty. And self-respect is a vital ingredient with the Army value of respect, which results from knowing you have put forth your best effort. The Army is one team and each of us has something to contribute.</p>
<p>SERVICE</p> <p>We prefer our national interests to personal, group, ethnic and religious interests and will try to ensure it. Our service to our country will be without thoughts of advancement of personal gain. There will be no superiority and</p>	<p>SELFLESS SERVICE</p> <p>Put the welfare of the nation, the Army and your subordinates before your own. Selfless service is larger than just one person. In serving your country, you are doing your duty loyally without thought of recognition or gain.</p>

<p>discrimination in our formation (but, based on piety, merit and rank) we will endure adversities, difficulties and serve Afghanistan with honor as one team and our goal is to provide peace and prosperity and ensure the prosperity of future generations.</p>	<p>The basic building block of selfless service is the commitment of each team member to go a little further, endure a little longer, and look a little closer to see how he or she can add to the effort.</p>
<p>HONOR</p> <p>Whatever good deeds the ANA does for the Afghan nation is a big honor. Positive choices add to our honor. Honor means that ANA personnel should be steadfast to our Islamic values, our country, and our duty. We are obliged to take action against dishonorable behavior. Serving Afghanistan is our honor and we sacrifice our life to secure the confidence of the public and government.</p>	<p>HONOR</p> <p>Live up to Army values. The nation’s highest military award is The Medal of Honor. This award goes to Soldiers who make honor a matter of daily living — Soldiers who develop the habit of being honorable, and solidify that habit with every value choice they make. Honor is a matter of carrying out, acting, and living the values of respect, duty, loyalty, selfless service, integrity and personal courage in everything you do.</p>
<p>INTEGRITY</p> <p>We must do what is right morally and legally. We will be honest and truthful in our behavior with each other, teammates and those outside the Army.</p>	<p>INTEGRITY</p> <p>Do what’s right, legally and morally. Integrity is a quality you develop by adhering to moral principles. It requires that you do and say nothing that deceives others. As your integrity grows, so does the trust others place in you. The more choices you make based on integrity, the more this highly prized value will affect your relationships with family and friends, and, finally, the fundamental acceptance of yourself.</p>
<p>COURAGE</p> <p>We will be courageous and steadfast in our Islamic beliefs and religious values. We firmly believe in Ghza (Holy War) and martyrdom</p>	<p>PERSONAL COURAGE</p> <p>Face fear, danger or adversity (physical or moral). Personal courage has long been associated with our Army. With physical</p>

<p>(life after death). We will endure difficulties, risk personal safety, and face moral fear and adversity. We believe our life and death is in God`s hands and in God`s path, for country and duty, and we do not have fear of anything else.</p>	<p>courage, it is a matter of enduring physical duress and at times risking personal safety. Facing moral fear or adversity may be a long, slow process of continuing forward on the right path, especially if taking those actions is not popular with others. You can build your personal courage by daily standing up for and acting upon the things that you know are honorable.</p>
<p>GOD</p> <p>There is no God but Allah and Mohammad (PBUH) is his prophet. Obedience to and practice of Allah`s rules are the duty and responsibility of ANA personnel and Afghanistan`s citizens.</p>	

Although this list only compares Afghan National Army Values to the values of the United States Army, other ISAF armies have similar values. For example, the six core values of the British Army are:

- **Courage:** Be brave enough to do the right thing, no matter what the circumstances.
- **Discipline:** Set a good example and follow lawful orders.
- **Respect for Others:** Treat people as you`d want to be treated.
- **Integrity:** Be honest and never lie, cheat, or steal.
- **Loyalty:** Look after your mates and stick with them, even when the going gets tough.
- **Selfless commitment:** Put the team, your mates and the mission before yourself.

You may have noticed that the Army Values of the United States Army and the British Army`s Core Values do not mention God. That doesn`t mean that the soldiers of those nations don`t believe in God or that God is not important to the people of those countries. As you study the following next section of this booklet you`ll learn about the different way many ISAF nations view religion and that may explain why God is not mentioned. But don`t let that distract you from the fact that most of our Army values are similar to those of our ISAF partners.

Discussion Questions:

1. Which ANA value do you believe is most important and why?

2. How does that ANA Value compare with the United States Army Value or the British Core Values?
3. Describe an occasion when you saw an Afghan soldier demonstrating one of the ANA values.
4. Describe an occasion when you saw an ISAF soldier demonstrating a similar value.
5. How would the relationship between our Army and ISAF be improved if all Afghan and ISAF soldiers lived by their Army's values?

ISAF AND THE ANA: SHOULDER TO SHOULDER BUT WITH MANY DIFFERENCES

So far we have learned that ISAF is composed of many different nations with many different customs, cultures, and practices but all are united in a common cause of assisting the Afghan government in establishing a secure and stable environment for its people. In addition we've seen that despite their differences, the various ISAF nations share many common values. Finally, we've seen that the ISAF mission and the Afghan National Army's mission are the same and that some ISAF values and Afghan values are also similar. But there are also many differences between Afghanistan and the various ISAF countries in customs, cultures, and practices. And these differences can sometimes cause friction, tension, and misunderstanding. That's normal and to be expected. In fact, the countries of ISAF sometimes experience friction, tension, and misunderstanding even among themselves! This section will focus on these differences and how we can work together to develop a better understanding of one another. In particular this section will focus on cultural differences related to family relations, women's roles, and religious practices.

THE FAMILY

The family is as important to the men and women of ISAF as it is to the people of Afghanistan. The family is a central part of each ISAF members' life; however, there are some differences in the role of the family among many ISAF forces compared to the roles and obligations of family members in Afghanistan. Like the family in Afghanistan, the family in many ISAF states is a location of intimacy, love, and trust where individuals can escape from the competition of the world. The family's task is to protect its members against the outside world. The difference between many ISAF families and the families of Afghanistan is who is considered part of the family and what their obligations to each other are.

In the ISAF states of North American and Europe, for example, the nuclear family is the primary family structure. The nuclear family is a family group consisting of a pair of adults and their children. Nuclear families typically center on a married couple and their children. In contrast, the primary family form in Afghanistan is the extended family. The extended family includes many relatives in one household. The extended family may also consist of several generations living together in a single household. From culture to culture, the extended family varies. For instance, in Afghanistan the family is a patriarchal society with the sons' families often staying in the same house.

The difference between nuclear and extended families goes beyond the size of the family. It in part reflects the economic conditions in which the family exists. For example, in a society dominated by agriculture, high mortality rate, and low industrialization, the larger extended family ensures the survival of the bloodline and provides labor both for agriculture and security. In contrast, the nuclear families of many ISAF member states reflect a post-industrial society where a smaller mobile family is more successful. In either case the family is important because it is where children first learn about their culture, the roles available to them in society, and their religious practices and obligations.

WOMEN

One role in particular has changed significantly in the last fifty to a hundred years among many of the states in ISAF – that's the role of women. In the countries that comprise ISAF, women are important members of society, just as they are in Afghanistan. Women in ISAF societies are mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives; the same as they are in Afghanistan. The difference between many ISAF societies and Afghanistan lies in the various roles women can play in public and private life. In the past, the man's role in many ISAF societies was to provide financial support and protection for the family. The role of women was to maintain the household by cooking, cleaning, and raising children. This has changed in many places over the past fifty years. For the most part, women in most ISAF societies have all the opportunities that males have. Today, in most ISAF states, women and men are both responsible for the financial and physical security of the family and the maintenance of the family household.

It is important for you to understand that this change did not come easily or is it complete. Political, economic, and social necessities caused these changes. For example, the need for workers at American factories during World War II provided the opportunity for women to enter the workforce. Furthermore, the changing relationship between men and women in many ISAF societies is a result of their own unique histories and challenges. Nevertheless, the vast majority of ISAF countries have found that overcoming those challenges was well worth the effort as opening greater opportunities for women brought the gifts, talents, and abilities of women to bear on the problems facing their societies and resulted in stronger societies as a whole.

RELIGION

We should understand that many of the members of ISAF are just as religious as Afghans, but it is important to also understand that the role of religion is different in most of the ISAF states. The difference is often found in the role religion plays in governing or influencing society.

In Afghanistan, religion is a large part of public life. This means that religion has an important role in the economic, social, and political aspects of Afghan society. Religion is part of the national identity of Afghans; it defines in part who Afghans are as a people. This is not necessarily true among many ISAF states. Religion may be part of an individual's personal life but may not be part of his or her public life and probably doesn't determine how the state is organized or functions. For example, countries like the United States and France have very strict laws on what role religion can play in the operation of the state. Even Islamic ISAF countries like Turkey have a distinct limit on the role of religion in the administration of the government. Most Afghans cannot conceive of a government in which Islam did not have a major role to play. Most ISAF states cannot conceive of a government that did not limit the influence of religion in state affairs.

To repeat, many of the members of ISAF are just as religious as Afghans but they may see religion as an individual or personal matter and not a matter belonging to the state. In other words, who you believe in, how you believe, and why you believe or do not believe are not governed by the state but are seen as important matters between you, those closest to you, and the religion you choose to practice.

OTHER DIFFERENCES

Although differences regarding family, women, and religion are among the greatest differences between Afghan and Coalition cultures, there are many other minor differences, too. And these minor differences can cause friction and misunderstanding. Here are some common differences you may notice as you work with Coalition members and some suggestions for how to deal with these differences:

When Coalition members visit new countries they often take pictures to share with friends and family members back home. If you don't want your picture taken, then simply ask the Coalition member not to do so. You may also ask them to delete the pictures they've taken of you and ask them kindly not take any more.

As you know, in Afghan culture, pointing the soles of one's feet toward another person is considered offensive. However, in many Coalition cultures this is not considered offensive at all. In fact, when someone feels very comfortable in your presence, they may even put their feet on their own desk while speaking with you. They are by no means trying to offend you. They simply don't know or have forgotten the Afghan custom.

Of course, prayer is one of the main pillars of Islam and a very important aspect of Afghan culture and it's worthy to be mentioned that the absolute majority of Afghans are Muslims. While many Coalition members are quite religious, most are not Muslim and know very little about Islamic religious practices. Because of this, they may accidentally do things that you may find offensive such as passing in front of you when you are praying. Please do not be offended. Instead, let them know that this is a sensitive issue and ask them not to pass in front of a person who is praying.

Most Coalition members enjoy sightseeing and visiting new places. If they should accidentally enter a mosque or shrine and you do not want them to be there, please ask them nicely to leave and they will leave the area. You may also take the opportunity to explain to them the significance of the shrine or mosque so they will better understand its history and importance.

As you know, Afghans do not blow their noses in front of each other in social or private gatherings but this is not an unusual practice in many Coalition cultures so please do not get offended if you see a Coalition member blowing his/her nose in front of you.

Most Coalition members like to share stories and pictures with friends about their wives and their children, their brothers and their sisters. As a consequence, they may ask you about your own family members to include your female family members. If this happens, please don't be offended. They are just trying to be friendly. Instead, simply explain to them that Afghans do not commonly talk about the female members of their family.

When Coalition members get excited, they may show their excitement by patting one another on the back or behind. They may even do this to you if they are proud of the job you've done. Once again, they don't mean to offend you. If you are offended, just ask them kindly not to touch you in that way again.

Finally, as you well know, Afghans do not shake hands or salute with left hand; do not wink; do not rub or press the middle or other fingers in the palm of the hand; and do expose their private parts even when showering or using the bathroom. Coalition members, on the other hand, may do some of these things as part of their own cultural practices. They do not mean to offend you when they do so. If you are offended, you may want to ask them not to do these things again in your presence. They'll appreciate the fact that you've shared this information with them.

Discussion Questions:

1. The previous section highlighted differences between ISAF and Afghan practices related to family structures, women's roles, religion and other practices. What other ISAF customs or practices have you found that differ from Afghan customs or practices?
2. Which of these customs or practices do you find most difficult to understand? Why?

3. How have these differences affected your relationship with ISAF soldiers?

4. Have you discussed these differences with your ISAF partners? If so, how did they respond?

5. What can you do to make sure these differences don't detract from your partnership with ISAF?

6. Is it important for you to respect ISAF customs and practices, just as you expect ISAF to respect your customs and practices? Why or why not?

ISAF AND THE ANA: DEALING WITH DIFFERENCES – SHOULDER TO SHOULDER

In the previous section we saw that despite the things we share in common, there are many differences between ISAF soldiers and the Afghan National Army. And in the discussion section we discussed additional differences between us and our ISAF partners. So what can we do to make sure these differences don't detract from our partnership with ISAF?

First we must understand that differences can lead to friction, tension, and misunderstanding. That's normal and quite natural. We shouldn't be surprised when we feel this way. In addition, we need to realize that friction, tension, and misunderstanding can lead to additional feelings of anger, bitterness, and resentment. That, too, is normal. Nevertheless, even though it may be normal to occasionally feel angry, bitter, or resentful toward our ISAF partners, we mustn't spoil the relationship we have with our allies.

So what should we do if we feel this way? First, we might remind ourselves that misunderstandings are common among people from different countries and cultures. Usually, our ISAF partners don't mean to offend us – they just have a different way of doing or saying things that we don't always understand. And because we don't always understand them, we can easily be offended by them. Nevertheless, if misunderstanding or anger persists, then we should deal with those feelings before they get out of control. Here are some simple suggestions for managing misunderstandings and the anger they sometimes create.

- Try to remember that almost all misunderstandings are accidental and not intentional.
- Listen carefully to what your ISAF partner is saying. If you don't understand him, ask him to explain.
- Describe to your ISAF partner what you think he has said and ask him to confirm whether or not you truly understand him.
- If you and your ISAF partner continue to misunderstand one another, ask your leaders to help you.
- If you or your ISAF partner becomes angry, separate yourself from him and take time to calm down. Report this to your leaders. They may be able to help you find sulh (a settlement) and musalaha (reconciliation) with your ISAF partners.
- Remember that you and your ISAF partner are joined in a common cause even though you may disagree on some issues.
- Look for shared values or common interests that can bring you back together with your ISAF partner.

Discussion Questions:

1. How have you successfully managed some misunderstanding or angry situation in the past?
2. What are some additional ideas you have for managing misunderstandings and anger?

ISAF AND THE ANA: SHOULDER TO SHOULDER

We began this study by recalling that ISAF forces and the ANA have been fighting shoulder to shoulder for many years. Although there will be fewer ISAF partners in Afghanistan over the coming months, ISAF nations are committed to a strategic partnership for many years to come. So we can expect to work shoulder to shoulder with our ISAF partners well into the future. As we do so, we will make friends with many and be frustrated by some. As we make friends, we will show our ISAF partners the best of Afghanistan so they will leave with fond memories of our nation and our people. And in the process, we will develop many fond memories of our own. Shared friendships and good memories are the result of cultural understanding!

¹ <http://www.isaf.nato.int/history.html> accessed on 14 April 2012.

² The ISAF Basic Course accessed at: <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/designer> accessed on 14 April 2012.

³ <http://www.isaf.nato.int/troop-numbers-and-contributions/index.php> accessed on 14 April 2012.

⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albania> accessed on 14 April 2012.

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- ⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Organisation_of_Islamic_Cooperation accessed on 14 April 2012.
- ⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demography_of_Afghanistan accessed on 15 April 2012.
- ⁷ <http://www.isaf.nato.int/mission.html> accessed on 14 April 2012.
- ⁸ <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/history.shtml> accessed on 15 April 2012.
- ⁹ http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/hr_law.shtml accessed on 15 April 2012.
- ¹⁰ <http://www.wwda.org.au/hrcore1.htm> accessed on 15 April 2012;
- ¹¹ <http://treaties.un.org/Pages/Treaties.aspx?id=4&subid=A&lang=en> accessed on 15 April 2012.
- ¹² http://www.afghan-web.com/politics/current_constitution.html#preamble accessed on 15 April 2012.
- ¹³ <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/> accessed on 16 April 2012.
- ¹⁴ http://www.afghan-web.com/politics/current_constitution.html accessed on 16 April 2012.