

(U) Introduction

(U) Pashtunwali (“the Way of the Pashtun”) is the pre-Islamic moral code and ideology of the Pashtun tribes of Afghanistan, Pakistan, other South/Central Asian countries, and diaspora around the world. It is often referred to as the Pashtun concept of living or philosophy. Pashtunwali revolves around a set of strict moral norms and mores through which followers live their daily lives. It is not solely a Pashtun belief system, with most ethnic and tribal groups in the region following Pashtunwali with varying degrees of conviction. This document will define in greater detail the broad tenets and practices of Pashtunwali as it pertains to life in Afghanistan and how coalition forces can understand life under such a system.

(U) Islam in Afghanistan

(U) Afghanistan’s official title is the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, signifying that Islam is the dominant religion and way of life in the country. However, to say that Afghanistan and its people conform to the traditional Muslim or Islamic rule of law and life is somewhat of a misnomer. There are many tenets and rules within Islam that Afghans do adhere to and it would be accurate to consider nearly all Afghans to be Muslims, but not in the same sense as we would expect Egyptians, Iraqi’s, or other Arabs to be Muslim. While Arabs adhere to the strict teachings of the Quran as carried out under Sharia law and Fiqh/Hanafi (jurisprudence), Afghans adhere to Islamic law, but also to a higher moral code of Pashtunwali, which has been in existence for much longer than Islam.

(U) For many Afghans, Islam is the religion, but Pashtunwali is the law. Moreover, Afghan Islam is closer to a conglomeration of occupying powers religious influence, the most attractive tenets of those religions, combined into one religion and labeled Islam. In this sense one sees the presence of decidedly non-traditional Islamic practices in the Afghan version such as the belief of Saints and mysticism (more prevalently seen in Catholicism and Western religions than in mainstream Islam). While Islam does entertain beliefs of sainthood, Afghans are more pronounced in those beliefs. In this sense, Afghan Islam more closely resembles Sufism (the more spiritual version of Islam) than it does Sunni, as most claim to be. “Popular belief in Afghanistan has been based on a mixture of superstition, spiritualism, saint worship, mysticism and organized religion. Islam has therefore been mixed with pre-Islamic beliefs and tribal codes. [1]”

(U) Pashtunwali as ‘way of Life,’ a Code, and an Ideology

(U) Pashtunwali is the pre-Islamic Pashtun code by which Pashtun’s manage their daily lives. It is not limited to just Pashtuns as most Afghans adhere to the Pashtunwali code. It consists of several unwritten rules which govern how followers should live. Religion and government can be seen as companions to Pashtunwali. To outsiders the code often seems contradictory or confusing. “Tribal codes and practices seem as distant in time [to westerners] as the American frontier or the ‘wild west,’ and more appropriate to an era dominated by imperial practices and

the building of empires...[2]” The Pashtunwali ideology is often confusing to foreigners as some tenets simply run counter to Western logic.

(U) Within Pashtunwali there exist many rules and codes by which followers should base their daily lives. At present about 18 primary codes in Pashtunwali can be identified. They are: Faith, Good Thoughts/Good Words/Good Deeds, Behavior, Unity, Equality, Freedom & Independence, Proselytizing, Hospitality & Sanctuary, Justice & Forgiveness, Brotherhood & Trust, Honor, Self Respect, Compassion & Cooperation, Family, Pashtun Nationalism, Knowledge, History, Fight Evil. From the codes come a series of primary and secondary concepts, some of which are more critical to foreigner presence than others. Of the primary concepts in Pashtunwali, five are of critical importance to U.S. and NATO forces operating in Afghanistan: *Nang* (honor), *Badal* (revenge/justice), *Melmastia* (hospitality). Each of these concepts is discussed in greater detail below.

(U) *Nang* (Honor)

(U) Honor is one of the core principles in many groups of people worldwide, but in the Pashtunwali system it is the central term and carries special meaning. *Nang* is Pashto for honor. Both individual and family honor are of the utmost importance in the Pashtunwali code. To followers of Pashtunwali honor means respect, prestige and nobility when one is considered honorable. Honor is of such importance that it must be defended at all times and at all costs by followers of Pashtunwali. *Benanga* is Pashto for shameless or undignified. When one is dishonored, under the Pashtunwali ideology they have an obligation to defend their honor or the honor of their family. “To be called *benanga* is the worst possible insult in Pashto and a deadly threat to the social position of the insulted. Killing the insulter is an accepted way of regaining one’s *nang* or social status. [3]” Defending one’s honor brings us to the second core concept of Pashtunwali, revenge.

(U) *Badal* (Revenge/Justice)

(U) Eye for an eye has a literal meaning in Afghanistan, specifically under the Pashtunwali ideology of *badal*, Pashto for revenge and justice. Simple slights or major insults against one’s honor can create blood feuds that last for generations. To regain or maintain one’s honor *badal* is an essential element of social control and deterrence. *Badal* is “the most commonly practiced form of punishment, and the cornerstone of Pukhtunwali (Pashtunwali). [4]” It is difficult to determine exactly what may cause a situation where *badal* is the only option, because the possibilities are subjective to each individual’s tolerance. Some blood feuds last for generations and may never be carried out by the original parties. It is also possible that the target of the *badal* is not the original insulter, but a member of his/her kinship or family. Actions against kinship are also an acceptable resolution under *badal*. In some cases a mediation Jirga (council) will be convened, in which the blood feud will be settled through mediation. It is the duty of all followers of Pashtunwali to seek *badal* when called for.

(U) *Melmastia* (Hospitality & Sanctuary)

(U) An interesting quirk in Pashtunwali is the belief that hospitality is a core principle. Under *melmastia*, Pashto for hospitality, Pashtunwali followers must show hospitality to ALL visitors, regardless of who they are, their ethnicity, their religious background, nationality without the expectation of repayment. They must also provide sanctuary for their enemy, if requested and this has been recorded in many incidents throughout history. It is an honorable venture to be hospitable to all, including ones enemies, in Pashtunwali ideology.

(U) Followers of Pashtunwali consider hospitality to be one of the finest virtues one may have. [5] The idea of providing sanctuary has led many Pashtuns to allow their enemy into their homes and villages. It is possible that seeking sanctuary was one of many tactics employed by al-Qaeda and the Taliban that brought the Pashtun public onto their (Taliban and al-Qaeda) side of the conflict.

(U) Conclusion

(U) The reality of the Pashtunwali code and ideology is far too complex to describe in this point paper. What is described above is a broad, yet descriptive, introduction to the ways of Afghan life under the Pashtunwali code. The code and ideology is largely unwritten, making a formal study even more complicated, yet many have attempted to transcribe the ideology over time. Important to note for military and civilian operators in Pashtunwali dominated areas is that the Pashtunwali way may seem illogical or contradictory to modern Western thought, but to those who live by the code it is how things are done. It is better to learn the ways of Pashtunwali rather than attempt to change locals mindset for fear of finding yourself a violator of the code and thus be targeted for *badal* (this has happened to Canadian military operating in Afghanistan since 2001).

(U) External Coordination

(U) Sources

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2. (U) Strickland, Richard Maj. "The Way of the Pashtun: Pashtunwali," *The Canadian Army Journal*, Vol. 10.3, (Fall 2007), pp.44. Document is unclassified.
3. (U) B. Glatzer (Hg): *Essays on South Asian Society: Culture and Politics II*. (Zentrum Moderner Orient, Arbeitshefte, 9). Berlin: Das Arabische Buch 1998 (S. 83-94).
4. (U) Mahdi, Niloufer Qasim "Pukhtunwali: Ostracism and Honor Among the Pathan Hill Tribes," Elsevier Science Publishing Co., New York, © 1986.
5. (U) <http://www.afghanland.com/culture/pashtunwali.html> Source is unclassified.