



## Cultural Sensitivity: Religious Importance of the Qur'an

**Best Practice: NATO ISAF personnel should always deal carefully with Islam and its founding text, the Holy Qur'an.**

### Discussion:

The vast majority of Afghans, 99%, is Muslim and thus practices Islam. The Qur'an (also spelled Koran) is the central religious text of Islam. Muslims believe the Qur'an is the book of divine guidance and direction that all of mankind should follow. They consider the text – in its original Arabic – to be the literal word of God (Allah), revealed to humanity through the Prophet Muhammad (also spelled Mohammad).

Because Muslims believe that the Qur'an records the literal word of God, they treat all copies of the book with extreme veneration. Every complete copy, or even a partial passage, is considered holy. It is considered culturally insensitive for any non-Muslim to touch a copy of the Qur'an. Even Muslims are supposed to perform ablution, a ritualistic hand washing before holding the Qur'an.

Additionally, verbal disrespect for Islam and/or the Qur'an is considered as inappropriate as physical desecration of the Qur'an. Insulting the Qur'an is an act of blasphemy. Muslims believe they have an inherent duty to stand up against injustices committed against Islam and the Qur'an. Therefore, they take any perceived disrespect to Islam and/or the Qur'an extremely seriously. Insurgents will use this to their advantage by planting desecrated Qur'ans and spreading disinformation about NATO ISAF forces.

### Recommendations: *(Key: D-Doctrine, O-Organization, T-Training, M-Material, L-Leadership, P-Personnel, F-Facilities)*

1. Do NOT handle Qur'ans or other Islamic religious items.
2. Never talk badly about the Qur'an or its contents.
3. If you must search a location or person's belongings, ask them if they have a Qur'an or religious item present. If so, ask them to remove it or put it in a suitable place before conducting the search.
4. Your level of sensitivity must be even greater when conducting canine searches. Having an animal anywhere near a Qur'an or other religious artifact is considered highly disrespectful.
5. If you have any questions about the Qur'an or Islam, ask respectfully.
6. Be informed and prepared to answer questions about alleged desecration of the Qur'an.