

From Kids to Kids...

## What we learned about Iraq and Afghanistan



Dear Operation Military Kids:


We wondered a lot about what it would be like in Iraq or Afghanistan, so we researched these things to tell you about.

We found it was really interesting to learn about other countries, and we found information in books, on the internet, and from sending our questions to soldiers who had been in these countries.

We also learned that things keep changing in these countries as the war and rebuilding efforts continue, for example people are working very hard to help build schools so kids can go to school again.

We hope this will help you while your Service Member is over there.

Sincerely,

The 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in Mrs. Darri Becchetti's class at: R.L. Stevenson Elementary School in Fridley Minnesota- *Ben, Alexandra, Daegia, Skyler, Sawyer, Evan, Alex, Teagan, William, Jorge, Yesenia, Gabe, Caleb, Alexis, Shadin, Gracia, Shelby, Breanne, Jeremiah, Jacob, Grace, Noel, & Barbara*  *Farrque,*

### How big is the country and how many people live there?

The population of Afghanistan is about 31,057,000.

Size or Area: 250,000 square miles. It is about the size of the state of Texas.

The population of Iraq is 26,761,000.

Size: 169,000 square miles. It is a little larger than the state of California

The population of the United States is about 307, 212,000

Size or Area: 3,718,711 sq miles (or 9,631,418 sq km.).

### What are the cities and rural areas like in Iraq and Afghanistan? Are there big cities or is it mostly villages or small towns?

#### Afghanistan

The Hindu Kish Mountains cover almost two-thirds of Afghanistan. These mountains have some of the tallest peaks in the world. A large desert stretches across southwestern Afghanistan. It's capital city is Kabul. Most Afghans live in small villages. They usually do not have running water or electricity. In villages people walk to places they need to go. Some have bicycles. They may use donkeys to carry heavy loads.

## **Iraq**

Most of Iraq is hot and dry. Iraq has two large rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, which flow through central Iraq toward the Persian Gulf. The rivers supply water for drinking and farming. The western part of Iraq (almost one-half of it) is dry and rocky desert. Few people live in this part. Most of Iraq is flat and low, except in northeastern Iraq where there are rolling hills and mountains. Some parts of Iraq have huge underground oil fields. The capital city is Baghdad. Two thirds of the population live in cities.

### **Do they have four seasons? What is the weather like there?**

Iraq has two seasons-summer and winter. Summer starts in May and ends in October. Summer is hot and dry. Winter is cooler and starts in December and ends in March. It is often rainy and cold during winter, but they don't get snow.

Afghanistan has cold winters that last from December to April. Summer lasts from May to November. It is warm in summer. Cold weather brings rain in the low elevations and snow in the high elevations, so it depends a little on where you are. Overall it is very dry.

Both countries have sandstorms. Strong winds blow sand into clouds that swirl over the land. It is very hard to see during a sandstorm.

### **Do they have air pollution?**

One of the biggest environmental problems Iraq faces is air pollution. It has also become a problem in Afghanistan's major urban areas because people burn wood to stay warm and people use a lot of cars in the cities.

### **What are their homes like?**

In Iraq, homes are made of bricks and mud. They have flat roofs made of metal. Sometimes on hot nights in summer they will sleep outside on their roofs. There are more apartment buildings in cities.

In Afghanistan, most people live in small villages. Most of the homes are made of mud and mud bricks. Often there is a tall mud wall around several homes. There may also be apartment buildings in cities. We learned many of the larger buildings were bombed during the years of war but some new buildings have been built.

### **What languages do they speak?**

Iraq has two official languages: Arabic and Kurdish. About 80% of the people speak Arabic as their first language. Kurdish is most often heard in northeastern Iraq.

Afghanistan has two primary languages: Pashtu and Dari. They are written in Arabic script. Arabic is written and read from right to left.

Some English words that are derived from Arabic, are: algebra, giraffe, coffee, and cotton.



### How would you 'Hello' in their language?

Here are a few common phrases:

<u>English</u>	<u>Iraqi Arabic</u>	<u>Dari (Afghanistan)</u>	<u>Pashto (Afghanistan)</u>
Hello	Marhaba	salam aleikum	as-salem aleikum
What is your name?	Shu ismak?	-	
Please	Minfadlik	lotfan	lutfan
Thank you	Shukran	tashakor	tashakor OR sta na shukria
Goodbye	Ma' assalama	khoda hafez	da khoday-pe-aman
Yes	-	bale	ho
No	-	nay	na

### What is their religion?

Iraq: The major religion is Islam, practiced by 97% of Iraqi's. The other 3% are Judaism, Christianity and other.

Afghanistan: Islam is the religion of 99% of the people. About 84% are Sunni Muslim and about 15% are Shiite Muslim.

### Do they have churches?

Most Iraqis and Aghanis are Muslims. Muslims follow the religion of Islam. They pray in buildings called Mosques. Often the Mosque is the nicest building in the town. Many Muslims pray five times a day.

### What is their money like?

Leader may print off a copy of the currency of Iraq and Afghanistan for the youth to view at: [www.kmmcoinsandcurrency.com](http://www.kmmcoinsandcurrency.com) under "Currency Sets."

**Iraq currency** (money) is called dinars. It takes about 175 dinar to equal one American dollar. There are bills of 50, 100, 250, 500, 1000, 5,000, 10,000 and 250,000 dinar. They do not have coins.

**Afghanistan currency** (money) is called afghani. It takes about 49 afghani to equal one American dollar (but this changes).

We also learned that sometimes people trade for things rather than using money.

### Do they have cars or bikes? How do they get around?

In the large cities, they do have cars. They also have minivans and busses in the cities, and bikes. In the rural villages they usually do not have any cars. In rural areas, donkeys, horses and camels are better transportation than cars. They also use camels because they are useful in the deserts. (In 2002, a good camel in Afghanistan cost about \$500 in US dollars). Mostly people walk!

### Do they have electricity?

In Afghanistan, the bigger cities usually have electricity. As rebuilding continues, this is more common. The majority of Afghans live in small villages so they don't have electricity. They use wood and dung to build fires to heat their homes and cook food. In Iraq, even in the cities, there

is often a lack of electricity due to damage from the wars. They may have it but it might not work all the time.

### **Schools**

We decided to research schools because we thought you might want to know what their education is like and how their schools compare to yours.

#### **Afghanistan:**

In the villages, there are very few schools. Some were wrecked in wars. If there are buildings, they are made of mud and bricks and youth often sit on the dirt floor. They don't have desks like we do, or computers or nice decorations on the walls. In some places, youth sit outside in the dirt and do their lessons with sticks in the dirt or on a slate. Boys and girls almost always are in separate places for school. Under the rule of the strict Taliban in the 1990's girls could not go to school and women could not work. This changed when the Taliban lost power in 2001. People value education. They work very hard if they have the opportunity to go to school. The right to go to school is a great privilege for them. Many schools have been started for girls. Soldiers have helped to bring school supplies from the US for youth and teachers in Afghanistan. Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, education was not a high priority in this country of farmers and shepherds. But today learning is a high priority, and many people in Afghanistan see the value of helping all youth learn to read and write and become educated so they can help their country. A great story about building schools in Three Cups of Tea –Young Reader's edition, by Greg Mortenson. It tells the story of how Greg and others are building schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

#### **Iraq:**

Prior to 1980, Iraq had some of the best-educated citizens in the Middle East. Six years of education was required. The government paid for all educational costs from elementary school through college. Through almost three decades of war and economic sanctions however, the education system was badly weakened. Schools have been destroyed, leaving the country with little money to buy supplies or pay teachers. Now about 50% of youth learn to read and write. Schools are overcrowded. Some schools do not have electricity and water. Some youth drop out or quit to work to help support their families. Some fear for their safety so they do not go to school. Schools for girls are less common than for boys. There is a lack of teachers as well. Education is a big challenge for the new government of Iraq.

### **Kids and Families**

#### **What is a day of a kid's life like in Iraq or Afghanistan?**

Some youth go to school. They like to play games similar to tag and chase each other around. Most youth like to play soccer, and they play it with whatever they can find for a ball (sometimes a tin can). Flying kites is once again enjoyed by youth and adults in Afghanistan. (Flying kites was banned under Taliban rule, as were balloons.) They might listen to music. Youth also help out their family. They may walk to the village well to get water for their family. Sometimes this can be one mile or more to get there! In Afghanistan, the youth might collect cow dung from the fields. They bring it home by carrying it in large baskets on their backs. They dry it and families use the dung for fuel for their cooking fires. Some youth might work with their father at a market stand. In the larger cities, TV is more common.



### **Do they have holidays like we do?**

Ramadan is celebrated by most Muslims. Ramadan is usually in October, and lasts for about a month. (The Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar, so Ramadan starts on a different day each year.) Muslims fast, or go without eating, from dawn to dusk. Fasting helps remind each Muslim that poor, hungry people suffer every day. It is a way to practice their beliefs. After dusk, families gather to eat and visit. Extended families are usually together. At the end of Ramadan, the feast of Eid-al-Fitr takes place. This celebration lasts about three days. Muslims go to the mosque, prepare special meals and visit with friends.

Every spring, Afghans celebrate Now Ruz. This festival marks the first day of spring. It is the first day of the new year in Afghanistan.

**Birthdays:** Afghan families honor a new baby seven days after it is born. On the sixth day, the family names the child. Friends and family members may bring gifts. In general, youth do not celebrate birthdays; many youth do not know the day they were born, only the season in which they were born.

### **What are families like?**

Households often include the father and mother and children, along with grandparents and sometimes cousins or aunts and uncles. In both countries, men lead their families. They are mainly responsible for earning the family income. Mothers are responsible for cooking, cleaning and taking care of the children. In some families, husbands and wives do the farming together. Children do many chores to help the family. Family members are very loyal to each other and do not want to do anything that would dishonor their families. Children are loved by their families.

The people of both countries are known for their friendliness and willingness to help others. Afghans are known for their kindness to strangers. They always will offer tea or food to a guest, even if they are poor.

### **How do people get clean?**

Most people in the villages would bathe in a nearby river. They may also wash using water they've brought from a well.

### **What clothes do they wear?**

It depends a little on where they live. Some clothing is very similar to ours. Most men and boys wear loose fitting, light weight clothes, such as baggy pants and shirts, to stay cool. Men generally wear a hat or head covering too. Some men wear long thin robes. Muslim women and girls generally wear the hijab, a head covering or scarf, which covers their head. Women may wear a burqa, an outer dress that covers their body over their other clothing.

### **Are there stores like grocery stores or toy stores?**

In larger cities there are stores but we discovered they are very different than stores we have in the US. They have small shops or markets where they may buy clothing or food. In rural areas, it is common that women make the fabric and the clothing from sheep's wool or other things. Many families grow their own vegetables or fruit. They grow rice and wheat for bread, and these are the most common thing they eat. They may grow vegetables or buy them at the

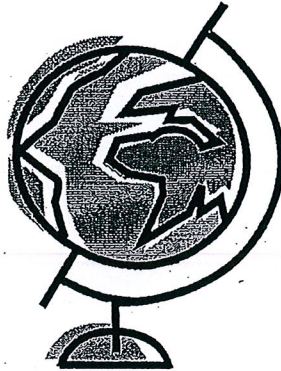
markets. They may eat meat from sheep or goats. Pilau is a dish in Afghanistan, it is made of rice and vegetables or meat. They might have squash, carrots, eggplants, spinach or potatoes. They may drink cow, goat or sheep milk. Cities have a larger variety of fruits and vegetables available to them. They don't have toy stores. Any toys they have are usually homemade or sometimes the children get a gift of a toy from a soldier.

### **What is a soldier's day like?**

The soldiers we wrote to told us this: "The days are long – 12 hours or more a day, 7 days a week. The day starts with PT (exercise) and breakfast, followed by work. We get lunch and dinner before our day is done. We eat foods that are pretty much like what we eat in the US. Each Soldier has a different job so each person's day can include many different things. After our work is done then we get a little bit of down time to take care of any personal needs, such as communicating with people back home. (To communicate, we use phone, email, and letters. We like getting letters from home!) Then it's off to sleep in order to get ready for the next day."

### **Summary:**

We learned a lot about people in these countries. We learned that for most youth, their lives are very different than ours. We have a lot of stores and we have really nice schools. We don't have to worry about mines or a big war in our country. We learned that kids over there like to do many things we like to do—run around outside, be with their family, play with friends. We also learned that soldiers over there help the country in a lot of different ways, and that soldiers also help each other stay safe. We hope our research will help you to know a little more about these countries.



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**Over Here and Over There**