



# P R E F A C E :

THE CAL POLY SHARED READING PROGRAM

## Fast Facts

**"...brilliant...both as a political chronicle and a deeply personal tale about how childhood choices affect our adult lives. . . a complete work of literature that succeeds in exploring the culture of a previously obscure nation that has become a pivot point in the global politics of the new millennium . . . It is rare that a book is at once so timely and of such high literary quality." - *Publishers Weekly***

### Afghanistan Fast Facts

Afghanistan's recent history is a story of war and civil unrest. The Soviet Union invaded in 1979, but was forced to withdraw 10 years later by anti-Communist mujahidin forces. The Communist regime in Kabul collapsed in 1992. Fighting that subsequently erupted among the various mujahidin factions eventually helped to spawn the Taliban, a hardline Pakistani-sponsored movement that fought to end the warlordism and civil war which gripped the country. The Taliban seized Kabul in 1996 and were able to capture most of the country outside of

Northern Alliance strongholds primarily in the northeast. Following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, a US, Allied, and Northern Alliance military action toppled the Taliban for sheltering Osama Bin Ladin. In late 2001, a conference in Bonn, Germany, established a process for political reconstruction that ultimately resulted in the adoption of a new constitution and presidential election in 2004. On 9 October 2004, Hamid Karzai became the first democratically elected president of Afghanistan. The new Afghan government's next task is to hold National Assembly elections, tentatively scheduled for April 2005.



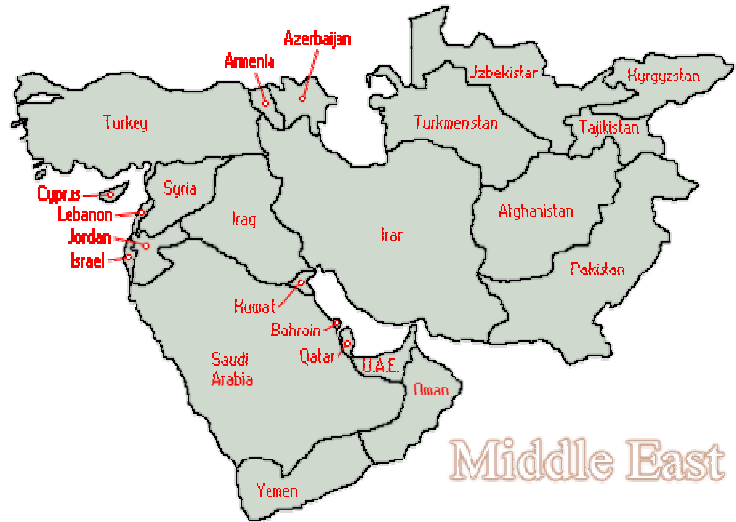
**Sunni and Shia Islam**

The historical divide of Islam into Sunni, or so-called orthodox Islam, and Shia, was caused more by political dispute over successors than doctrinal differences, although differences gradually assumed theological and metaphysical overtones. Despite the split, within centuries Islam reached far into Africa, eastward to the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia, as well as northward into Central Asia. This expansion was accomplished by traders and missionaries as much as by conquest. Sunni constitute 85 percent of the world's Muslims; Shia about 15 percent. Each division has four major Shariah or schools of theological law. The Sunni: Hanafi, dominant in the Arab Middle East, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan; Maleki, in north, central and west Africa and Egypt; Shafii, in east Africa, Indonesia and southeast Asia; Hanbali, in Saudi Arabia. The Shia: Ithna Ashariya or Imami, the state religion in Iran, dominant in Iraq and also found in Afghanistan; Nizari Ismaili, present throughout the Muslim world, including Afghanistan, led by the Aga Khan; Zaidiya, in Yemen; Mutazila, in Syria and Lebanon.



Official name:	Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
Capital:	Kabul
Government type:	Islamic republic
Population:	28,513,677 (July 2004 est.)
Languages:	Pashtu (official) 35%, Afghan Persian (Dari) 50%, Turkic languages (primarily Uzbek and Turkmen) 11%, 30 minor languages (primarily Balochi and Pashai) 4%, much bilingualism
Ethnic groups:	Pashtun 42%, Tajik 27%, Hazara 9%, Uzbek 9%, Aimak 4%, Turkmen 3%, Baloch 2%, other 4%
Religions:	Sunni Muslim 80%, Shi'a Muslim 19%, other 1%
Area:	total: 647,500 sq km water: 0 sq km land: 647,500 sq km (slightly smaller than Texas)
Map references:	Asia
Location:	Southern Asia, north and west of Pakistan, east of Iran

Climate: arid to semiarid; cold winters and hot summers



Sources:

- <http://www.afghan-network.net/Culture/facts.html>
- <http://countrystudies.us/afghanistan/61.htm>
- <http://www.geographyiq.com/meast.htm>
- [http://www.geographyiq.com/countries/af/Afghanistan\\_people.htm](http://www.geographyiq.com/countries/af/Afghanistan_people.htm)
- <http://plasma.nationalgeographic.com/mapmachine/profiles/af.html>