

STARS AND STRIPES®

AFGHANISTAN

NATO International Security Assistance Force



FULL NAME: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
Afghanistan literally means Land of the Afghan.

CAPITAL: Kabul

LOCATION: Central Asia

BORDERING COUNTRIES: China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

AREA: 647,500 square miles. Landlocked with mostly rugged mountains and some plains in the north and southwest.

AREA SIZE: Slightly smaller than the state of Texas.

POPULATION: 32,738,376 (June 2008 est.)

CLIMATE: Arid to semi-arid; cold winters and hot summers

RELIGION: Sunni Muslim and Shi'a Muslim

LANGUAGE: Pashtu, Dari, Turkic languages

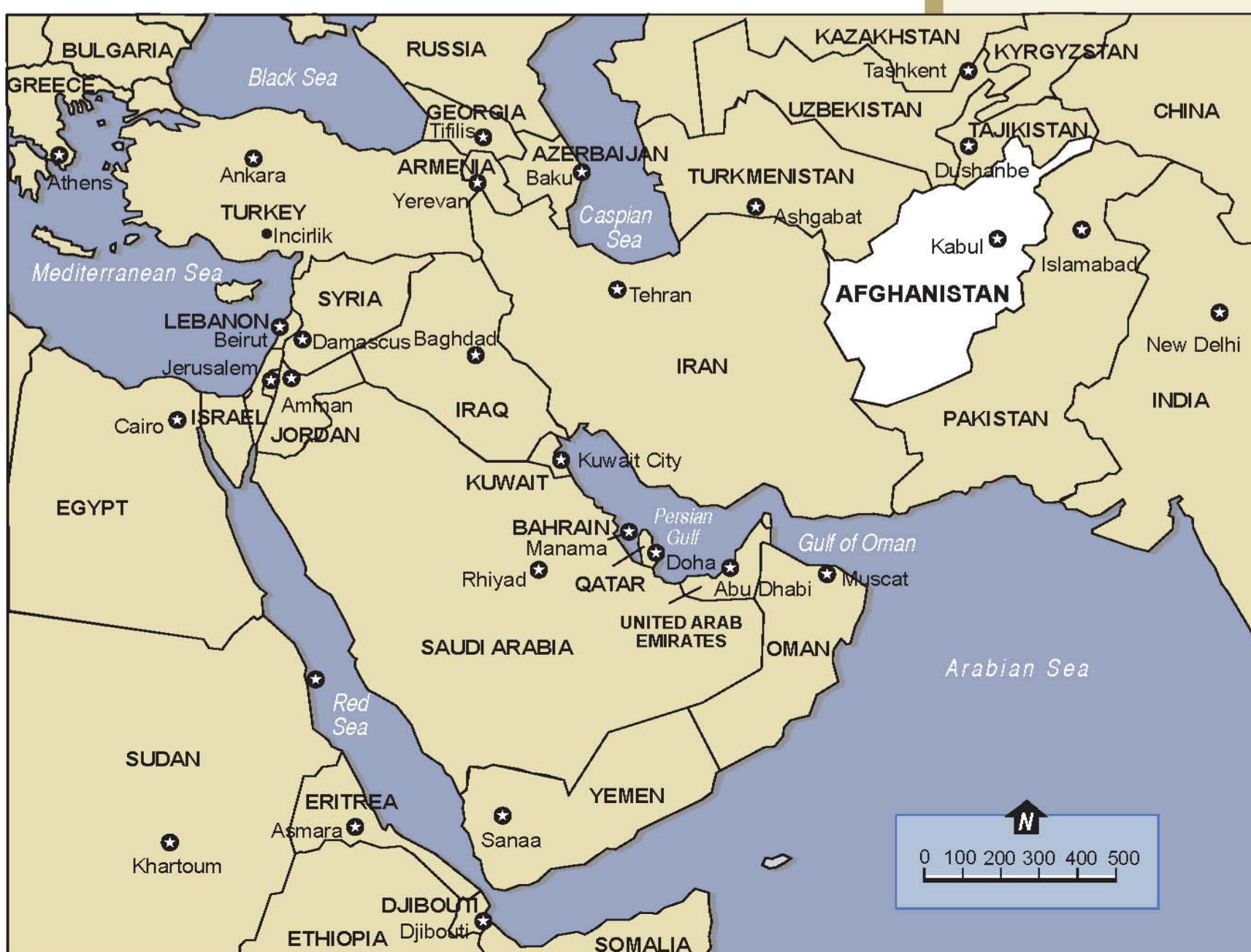
LIFE EXPECTANCY: Male: 44.04 years Female: 44.39 years (2008 est.)

INDEPENDENCE: August 19, 1919, from the United Kingdom

NATIONAL HOLIDAY: Independence Day, August 19

BACKGROUND: The Soviet Union invaded and occupied Afghanistan in 1979, but was forced to withdraw 10 years later by anti-communist mujahideen forces supplied and trained by the United States, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and others. The rebels quickly turned their guns on each other, causing the rise of the fundamentalist Islamic Taliban, which seized most of the country starting in 1994. In September 1996, the militant Taliban took the capital of Kabul. U.S.-led air strikes against Afghanistan were launched Oct. 7, 2001, for harboring Saudi exile Osama Bin Laden, the top suspect in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in the United States. With the support of U.S. bombs and Special Forces, a loose collection of warlords called the Northern Alliance took control and captured Kabul in November. In mid-December, the U.S. Embassy in Kabul reopened after 12 years. Today, Afghanistan is on a road to recovery. However, after decades of war, the economy is still in ruins, its environment is in a state of crisis. The country is riddled with landmines left from the war, which are still injuring and killing people on a daily basis.

POLITICAL SITUATION: An interim administration, headed by Hamid Karzai, took power December 22, 2001 after various delegates in Bonn, Germany, signed an accord. The administration ruled for six months, and an emergency loya jirga (Traditional Grand Assembly) was convened to decide on a transitional authority to lead Afghanistan until the people could elect a permanent government. Karzai was elected president by the loya jirga, in June 2002 and appointed a cabinet. In 2004, Karzai was elected to a five-year term in the country's first nationwide post-Taliban vote. The next presidential election is scheduled for 2009.



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Legend

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- International Security Assistance Provincial Reconstruction Teams
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- River
- Seasonal Stream
- Nation Capitol
- City