

War in Afghanistan (2001–present)

The **War in Afghanistan** began on October 7, 2001,^[1] as the armed forces of the United States of America, the United Kingdom and the Afghan United Front (Northern Alliance) launched Operation Enduring Freedom. The primary driver of the invasion was the September 11 attacks on the United States, with the stated goal of dismantling the Al-Qaeda terrorist organization and ending its use of Afghanistan as a base. The United States also said that it would remove the Taliban regime from power and create a viable democratic state.

The preludes to the war were the assassination of anti-Taliban leader Ahmad Shah Massoud on September 9, 2001, and the September 11 attacks on the United States, in which nearly 3000 civilians lost their lives in New York City, Arlington Va. and Pennsylvania. The United States identified members of al-Qaeda, an organization based in, operating out of and allied with the Taliban's Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, as the perpetrators of the attacks.

In the first phase of Operation Enduring Freedom, ground forces of the Afghan United Front working with U.S. and British Special Forces and with massive U.S. air support, ousted the Taliban regime from power in Kabul and most of Afghanistan in a matter of weeks. Most of the senior Taliban leadership fled to neighboring Pakistan. The democratic Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was established and an interim government under Hamid Karzai was created which was also democratically elected by the Afghan people in the 2004 general elections. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was established by the UN Security Council at the end of December 2001 to secure Kabul and the surrounding areas. NATO assumed control of ISAF in 2003. ISAF includes troops from 42 countries, with NATO members providing the core of the force.^[2]

The aim of the invasion was to find Osama bin Laden and other high-ranking Al-Qaeda members to be put on trial, to destroy the organization of Al-Qaeda, and to remove the Taliban regime which supported and gave safe harbor to it. The George W. Bush administration stated that, as policy, it would not distinguish between terrorist organizations and nations or governments that harbored them.

The Afghan nation was able to build democratic structures and to create some progress in key areas such as health, economy, education, transport, agriculture and construction. NATO is rebuilding and training the nation's military as well its police force. Over five million Afghan expatriates returned with new skills and capital.

In 2003, Taliban forces including the Haqqani network and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-i Islami started an insurgency campaign against the democratic Islamic Republic and the presence of ISAF-troops in Afghanistan.^[3] ^[4] Their headquarters is in or near Quetta, Pakistan.^[5] Since 2006, Afghanistan has experienced a dramatic increase in Taliban-led insurgent activity. In their campaign the Taliban also target the civilian population of Afghanistan in terrorist attacks. According to a report by the United Nations, the Taliban were responsible for 76% of civilian casualties in Afghanistan in 2009.^[6] The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIGRC) called the Taliban's terrorism against the Afghan civilian population a war crime.^[7] Religious leaders condemned Taliban terrorist attacks and said these kinds of attacks are against Islamic ethics.^[7]

On December 1, 2009, U.S. President Barack Obama announced that he would deploy an additional 30,000 soldiers over a period of six months.^[8] He also set a withdrawal date for the year 2014. The New York Magazine writes that Gen. Stanley McChrystal's leaking of the need for additional troops boxed Obama into a corner about boosting troop levels in Afghanistan, which the magazine refers to as the "McChrystal risk" (leaking of information to force presidential action).^[9]

On January 26, 2010, at the International Conference on Afghanistan in London, which brought together some 70 countries and organizations,^[10] Afghan President Hamid Karzai told world leaders that he intended to reach out to the top echelons of the Taliban (including Mullah Omar, Siraj Haqqani and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar) with a peace initiative.^[11] He called on the group's leadership to take part in a "loya jirga"—or large assembly of elders—to initiate peace talks.^[12] According to the Wall Street Journal, these steps have been reciprocated so far with an intensification of bombings, assassinations and ambushes.^[13] Many Afghan groups (including the former

intelligence chief Amrullah Saleh and opposition leader Dr. Abdullah Abdullah) believe that Karzai's plan aims to appease the insurgents' senior leadership at the cost of the democratic constitution, the democratic process and progress in the field of human rights especially women's rights.^[14]

The cost of the war reportedly was a major factor as U.S. officials considered drawing down troops in 2011.^[15] A March 2011 Congressional Research Service report notes the following about Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) Afghanistan: 1) following the Afghanistan surge announcement in 2009, Defense Department spending on Afghanistan has increased 50%, going from \$4.4 billion to \$6.7 billion a month. During that time, troop strength has gone from 44,000 to 84,000, and it is expected to be at 102,000 for fiscal year 2011; 2) The total operational cost for Afghanistan from the beginning of the conflict in 2001 through 2006 only slightly exceeds the amount spent in 2010 alone — \$93.8 billion. The projected total cost relating to Afghanistan in fiscal year 2011 is expected to be \$468 billion.^[16]

On June 22, 2011, President Obama announced that 10,000 U.S. troops would be withdrawn by the end of 2011. An additional 23,000 troops will leave the country by the summer of 2012.^[17]

In June 2010, the war in Afghanistan became the United States' longest war, if the length of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War is measured from August 7, 1964, to March 1973.^[18]

Historic background (1992–2001)

Foreign interference and civil war

After the fall of the Najibullah-regime in 1992, the Afghan political parties agreed on a peace and power-sharing agreement (the Peshawar Accords). The Peshawar Accords created the Islamic State of Afghanistan and appointed an interim government for a transitional period. According to Human Rights Watch:

"The sovereignty of Afghanistan was vested formally in the Islamic State of Afghanistan, an entity created in April 1992, after the fall of the Soviet-backed Najibullah government. ... With the exception of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami, all of the parties ... were ostensibly unified under this government in April 1992. ... Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami, for its part, refused to recognize the government for most of the period discussed in this report and launched attacks against government forces and Kabul generally. ... Shells and rockets fell everywhere.^[19]"

—Human Rights Watch, 2005

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar received operational, financial and military support from Pakistan.^[20] Afghanistan expert Amin Saikal concludes in *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival*:

"Pakistan was keen to gear up for a breakthrough in Central Asia. ... Islamabad could not possibly expect the new Islamic government leaders ... to subordinate their own nationalist objectives in order to help Pakistan realize its regional ambitions. ... Had it not been for the ISI's logistic support and supply of a large number of rockets, Hekmatyar's forces would not have been able to target and destroy half of Kabul.^[21]"

—Amin Saikal in "Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival", 2004

In addition, Saudi Arabia and Iran - as competitors for regional hegemony - supported Afghan militias hostile towards each other.^[21] According to Human Rights Watch, Iran was assisting the Shia Hazara Hezb-i Wahdat forces of Abdul Ali Mazari, as Iran was attempting to maximize Wahdat's military power and influence.^{[19] [21] [22]} Saudi Arabia supported the Wahhabite Abdul Rasul Sayyaf and his Ittihad-i Islami faction.^{[19] [21]} Conflict between the two militias soon escalated into a full-scale war. A publication by the George Washington University describes:

"[O]utside forces saw instability in Afghanistan as an opportunity to press their own security and political agendas.^[23]"

—"The Taliban File" by the George Washington University, 2003

Due to the sudden initiation of the war, working government departments, police units or a system of justice and accountability for the newly created Islamic State of Afghanistan did not have time to form. The United States and European countries after the communist defeat largely lost interest in Afghanistan and disengaged. U.S. congressman Dana Rohrabacher told U.S. Congress in 2004:

"[I]t was a policy decision to walk away... even after psychopathic killers like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar rose up as the Soviets departed.... The Saudis and the Pakistanis supported the arming of these violent extremists. Predictably, what followed was a period of havoc and bloodshed."^[24] "

—U.S. Congressman Dana Rohrabacher, 2004

Atrocities were committed by individuals of the different armed factions while Kabul descended into lawlessness and chaos as described in reports by Human Rights Watch and the Afghanistan Justice Project.^[19] ^[25] Because of the chaos, some leaders increasingly had only nominal control over their (sub-)commanders.^[26] For civilians there was little security from murder, rape and extortion.^[26] Approximately 25,000 people died during the most intense period of bombardment by Hekmatyar's Hezb-i Islami and the Junbish-i Milli forces of Abdul Rashid Dostum, who had created an alliance with Hekmatyar in 1994.^[25] Half a million people fled Afghanistan.^[26]

Rare ceasefires, usually negotiated by representatives of Ahmad Shah Massoud, Sibghatullah Mojaddedi or Burhanuddin Rabbani [the interim government], or officials from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), commonly collapsed within days."^[19] "

—Human Rights Watch, 2005

Southern Afghanistan was under the control of neither foreign-backed militias nor the government in Kabul, but was ruled by local leaders such as Gul Agha Sherzai and their militias. In 1994, the Taliban (a movement originating from Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-run religious schools for Afghan refugees in Pakistan) also developed in Afghanistan as a politico-religious force, reportedly in opposition to the tyranny of the local governor.^[27] Mullah Omar started his movement with fewer than 50 armed madrassah students in his hometown of Kandahar.^[27] When the Taliban took control of the city in 1994, they forced the surrender of dozens of local Pashtun leaders who had presided over a situation of complete lawlessness and atrocities.^[26] In 1994, the Taliban took power in several provinces in southern and central Afghanistan.

In late 1994, most of the militia factions (Hezb-i Islami, Junbish-i Milli and Hezb-i Wahdat) which had been fighting in the battle for control of Kabul were defeated militarily by forces of the Islamic State's Secretary of Defense Ahmad Shah Massoud. Bombardment of the capital came to a halt.^[25] ^[28] ^[29] Massoud tried to initiate a nationwide political process with the goal of national consolidation and democratic elections, also inviting the Taliban to join the process.^[30] The Taliban declined.^[30]

Taliban Emirate and Pakistan vs United Front

The Taliban started shelling Kabul in early 1995 but were defeated by forces of the Islamic State government under Ahmad Shah Massoud.^[28] (see video ^[31]) Amnesty International, referring to the Taliban offensive, wrote in a 1995 report:

"This is the first time in several months that Kabul civilians have become the targets of rocket attacks and shelling aimed at residential areas in the city."^[28]

—Amnesty International, 1995

The Taliban's early victories in 1994 were followed by a series of defeats that resulted in heavy losses.^[26] Pakistan provided strong support to the Taliban.^[21] ^[32] Many analysts like Amin Saikal describe the Taliban as developing into a proxy force for Pakistan's regional interests which the Taliban decline.^[21] On September 26,

1996, as the Taliban with military support by Pakistan and financial support by Saudi Arabia prepared for another major offensive, Massoud ordered a full retreat from Kabul.^[33] The Taliban seized Kabul on September 27, 1996, and established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. They imposed on the parts of Afghanistan under their control their political and judicial interpretation of Islam issuing edicts forbidding women to work outside the home, attend school, or to leave their homes unless accompanied by a male relative.^[34] The Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) say:

"To PHR's knowledge, no other regime in the world has methodically and violently forced half of its population into virtual house arrest, prohibiting them on pain of physical punishment."^[34]

—Physicians for Human Rights, 1998

After the fall of Kabul to the Taliban on September 27, 1996,^[35] Ahmad Shah Massoud and Abdul Rashid Dostum, two former archenemies, created the United Front (Northern Alliance) against the Taliban that were preparing offensives against the remaining areas under the control of Massoud and those under the control of Dostum. see video ^[36] The United Front included beside the dominantly Tajik forces of Massoud and the Uzbek forces of Dostum, Hazara factions and Pashtun forces under the leadership of commanders such as Abdul Haq, Haji Abdul Qadir, Qari Baba or diplomat Abdul Rahim Ghafoorzai.

According to Human Rights Watch, in late May 1997 some 3,000 captive Taliban soldiers were summarily executed in and around Mazar-i-Sharif by Dostum's Junbish forces and members of the Shia Hazara Hezb-i Wahdat faction.^[26] ^[37] The Taliban defeated Dostum's Junbish forces militarily by seizing Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998. Dostum went into exile.



Ahmad Shah Massoud (right) with Pashtun anti-Taliban leader and later Vice-President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Haji Abdul Qadir



Former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf sent more troops against the United Front of Ahmad Shah Massoud than the Afghan Taliban.

According to a 55-page report by the United Nations, the Taliban, while trying to consolidate control over northern and western Afghanistan, committed systematic massacres against civilians.^{[38] [39]} U.N. officials stated that there had been "15 massacres" between 1996 and 2001.^{[38] [39]} They also said, that "[t]hese have been highly systematic and they all lead back to the [Taliban] Ministry of Defense or to Mullah Omar himself."^{[38] [39]} The Taliban especially targeted people of Shia religious or Hazara ethnic background.^{[38] [39]} Upon taking Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998, about 4,000 civilians were executed by the Taliban and many more reported tortured.^{[40] [41]} The documents also reveal the role of Arab and Pakistani support troops in these killings.^{[38] [39]}

Bin Laden's so-called 055 Brigade was responsible for mass-killings of Afghan civilians.^[42] The report by the United Nations quotes eyewitnesses in many villages describing Arab fighters carrying long knives used for slitting throats and skinning people.^{[38] [39]}

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf - then as Chief of Army Staff - was responsible for sending thousands of Pakistanis to fight alongside the Taliban and Bin Laden against the forces of Massoud.^{[30] [32] [43] [44]} In total there were believed to be 28,000 Pakistani nationals fighting inside Afghanistan.^[30] About 20,000 were regular Pakistani soldiers either from the Frontier Corps or army and an estimated 8,000 were militants recruited in madrassas filling regular Taliban ranks.^[42] The estimated 25,000 Taliban regular force thus comprised more than 8,000 Pakistani nationals.^[42] A 1998 document by the U.S. State Department confirms that "20-40 percent of [regular] Taliban soldiers are Pakistani."^[32] The document further states that the parents of those Pakistani nationals "know nothing regarding their child's military involvement with the Taliban until their bodies are brought back to Pakistan."^[32] Further 3,000 fighters of the regular Taliban army were Arab and Central Asian militants.^[42] From 1996 to 2001 the Al-Qaeda of Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri became a state within the Taliban state.^[45] Bin Laden sent Arab recruits to join the fight against the United Front.^{[45] [46]} Of roughly 45,000 Pakistani, Taliban and Al Qaeda soldiers fighting against the forces of Massoud only 14,000 were Afghan.^{[30] [42]}

Under the Taliban, Al-Qaeda was able to use Afghanistan as a place to train and indoctrinate fighters, import weapons, coordinate with other jihadists, and plot terrorist actions.^[47] While Al-Qaeda maintained its own establishments in Afghanistan, it also supported training camps belonging to other organizations. Between 10,000 and 20,000 people passed through these facilities before 9/11, most of whom were sent to fight for the Taliban against the United Front but a smaller number were inducted into al-Qaeda.^[48]

After the August 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings were linked to bin Laden, President Bill Clinton ordered missile strikes on militant training camps in Afghanistan. U.S. officials pressed the Taliban to surrender bin Laden, and the international community imposed sanctions on the Taliban in 1999, calling for bin Laden to be surrendered. The Taliban repeatedly rebuffed the demands, however.

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Special Activities Division paramilitary teams were active in Afghanistan in the 1990s in clandestine operations to locate and kill or capture Osama Bin Laden. These teams planned several operations but did not receive the order to execute from President Bill Clinton.^[49] These efforts did however build many of the relationships that would prove essential in the 2001 U.S. Invasion of Afghanistan.^[49]

Ahmad Shah Massoud meanwhile remained the only leader of the United Front in Afghanistan. In the areas under his control Massoud set up democratic institutions and signed the Women's Rights Declaration.^[50] Human Rights Watch cites no human rights crimes for the forces under direct control of Massoud for the period from October 1996

until the assassination of Massoud in September 2001.^[37] As a consequence many civilians fled to the area of Ahmad Shah Massoud.^[43] ^[51] In total, estimates range up to one million people fleeing the Taliban.^[52] National Geographic concluded in its documentary *"Inside the Taliban"*:

"The only thing standing in the way of future Taliban massacres is Ahmad Shah Massoud."^[43]

—National Geographic, Inside the Taliban

In early 2001 Massoud addressed the European Parliament in Brussels asking the international community to provide humanitarian help to the people of Afghanistan.(see video ^[53])^[52] He stated that the Taliban and Al-Qaeda had introduced "a very wrong perception of Islam" and that without the support of Pakistan and Bin Laden the Taliban would not be able to sustain their military campaign for up to a year.^[52] On this visit to Europe he also warned that his intelligence had gathered information about a large-scale attack on U.S. soil being imminent.^[54]

Change in U.S. policy towards Afghanistan

During the Clinton administration the U.S. had no clear policy towards Afghanistan although it slightly favoured Pakistan's approach. In 1997, U.S. State Department's Robin Raphel told anti-Taliban leader Ahmad Shah Massoud to surrender to the Taliban. Massoud answered that as long as he controlled an area the size of his hat he would continue to defend it from the Taliban.^[30] Robin Raphel eventually became a lobbyist and adviser at Cassidy & Associates.^[55] The firm had a \$1.2 million contract with the Musharraf military regime of Pakistan. At Cassidy & Associates she lobbied and advised Congress and the State Department for Pakistan on issues such as Afghan policy, Pakistan's relations with India, judicial independence and U.S. perceptions and congressional views of the Pakistan government.^[55] In late 2009 Raphel was (again) appointed to the Af-Pak region as deputy to Richard Holbrooke, the late US. Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, by the Obama administration. Raphel will be the main person overlooking the \$1.5 billion U.S. aid package "for non-military purpose" to Pakistan.^[55]

At one point in the war, in 1997, the Taliban were vulnerable and the road to the capital, Kabul, was wide open. Two top foreign policy officials in the Clinton administration flew to northern Afghanistan to convince - without success - the United Front not to take advantage of a opportunity to make crucial gains against the Taliban.^[24] Before the United Front could strike, Assistant Secretary of State Rick Indefurth and American U.N. Ambassador Bill Richardson flew to northern Afghanistan and tried to convince the leadership of the United Front that this was not the time for an offensive.^[24] Instead, they insisted this was the time for a cease-fire and an arms embargo. At the same time Pakistanis began a "Berlin-like airlift to resupply and re-equip the Taliban", financed with Saudi money.^[24]

On another note, an analyst with the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Julie Sirrs, had visited Afghanistan, but only in those areas controlled by the Taliban. After returning, she had realized that this was a one-dimensional view of Afghanistan and there were holes in the DOD's understanding of the situation. In 1998, she requested to officially go back to northern Afghanistan to the areas controlled by Commander Massoud.^[24] Subsequently she was denied the permission to go there.^[24] So she went to the Panjshir Valley on her vacation and paid the journey on herself (in 1998). U.S. congressman Dana Rohrabacher describes:

"When she got to the Panjshir Valley, she found... something vital to America's security was happening, something she was not really able to discover when she visited the Taliban-controlled areas before. Commander Massoud told her that he was facing a new enemy in Afghanistan [meaning foreign esp. Arab forces].... Apparently, bin Laden, who was making Afghanistan into



An analyst of the Defense Intelligence Agency was fired by her leading officer for talking to Massoud.

his base of operations, was importing Islamic radicals from all over the world, training them as terrorists and killers and then sending them up against Massoud's troops.... She only had a short time, but she collected enough information for a preliminary report, and she headed home. The minute she got back, she found herself under severe restrictions at the Defense Intelligence Agency and restricted to whom she could brief or show any of her reports.... The commanding officer of the DIA labeled her as insubordinate, he fired her; and when she fought her dismissal, he set out to destroy her. Amidst the fight to save her job, the DIA commanding officer told her what really upset him most was her contact with Massoud, who, according to the DIA general, was one of the bad guys. This general was sending his people to be briefed by the Taliban, but any contact with Massoud was a cause for dismissal.... It was a mind set of the man who headed the Defense Intelligence Agency. Something is terribly wrong with this picture."^[24]

—U.S. Congressman Dana Rohrabacher, 2004

In the meantime, the only collaboration between Massoud and another U.S. intelligence service, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), consisted of an effort to trace Osama bin Laden following the 1998 embassy bombings.^[56] The U.S. and the European Union provided no support to Massoud for the fight against the Taliban.

A change of policy regarding support to Massoud, lobbied for by CIA officers who had visited Massoud, was underway during 2001. According to Steve Coll's book "Ghost Wars" (who won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction):^[57]

"The CIA officers admired Massoud greatly. They saw him as a Che Guevara figure, a great actor on history's stage. Massoud was a poet, a military genius, a religious man, and a leader of enormous courage who defied death and accepted its inevitability, they thought.... In his house there were thousands of books: Persian poetry, histories of the Afghan war in multiple languages, biographies of other military and guerilla leaders. In their meetings Massoud wove sophisticated, measured references to Afghan history and global politics into his arguments. He was quiet, forceful, reserved, and full of dignity, but also light in spirit. The CIA team had gone into the Panshjr as unabashed admirers of Massoud. Now their convictions deepened."^[57]

—Steve Coll in "Ghost Wars", 2004

U.S. Congressman Dana Rohrabacher also recalls:

"[B]etween Bush's inauguration and 9/11, I met with the new national security staff on 3 occasions, including one meeting with Condoleezza Rice to discuss Afghanistan. There were, in fact, signs noted in an overview story in The Washington Post about a month ago that some steps were being made to break away from the previous administration's Afghan policy."^[24]

—U.S. Congressman Dana Rohrabacher, 2004

CIA lawyers, working with officers in the Near East Division and Counterterrorist Center, began to draft a formal, legal presidential finding for Bush's signature authorizing a new covert action program in Afghanistan, the first in a decade that sought to influence the course of the Afghan war in favour of Massoud.^[57] Richard A. Clarke, chair of the Counter-Terrorism Security Group under the Clinton administration, and later an official in the Bush administration, allegedly presented a plan to incoming Bush administration official Condoleezza Rice in January 2001.

A change in policy was finalized in August 2001.^[57] In late August 2001, the Bush administration, to pressure the Taliban to hand over leading Al-Qaeda operatives, agreed on a plan to start giving support to the anti-Taliban forces



CIA officers on the ground lobbied for a change in U.S. policy towards Afghanistan.

of Ahmad Shah Massoud who sought to create a democratic form of government in Afghanistan. Massoud until then had not received any meaningful support from Western countries. In a meeting by the Bush administration's top national security officials it was agreed that the Taliban in negotiations would be presented with a final ultimatum to hand over Osama bin Laden and other leading Al-Qaeda operatives. If the Taliban refused, covert military aid would be channeled by the U.S. to anti-Taliban groups. If both those options failed, "the deputies agreed that the United States would seek to overthrow the Taliban regime through more direct action."^[58]

September 9, 2001



On his visit to Europe in March 2001 Ahmad Shah Massoud had warned that his intelligence had gathered information about a large-scale attack on U.S. soil being imminent.

“Massoud’s intelligence staff is aware that the attack against the U.S. will be on a scale larger than the 1998 embassy bombings, which killed over two hundred people and injured thousands.”^[59]

On September 9, 2001, Massoud, then aged 48, was the target of a suicide attack by two Arabs posing as journalists detonating a bomb hidden in their videocamera during an interview in Khoja Bahauddin, in the Takhar Province of Afghanistan.^{[60] [61]} Massoud died in a helicopter taking him to a hospital. The funeral, though in a rather rural area, was attended by hundreds of thousands of mourning Afghans. (see video ^[62])

Massoud had survived countless assassination attempts over a period of 26 years. The assassination of Massoud is considered to have a strong connection to the September 11, 2001 attacks on U.S. soil, which killed nearly 3,000 people, and which appeared to be the terrorist attack that Massoud had warned against in his speech to the European Parliament several months earlier. International experts and members of the United Front such as Amrullah Saleh feared that without Massoud the anti-Taliban resistance would be overrun by the Taliban.

John P. O'Neill was a counter-terrorism expert and the Assistant Director of the FBI until late 2001. He retired from the FBI and was offered the position of director of security at the World Trade Center (WTC). He took the job at the WTC two weeks before 9/11. On September 10, 2001, O'Neill told two of his friends:

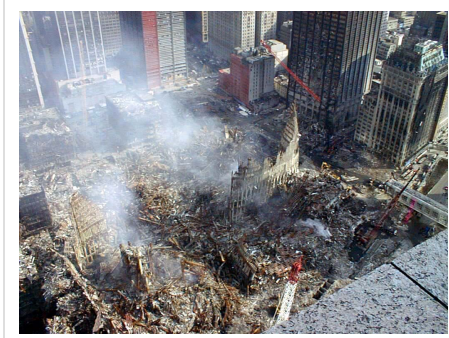
"We're due. And we're due for something big.... Some things have happened in Afghanistan [referring to the assassination of Massoud]. I don't like the way things are lining up in Afghanistan. ... I sense a shift, and I think things are going to happen ... soon."^[63]

—John O'Neill, September 10, 2001

O'Neill died on September 11, 2001, when the South Tower collapsed.^[63]

September 11, 2001

On September 11, 2001, in the early morning, a series of coordinated attacks took place on United States soil. Four commercial passenger jet airliners were hijacked.^[64] ^[65] The hijackers intentionally crashed two of the airliners into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, killing everyone on board and many others working in the buildings. Both buildings collapsed within two hours, destroying nearby buildings and damaging others. The hijackers crashed a third airliner into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C. The fourth plane crashed into a field near Shanksville in rural Pennsylvania after some of its passengers and flight crew attempted to retake control of the plane, which the hijackers had redirected toward Washington, D.C to target the White House, or the Capitol. There were no survivors from any of the flights.



Ground Zero in New York following the attacks of September 11, 2001

Nearly 3,000 people and the 19 hijackers died in the attacks.^[66] According to the New York State Health Department, 836 responders, including firefighters and police personnel, have died as of June 2009.^[66]

The United States identified members of Al-Qaeda as the perpetrators of the attacks.

Legal basis for war

The United Nations Charter, to which all the Coalition countries are signatories, provides that all UN member states must settle their international disputes peacefully and no member nation can use military force except in self-defense. The United States Constitution states that international treaties, such as the United Nations Charter, that are ratified by the U.S. are part of the law of the land in the U.S., though subject to effective repeal by any subsequent act of Congress (i.e., the "leges posteriores priores contrarias abrogant" or "last in time" canon of statutory interpretation)^[67] The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) did not authorize the U.S.-led military campaign in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom).

Defenders of the legitimacy of the U.S.-led invasion argue that U.N. Security Council authorization was not required since the invasion was an act of collective self-defense provided for under Article 51 of the UN Charter, and therefore was not a war of aggression.^[67] ^[68] Critics maintain that the bombing and invasion of Afghanistan were not legitimate self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter because the 9/11 attacks were not "armed attacks" by another state, but rather were perpetrated by groups of individuals or non-state actors, and that these attackers had no proven connection to Afghanistan. Further, it is their opinion that even if a state had perpetrated the 9/11 attacks, no bombing campaign would constitute self-defense; the necessity for self-defense must be "instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means, and no moment for deliberation."^[69]

President George W. Bush was authorized by Congress on September 14, 2001, by legislation titled Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists which was passed and signed on September 18, 2001 by both President Bush and congress. This legislation authorized the use of United States Armed Forces against those responsible for the attacks on September 11, 2001. The authorization granted the President the authority to use all "necessary and appropriate force" against those whom he determined "planned, authorized, committed or aided" the September 11th attacks, or who harbored said persons or groups. The Bush administration, for its part, did not seek a declaration of war by the U.S. Senate, and labeled Taliban troops as supporters of terrorists rather than soldiers, denying them the protections of the Geneva Convention and due process of law. This position was successfully challenged in the U.S. Supreme Court^[70] and questioned even by military lawyers responsible for prosecuting affected prisoners.^[71] On December 20, 2001, more than two months after the U.S.-led attack began, the UNSC authorized the creation of an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to take all measures necessary to fulfill its mandate of assisting the

Afghan Interim Authority in maintaining security.^[72] Command of the ISAF passed to NATO on August 11, 2003.^[73]

2001: Initial attack

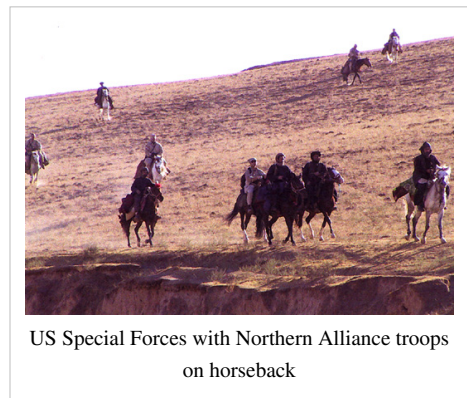
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The Taliban offered to try Bin Laden in an Afghan court, or have him extradited to a third country, so long as the United States provided evidence of his guilt, but the U.S. refused, stating it would not hand over evidence to the Taliban [74]. So on October 7, 2001, the U.S. government launched military operations in Afghanistan. Teams from the CIA's Special Activities Division (SAD) were the first U.S. forces to enter Afghanistan and begin combat operations. They were soon joined by U.S. Army Special Forces from the 5th Special Forces Group and other units from USSOCOM.^{[75] [76] [77]}

On October 7, 2001, airstrikes were reported in the capital, Kabul (where electricity supplies were severed), at the airport, at Kandahar (home of the Taliban's Supreme Leader Mullah Omar), and in the city of Jalalabad. CNN released exclusive footage of Kabul being bombed to all the American broadcasters at approximately 5:08 p.m. October 7, 2001.^[78]

At 17:00 UTC, President Bush confirmed the strikes on national television and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Tony Blair also addressed the UK. Bush stated that Taliban military sites and terrorist training grounds would be targeted. In addition, food, medicine, and supplies would be dropped to "the starving and suffering men, women and children of Afghanistan".^[79]

A prerecorded videotape of Osama bin Laden had been released before the attacks in which he condemned any attacks against Afghanistan. Al Jazeera, the Arabic satellite news channel, reported that these tapes were received shortly before the attack.



US Special Forces with Northern Alliance troops on horseback

British and American special forces worked jointly to liberate Herat in November 2001. These forces worked with Afghan opposition groups on the ground, in particular the Northern Alliance. The United Kingdom, Canada and Australia also deployed forces and several other countries provided basing, access and overflight permission.

The US was able to track Al-Qaeda's number three at the time Mohammed Atef who was one of the most wanted, when Atef was killed, along with his guard Abu Ali al-Yafi'i and six others,^{[80] [81]} in a U.S. air-strike on his home near Kabul during the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan at some time between November 14–16, 2001. This was one of America's first and largest victories during the early stages of the war.

Air campaigns

Bombers operating at high altitudes well out of range of anti-aircraft guns dropped bombs at Afghan training camps and Taliban air defenses. U.S. aircraft, including Apache helicopter gunships from the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, operated with impunity throughout the campaign with no losses due to Taliban air defenses.

The strikes initially focused on the area in and around the cities of Kabul, Jalalabad, and Kandahar. Within a few days, most Taliban training sites were severely damaged and the Taliban's air defenses were destroyed. The campaign then focused on command, control, and communication targets which weakened the ability of the Taliban forces to communicate. However, the line facing the Afghan Northern Alliance held, and no tangible battlefield successes had yet occurred on that front. Two weeks into the campaign, the Northern Alliance demanded the air campaign focus more on the front lines.

The next stage of the campaign began with carrier based F/A-18 Hornet fighter-bombers hitting Taliban vehicles in pinpoint strikes, while other U.S. planes began cluster bombing Taliban defenses. For the first time in years, Northern Alliance commanders finally began to see the substantive results that they had long hoped for on the front lines.

At the beginning of November, the Taliban front lines were bombed with daisy cutter bombs, and by AC-130 gunships. The Taliban fighters had no previous experience with American firepower, and often even stood on top of bare ridgelines where Special Forces could easily spot them and call in close air support. By November 2, Taliban frontal positions were devastated, and a Northern Alliance march on Kabul seemed possible for the first time.

Foreign fighters from al-Qaeda took over security in the Afghan cities, demonstrating the instability of the Taliban regime. Meanwhile, the Northern Alliance and their Central Intelligence Agency/Special Forces advisors planned the next stage of their offensive. Northern Alliance troops would seize Mazari Sharif, thereby cutting off Taliban supply lines and enabling the flow of equipment from the countries to the north, followed by an attack on Kabul itself.

Areas most targeted

During the early months of the war the U.S. military had a limited presence on the ground. The plan was that Special Forces, and intelligence officers with a military background, would serve as liaisons with Afghan militias opposed to the Taliban, would advance after the cohesiveness of the Taliban forces was disrupted by American air power.^{[82] [83] [84]}

The Tora Bora Mountains lie roughly east of Afghanistan's capital Kabul, which is itself close to the border with Pakistan. American intelligence analysts believed that the Taliban and al Qaeda had dug in behind fortified networks of well-supplied caves and underground bunkers. The area was subjected to a heavy continuous bombardment by B-52 bombers.^{[82] [83] [84] [85]}

The U.S. forces and the Northern Alliance also began to diverge in their objectives. While the U.S. was continuing the search for Osama bin Laden, the Northern Alliance was pressuring for more support in their efforts to finish off the Taliban and control the country.

Battle of Mazar-i Sharif

Further information: Fall of Mazar-i-Sharif

The battle for Mazari Sharif was considered important, not only because it is the home of the Shrine of Hazrat Ali or "Blue Mosque", a sacred Muslim site, but also because it is the location of a significant transportation hub with two main airports and a major supply route leading into Uzbekistan.^[86] It would also enable humanitarian aid to alleviate Afghanistan's looming food crisis, which had threatened more than six million people with starvation. Many of those in most urgent need lived in rural areas to the south and west of Mazar-i-Sharif.^{[86] [87]}

On November 9, 2001, Northern Alliance forces, under the command of generals Abdul Rashid Dostum and Ustad Atta Mohammed Noor, swept across the Pul-i-Imam Bukhri bridge, meeting some resistance,^{[88] [89]} and seized the city's main military base and airport.

U.S. Special Operations Forces (namely Special Forces Operational Detachment A-595, CIA paramilitary officers and Air Force Combat Control Teams)^{[90] [91] [92]} on horseback and using Close Air Support platforms, took part in



Example of the U.S. propaganda pamphlets dropped over Mazari Sharif.



US Army Special Forces on November 10, upon arriving into the city with Northern Alliance fighters

the push into the city of Mazari Sharif in Balkh Province by the Northern Alliance. After a bloody 90-minute battle, Taliban forces, who had held the city since 1998, withdrew from the city, triggering jubilant celebrations among the townspeople whose ethnic and political affinities are with the Northern Alliance.^{[87] [93]}

The Taliban had spent three years fighting the Northern Alliance for Mazar-i-Sharif, precisely because its capture would confirm them as masters of all Afghanistan.^[93] The fall of the city was a "body blow"^[93] to the Taliban and ultimately proved to be a "major shock",^[91] since the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) had originally believed that the city would remain in Taliban hands well into the following year,^[94] and any potential battle would be "a very slow advance".^[95]

Following rumors that Mullah Dadullah was headed to recapture the city with as many as 8,000 Taliban fighters, a thousand American 10th Mountain Soldiers were airlifted into the city, which provided the first solid foothold from which Kabul and Kandahar could be reached.^{[96] [97]} While prior military flights had to be launched from Uzbekistan or Aircraft carriers in the Arabian Sea, now the Americans held their own airport in the country which allowed them to fly more frequent sorties for resupply missions and humanitarian aid. These missions allowed massive shipments of humanitarian aid to be immediately shipped to hundreds of thousands of Afghans facing starvation on the northern plain.^{[93] [98]}

It was revealed that the airfield had been boobytrapped by the Taliban as they left, with explosives planted around the property, as well as being badly damaged by their own Air Interdiction missions to prevent it being used by the enemy.^[88] The destroyed runways on the airfield were patched by the U.S. Air Force Red Horse personnel and local Afghans hired to fill bomb craters with asphalt and tar by hand, and the first cargo plane was able to land ten days after the battle.^[88] The airbase wasn't declared operational until December 11.^[99]

The American-backed forces now controlling the city began immediately broadcasting from *Radio Mazar-i-Sharif*, the former Taliban *Voice of Sharia* channel on 1584 kHz,^[100] including an address from former President Burhanuddin Rabbani.^[101] Music was also broadcast over Kabul radio for the first time in five years, and the songs were introduced by a female announcer—another major breakthrough for a city where women had been banned from education, work, and many other civil liberties since 1996.^[102]

Fall of Kabul

On the night of November 12, Taliban forces fled from the city of Kabul, leaving under the cover of darkness. By the time Northern Alliance forces arrived in the afternoon of November 13, only bomb craters, burned foliage, and the burnt-out shells of Taliban gun emplacements and positions were there to greet them. A group of about twenty hardline fighters hiding in the city's park were the only remaining defenders. This Taliban group was killed in a 15-minute gun battle, being heavily outnumbered and having had little more than a telescope to shield them. After these forces were neutralized Kabul was in the hands of the U.S./NATO forces and the Northern Alliance.^[103]

The fall of Kabul marked the beginning of a collapse of Taliban positions across the map. Within 24 hours, all the Afghan provinces along the Iranian border, including the key city of Herat, had fallen. Local Pashtun commanders and warlords had taken over throughout northeastern Afghanistan, including the key city of Jalalabad. Taliban holdouts in the north, mainly Pakistani volunteers, fell back to the northern city of Kunduz to make a stand. By November 16, the Taliban's last stronghold in northern Afghanistan was besieged by the Northern Alliance. Nearly 10,000 Taliban fighters, led by foreign fighters, refused to surrender and continued to put up resistance. By then, the Taliban had been forced back to their heartland in southeastern Afghanistan around Kandahar.^[104]

By November 13, al-Qaeda and Taliban forces, with the possible inclusion of Osama bin Laden, had regrouped and were concentrating their forces in the Tora Bora cave complex, on the Pakistan border 50 kilometers (30 mi) southwest of Jalalabad, to prepare for a stand against the Northern Alliance and U.S./NATO forces. Nearly 2,000 al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters fortified themselves in positions within bunkers and caves, and by November 16, U.S. bombers began bombing the mountain fortress. Around the same time, CIA and Special Forces operatives were already at work in the area, enlisting and paying local warlords to join the fight and planning an attack on the Tora

Bora complex.^[105]

Fall of Kunduz

Just as the bombardment at Tora Bora was stepped up, the siege of Kunduz that began on November 16 was continuing. Finally, after nine days of heavy fighting and American aerial bombardment, Taliban fighters surrendered to Northern Alliance forces on November 25 – November 26. Shortly before the surrender, Pakistani aircraft arrived ostensibly to evacuate a few hundred intelligence and military personnel who had been in Afghanistan before the U.S. invasion to aid the Taliban's ongoing fight against the Northern Alliance. However, during this airlift, it is alleged that up to five thousand people were evacuated from the region, including Taliban and al-Qaeda troops allied to the Pakistanis in Afghanistan, see Airlift of Evil.^{[106] [107] [108]}

Battle of Qala-i-Jangi

On November 25, the day that Taliban fighters holding out in Kunduz surrendered and were being herded into the Qala-I-Janghi fortress near Mazar-I-Sharif, a few Taliban attacked some Northern Alliance guards, taking their weapons and opening fire. This incident soon triggered a widespread revolt by 300 prisoners, who soon seized the southern half of the complex, once a medieval fortress, including an armory stocked with small arms and crew-served weapons. One American CIA paramilitary operative who had been interrogating prisoners, Johnny Micheal Spann, was killed, marking the first American combat death in the war.

The revolt was finally put down after seven days of heavy fighting between an SBS unit along with some US Army Special Forces and Northern Alliance, AC-130 gunships and other aircraft took part providing strafing fire on several occasions, as well as a bombing airstrikes.^[109] A total of 86 of the Taliban prisoners survived, and around 50 Northern Alliance soldiers were killed. The squashing of the revolt marked the end of the combat in northern Afghanistan, where local Northern Alliance warlords were now firmly in control.

Consolidation: the taking of Kandahar

By the end of November, Kandahar, the Taliban's birthplace, was its last remaining stronghold, and was coming under increasing pressure. Nearly 3,000 tribal fighters, led by Hamid Karzai, a loyalist of the former Afghan king, and Gul Agha Sherzai, the governor of Kandahar before the Taliban seized power, pressured Taliban forces from the east and cut off the northern Taliban supply lines to Kandahar. The threat of the Northern Alliance loomed in the north and northeast.

Meanwhile, the first significant numbers of U.S. combat troops had arrived. Nearly 1,000 Marines, ferried in by CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters and C-130s, set up a Forward Operating Base known as Camp Rhino in the desert south of Kandahar on November 25. This was the coalition's first strategic foothold in Afghanistan, and was the stepping stone to establishing other operating bases. The first significant combat involving U.S. ground forces occurred a day after Rhino was captured when 15 armored vehicles approached the base and were attacked by helicopter gunships, destroying many of them. Meanwhile, the airstrikes continued to pound Taliban positions inside the city, where Mullah Omar was holed up.



U.S. Marines in Southern Afghanistan-A Marine with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) leads a leatherneck to a security position after seizing a Taliban forward-operating base Nov. 25, 2001. By Sgt. Joseph R Chenelly.



Army Special Forces with Hamid Karzai in Kandahar province

Omar, the Taliban leader, remained defiant although his movement only controlled 4 out of the 30 Afghan provinces by the end of November and called on his forces to fight to the death.

On December 6, the U.S. government rejected any amnesty for Omar or any Taliban leaders. Shortly thereafter on December 7, Omar slipped out of the city of Kandahar with a group of his hardcore loyalists and moved northwest into the mountains of Uruzgan Province, reneging on the Taliban's promise to surrender their fighters and their weapons. He was last reported seen driving off with a group of his fighters on a convoy of motorcycles.

Other members of the Taliban leadership fled into Pakistan through the remote passes of Paktia and Paktika Provinces. Nevertheless, Kandahar, the last Taliban-controlled city, had fallen, and the majority of the Taliban fighters had disbanded. The border town of Spin Boldak was surrendered on the same day, marking the end of Taliban control in Afghanistan. The Afghan tribal forces under Gul Agha seized the city of Kandahar while the Marines took control of the airport outside and established a U.S. base.

Battle of Tora Bora

Al-Qaeda fighters were still holding out in the mountains of Tora Bora, however, while an anti-Taliban tribal militia steadily pushed bin Laden back across the difficult terrain, backed by Delta Force, UK Special Forces and withering air strikes by the U.S. Facing defeat, the al-Qaeda forces agreed to a truce to give them time to surrender their weapons. In retrospect, however, many believe that the truce was a ruse to allow important al-Qaeda figures, including Osama bin Laden, to escape. On December 12, the fighting flared again, probably initiated by a rear guard buying time for the main force's escape through the White Mountains into the tribal areas of Pakistan. Again, tribal forces backed by British and U.S. special operations troops and air support pressed ahead against fortified al-Qaeda positions in caves and bunkers scattered throughout the mountainous region.

By December 17, the last cave complex had been taken and their defenders overrun. A search of the area by U.S. and UK forces continued into January, but no sign of bin Laden or the al-Qaeda leadership emerged. It is almost unanimously believed that they had already slipped away into the tribal areas of Pakistan to the south and east. It is estimated that around 200 of the al-Qaeda fighters were killed during the battle, along with an unknown number of anti-Taliban tribal fighters. No U.S. or UK deaths were reported.

Diplomatic and humanitarian efforts

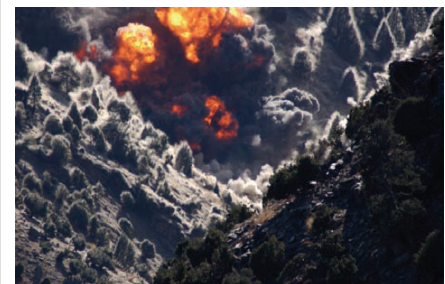
After the Taliban fled Kabul in November 2001 and left their stronghold, the southern city of Kandahar, in December 2001, it was generally understood that by then major Al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders had fled across the border into Pakistan.

To fill the political void, in December 2001 the United Nations hosted the Bonn Conference in Germany. The meetings of various Afghan leaders here were organized by the United Nations Security Council. The Taliban were not included. Participants included representatives of four Afghan opposition groups. Observers included representatives of neighbouring and other involved major countries, including the United States.

The result was the Bonn Agreement which created the Afghan Interim Authority that would serve as the “repository of Afghan sovereignty” and outlined the so-called Petersberg Process, a political process towards a new constitution and choosing a new Afghan government.



Tommy Franks meets with Army Special Forces



Air strikes on Tora Bora

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1378 of November 14, 2001, included "Condemning the Taliban for allowing Afghanistan to be used as a base for the export of terrorism by the Al-Qaeda network and other terrorist groups and for providing safe haven to Osama bin Laden, Al-Qaeda and others associated with them, and in this context supporting the efforts of the Afghan people to replace the Taliban regime".^[110]

To help provide security to support this Afghan Interim Authority, the United Nations authorized an international force—the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)—with a mandate to help the Afghans maintain security in Kabul and surrounding areas.

Before the U.S.-led invasion, there were fears that the invasion and resultant disruption of services would cause widespread starvation and refugees. The United Nations World Food Programme temporarily suspended activities within Afghanistan at the beginning of the bombing attacks but resumed them after the fall of the Taliban.

International Security Assistance Force

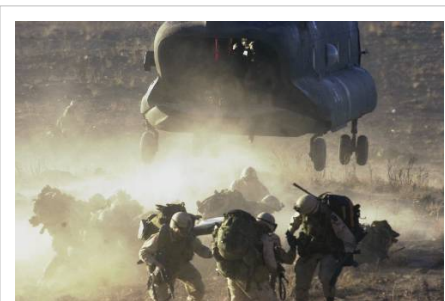
Operating under United States General David Howell Petraeus,^[111] the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) includes soldiers from 46 countries with U.S. troops making up about half its force.^[112] ISAF had initially been established as a stabilization force by the United Nations Security Council on December 20, 2001, to secure Kabul. Its mandate did not extend beyond this area for the first few years.^[113] On August 11, 2003, NATO assumed political command and coordination of ISAF.^[113] On July 31, 2006, ISAF assumed command of the south of the country, and by October 5, 2006, of the east.^[114]



2002: Operation Anaconda

Further information: Operation Anaconda and Tarnak Farm incident

Following Tora Bora, U.S. forces and their Afghan allies consolidated their position in the country. Following a Loya jirga or grand council of major Afghan factions, tribal leaders, and former exiles, an interim Afghan government was established in Kabul under Hamid Karzai. U.S. forces established their main base at Bagram airbase just north of Kabul. Kandahar airport also became an important U.S. base area. Several outposts were established in eastern provinces to hunt for Taliban and al-Qaeda fugitives. The number of U.S.-led coalition troops operating in the country would eventually grow to over 10,000.



U.S. soldiers from Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division search for Al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters.



Canadian soldiers from 3PPCLI move into the hills to search for Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters after an air assault onto an objective north of Qualat, Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the Taliban and al-Qaeda had not given up. Al-Qaeda forces began regrouping in the Shahi-Kot mountains of Paktia province throughout January and February 2002. A Taliban fugitive in Paktia province, Mullah Saifur Rehman, also began reconstituting some of his militia forces in support of the anti-U.S. fighters. They totalled over 1,000 by the beginning of March 2002. The intention of the insurgents was to use the region as a base area for launching guerrilla attacks and possibly a major offensive in the style of the Mujahideen who battled Soviet forces during the 1980s.

U.S. allied to Afghan militia intelligence sources soon picked up on this buildup in Paktia province and prepared a massive push to counter it. On March 2, 2002, U.S. and Afghan forces launched an offensive on al-Qaeda and Taliban forces entrenched in the mountains of Shahi-Kot southeast of Gardez. The Mujahideen forces, who used small arms, rocket-propelled grenades, and mortars, were entrenched into caves and bunkers in the hillsides at an altitude that was largely above 10,000 feet (3,000 m).

They used "hit and run" tactics, opening fire on the U.S. and Afghan forces and then retreating back into their caves and bunkers to weather the return fire and persistent U.S. bombing raids. To compound the situation for the coalition troops, U.S. commanders initially underestimated the Taliban and al-Qaeda forces as a last isolated pocket numbering fewer than 200. It turned out that the guerrillas numbered between 1,000–5,000 according to some estimates and that they were receiving reinforcements.^[115]

By March 6, eight Americans and seven Afghan soldiers had been killed and reportedly 400 opposing forces had also been killed in the fighting. The coalition casualties stemmed from a friendly fire incident that killed one soldier, the downing of two helicopters by rocket-propelled grenades and small arms fire that killed seven soldiers, and the pinning down of U.S. forces being inserted into what was coined as "Objective Ginger" that resulted in dozens of wounded.^[116] However, several hundred guerrillas escaped the dragnet heading to the Waziristan tribal areas across the border in Pakistan.

During Operation Anaconda and other missions during 2002 and 2003, special forces from several western nations were also involved in operations. These included the Australian Special Air Service Regiment, the Canadian Joint Task Force 2, the German KSK, the New Zealand Special Air Service and Norwegian Marinejegerkommando.



An Anti-Taliban Forces (ATF) fighter wraps a bandolier of ammunition for his 7.62 mm PK machine gun around his body as ATF personnel help secure a compound in Helmand Province in Afghanistan, January 2002.

Post-Anaconda operations

Following the battle at Shahi-Kot, it is believed that the al-Qaeda fighters established sanctuaries among tribal protectors in Pakistan, from which they regained their strength and later began launching cross-border raids on U.S. forces by the summer months of 2002. Guerrilla units, numbering between 5 and 25 men, still regularly crossed the border from their sanctuaries in Pakistan to fire rockets at U.S. bases and ambush American convoys and patrols, as well as Afghan National Army troops, Afghan militia forces working with the U.S.-led coalition, and non-governmental organizations. The area around the U.S. base at Shkin in Paktika province saw some of the heaviest activity.

Meanwhile, Taliban forces remained in hiding in the rural regions of the four southern provinces that formed their heartland, Kandahar, Zabul, Helmand Province, and Uruzgan. In the wake of Operation Anaconda The Pentagon requested that British Royal Marines who are highly trained in mountain warfare, be deployed. They conducted a number of missions over several weeks with varying results. The Taliban, who during the summer of 2002 numbered in the hundreds, avoided combat with U.S. forces and their Afghan allies and melted away into the caves and tunnels of remote Afghan mountain ranges or across the border into Pakistan during operations.^[117]

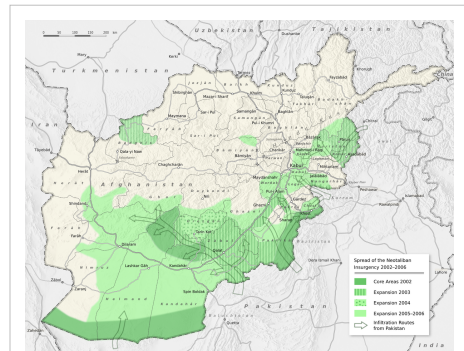
2003–2005: Renewed Taliban insurgency

Further information: War in North-West Pakistan, 2003 in Afghanistan, 2004 in Afghanistan, and 2005 in Afghanistan

After managing to evade U.S. forces throughout mid-2002, the remnants of the Taliban gradually began to regain their confidence and started to begin preparations to launch the insurgency that Mullah Muhammad Omar had promised during the Taliban's last days in power.^[118] During September, Taliban forces began a recruitment drive in Pashtun areas in both Afghanistan and Pakistan to launch a renewed "jihad" or holy war against the Afghan government and the U.S.-led coalition. Pamphlets distributed in secret during the night also began to appear in many villages in the former Taliban heartland in southeastern Afghanistan that called for jihad.^[119]

Small mobile training camps were established along the border with Pakistan by al-Qaeda and Taliban fugitives to train recruits in guerrilla warfare and terrorist tactics, according to Afghan sources and a United Nations report.^[120] Most of the recruits were drawn from the madrassas or religious schools of the tribal areas of Pakistan, from which the Taliban had originally arisen. Major bases, a few with as many as 200 men, were created in the mountainous tribal areas of Pakistan by the summer of 2003. The will of the Pakistani paramilitaries stationed at border crossings to prevent such infiltration was called into question, and Pakistani military operations proved of little use.^[121]

The Taliban gradually reorganized and reconstituted their forces over the winter, preparing for a summer offensive. They established a new mode of operation: gathered into groups of around 50 to launch attacks on isolated outposts and convoys of Afghan soldiers, police, or militia



Map detailing the spread of the Neotaliban-Insurgency in Afghanistan 2002–2006



A 19th U.S. Special Forces Group soldier mans an M60 machine gun on a HMMWV in Afghanistan, in March 2004. An AT4 anti-tank rocket can be seen in the foreground.

and then breaking up into groups of 5–10 men to evade subsequent offensives. U.S. forces in the strategy were attacked indirectly, through rocket attacks on bases and improvised explosive devices.

To coordinate the strategy, Omar named a 10-man leadership council for the resistance, with himself at the head.^[121] Five operational zones were created, assigned to various Taliban commanders such as the key Taliban leader Mullah Dadullah, in charge of Zabul province operations.^[121] Al-Qaeda forces in the east had a bolder strategy of concentrating on the Americans and catching them when they could with elaborate ambushes.

The first sign that Taliban forces were regrouping came on January 27, 2003, during Operation Mongoose, when a band of fighters allied with the Taliban and Hezb-i-Islami were discovered and assaulted by U.S. forces at the Adi Ghar cave complex 15 miles (24 km) north of Spin Boldak.^[122] 18 rebels were reported killed and no U.S. casualties reported. The site was suspected to be a base to funnel supplies and fighters from Pakistan. The first isolated attacks by relatively large Taliban bands on Afghan targets also appeared around that time.

As the summer continued, the attacks gradually increased in frequency in the "Taliban heartland." Dozens of Afghan government soldiers, non-governmental organization and humanitarian workers, and several U.S. soldiers died in the raids, ambushes, and rocket attacks. Besides using guerrilla attacks, Taliban fighters began building up their forces in the district of Dai Chopan, a district in Zabul Province that also straddles Kandahar and Uruzgan and is at the very center of the Taliban heartland.

Dai Chopan district is a remote and sparsely populated corner of southeastern Afghanistan composed of towering, rocky mountains interspersed with narrow gorges. Taliban fighters decided it would be the perfect area to make a stand against the Afghan government and the coalition forces. Over the course of the summer, perhaps the largest concentration of Taliban militants gathered in the area since the fall of the regime, with up to 1,000 guerrillas regrouping. Over 220 people, including several dozen Afghan police, were killed in August 2003 as Taliban fighters gained strength.



Spanish Cougar and a VBL of the 2nd Foreign Infantry Regiment (2e REI) in Afghanistan (2005).



US Marines searching for Taliban fighters in the spring of 2005

Coalition response

As a result, coalition forces began preparing offensives to root out the rebel forces. In late August 2005, Afghan government forces backed by U.S. troops and heavy American aerial bombardment advanced upon Taliban positions within the mountain fortress. After a one-week battle, Taliban forces were routed with up to 124 fighters (according to Afghan government estimates) killed.

2006: NATO in southern Afghanistan

Further information: 2006 in Afghanistan

From January 2006, a NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) started to replace the U.S. troops of Operation Enduring Freedom in southern Afghanistan. The British 16th Air Assault Brigade (later reinforced by Royal Marines) formed the core of the force in Southern Afghanistan, along with troops and helicopters from Australia, Canada and the Netherlands. The initial force consisted of roughly 3,300 British,^[123] 2,300 Canadian,^[124] 1,963 from the Netherlands, 300 from Australia,^[125] 290 from Denmark,^[126] and 150 from Estonia.^[127] Air support was provided by U.S., British, Dutch, Norwegian and French combat aircraft and helicopters.

In January 2006, NATO's focus in southern Afghanistan was to form Provincial Reconstruction Teams with the British leading in Helmand Province while the Netherlands and Canada would lead similar deployments in Orūzgān Province and Kandahar Province respectively. Local Taliban figures voiced opposition to the incoming force and pledged to resist it.^[128]

Southern Afghanistan faced in 2006 the deadliest spate of violence in the country since the ousting of the Taliban regime by U.S.-led forces in 2001, as the newly deployed NATO troops battled resurgent militants. NATO operations have been led by British, Canadian and Dutch commanders. Operation Mountain Thrust was launched on May 17, 2006, with the purpose of rooting out Taliban forces. In July, Canadian Forces, supported by U.S., British, Dutch and Danish forces, launched Operation Medusa in an attempt to clear the areas of Taliban fighters.

Further NATO operations included the Battle of Panjwaii, Operation Mountain Fury and Operation Falcon Summit. The fighting for NATO forces was intense throughout the second half of 2006. NATO has been successful in achieving tactical victories over the Taliban and denied areas to them, but the Taliban were not completely defeated, and NATO had to continue operations into 2007.



A number of 1.25lb M112 Demolition Charges, consisting of a C-4 compound, sit atop degraded weaponry scheduled for destruction



A U.S. soldier from 10th Mountain Division, patrols Aranas, Afghanistan

2007: Coalition offensive

Further information: 2007 in Afghanistan

In January and February 2007, British Royal Marines mounted Operation Volcano to clear insurgents from firing points in the village of Barikju, north of Kajaki.^[129] Other major operations during this period were Operation Achilles (March – May) and Operation Lastay Kulang. The UK ministry of defence announced its intention to bring British troop levels in the country up to 7,700 (committed until 2009).^[130] Further operations, such as Operation Silver and Operation Silicon, were conducted to keep up the pressure on the Taliban in the hopes of blunting their expected spring offensive.^{[131] [132]}

On March 4, 2007, at least 12 civilians were killed and 33 were injured by U.S. Marines in Shinwar district in Nangrahar province of Afghanistan^[133] as the Americans reacted to a bomb ambush. The event has become known as the Shinwar Massacre.^[134] The 120 member Marine unit responsible for the attack was asked to leave the country because the incident damaged the unit's relations with the local Afghan population.^[135]

Later in March 2007, the Bush Administration sent more 3,500 additional US troops to the country.

On May 12, 2007, ISAF forces killed Mullah Dadullah, a Taliban commander in charge of leading operations in the south of the country; eleven other Taliban fighters were killed in the same firefight.

During the summer, NATO forces achieved tactical victories over the Taliban at the Battle of Chora in Orūzgān Province, where Dutch and Australian ISAF forces are deployed.

On August 16, 2007, eight civilians including a pregnant women and a baby died when Polish soldiers shelled the village of Nangar Khel, Paktika Province. Seven soldiers have been charged with war crimes.

On October 28, 2007, about 80 Taliban fighters were killed in a 24 hour battle with forces from the U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan's Helmand province.^[136] During the last days of October, Canadian forces surrounded around 300 militants near Arghandab and killed at least 50 of them. This was said to have stopped a potential Taliban offensive on Kandahar.

The strength of Taliban forces was estimated by Western officials and analysts at about 10,000 fighters fielded at any given time, according to an October 30 report in *The New York Times*. Of that number, "only 2,000 to 3,000 are highly motivated, full-time insurgents", the *Times* reported. The rest are part-timers, made up of alienated, young Afghan men angry at bombing raids or fighting to get money. In 2007, more foreign fighters were showing up in Afghanistan than ever before, according to Afghan and United States officials. Approximately 100 to 300 full-time combatants are foreigners, usually from Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Chechnya, various Arab countries and perhaps even Turkey and western China. They tend to be more fanatical and violent, and they often bring skills such as the ability to post more sophisticated videos on the Internet or bombmaking expertise.^[137]

On November 2, 2007, Afghan security forces killed a top-ranking militant, Mawlawi Abdul Manan, after he was caught trying to cross into Afghanistan from neighboring Pakistan. The Taliban confirmed his death.^[138] On November 10, 2007, the Taliban ambushed a patrol in eastern Afghanistan. This attack brought the U.S. death toll for 2007 to 100, making it the deadliest year for Americans in Afghanistan.^[139]



US and British troops during a patrol in Helmand Province



Dutch army PzH 2000 firing on Taliban in Chora

The Battle of Musa Qala took place in December 2007. Afghan units were the principal fighting force, supported by British forces.^[140] Taliban forces were forced to pull out of Musa Qala.

2008: Reassessment and renewed commitment

Further information: 2008 in Afghanistan

Admiral Mike Mullen, Staff Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that while the situation in Afghanistan is "precarious and urgent," the 10,000 additional troops needed there would be unavailable "in any significant manner" unless withdrawals from Iraq are made. However, Mullen stated that "my priorities . . . given to me by the commander in chief are: Focus on Iraq first. It's been that way for some time. Focus on Afghanistan second."^[141]

In the first five months of 2008, the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan increased by over 80% with a surge of 21,643 more troops, bringing the total number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan from 26,607 in January to 48,250 in June.^[142] In September 2008, President Bush announced the withdrawal of over 8,000 troops from Iraq in the coming months and a further increase of up to 4,500 U.S. troops in Afghanistan.^[143]

In June 2008, British prime minister Gordon Brown announced the number of British troops serving in Afghanistan would increase to 8,030 – a rise of 230 personnel.^[144] The same month, the UK lost its 100th serviceman killed in the war since 2001.^[145]

On June 13, Taliban fighters demonstrated their ongoing strength, liberating all prisoners in Kandahar jail. The well-planned operation freed 1200 prisoners, 400 of whom were Taliban prisoners of war, causing a major embarrassment for NATO in one of its operational centres in the country.^[146]



U.S. Army Chinook helicopter in the Afghanistan mountains



French soldiers from the 27ème bataillon de Chasseurs alpins and French Task Force Tiger patrolling the many valleys of Kapisa province.

On July 13, 2008, a coordinated Taliban attack was launched on a remote NATO base at Wanat in Kunar province. On August 19, French troops suffered their worst losses in Afghanistan in an ambush.^[147] Later in the month, an airstrike which targeted a Taliban commander in Herat province killed 90 civilians.

Late August saw one of the largest operations by NATO forces in Helmand province, Operation Eagle's Summit, with the aim bringing electricity to the region.^[148]

On September 3, the war spilled over on to Pakistani territory for the first time when heavily armed commandos, believed to be US Army Special Forces, landed by helicopter and attacked three houses in a village close to a known Taliban and Al-Qaeda stronghold. The attack killed between seven and twenty people. According to local residents, most of the dead were civilians. Pakistan responded furiously, condemning the attack. The foreign ministry in Islamabad called the incursion "a gross violation of Pakistan's territory".^[149] ^[150]

On September 6, in an apparent reaction to the recent cross-border attack, the federal government announced disconnection of supply lines to the allied forces stationed in Afghanistan through Pakistan for an indefinite period.^[151]

On September 11, militants killed two U.S. troops in the eastern part of the country. This brought the total number of US losses to 113, making 2008 the deadliest year for American troops in Afghanistan since the start of the war.^[152] The year was also the deadliest for several European countries in Afghanistan, particularly for the UK, who suffered a similar level of casualties to the USA with the loss of 108 personnel.^[153]

Taliban attacks on supply lines through Pakistan

In November and December 2008, there were multiple incidents of major theft, robbery, and arson attacks against NATO supply convoys in Pakistan.^{[154] [155] [156]} Transport companies south of Kabul have also been reported to pay protection money to the Taliban.^{[156] [157]} In an attack on November 11, 2008, Taliban fighters in Peshawar hijacked a convoy carrying NATO supplies from Karachi to Afghanistan. The militants took two military Humvees and paraded them in front of the media as trophies.^[155]

The coalition forces bring 70 per cent of supplies through Pakistan every month, of a total of 2,000 truckloads in all.^[157]

The area east of the Khyber pass in Pakistan has seen very frequent attacks. Cargo trucks and Humvees have been set ablaze by Taliban militants.^[158] A half-dozen raids on depots with NATO supplies near Peshawar destroyed 300 cargo trucks and Humvees in December 2008.^[158] The Taliban destroyed an iron bridge on the highway between Peshawar and the Khyber pass in February 2009.^[159]

Coalition issues with Pakistan

An unnamed senior Pentagon official told the BBC that at some point between July 12 and September 12, 2008, President George W. Bush issued a classified order to authorize U.S. raids against militants in Pakistan. Pakistan however said it would not allow foreign forces onto its territory and that it would vigorously protect its sovereignty.^[160] In September, the Pakistan military stated that it had issued orders to "open fire" on American soldiers who crossed the Pakistan border in pursuit of militant forces.^[161]

On September 25, 2008, Pakistani troops shot towards ISAF helicopters, which belonged to American troops. This caused confusion and anger in the Pentagon, which asked for a full explanation into the incident, and they denied that American choppers were in Pakistani airspace. Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari was quick to deny that shots were fired but instead insisted that the Pakistani troops shot flares to warn the Americans that they were in Pakistani airspace.

A further split occurred when American troops apparently landed on Pakistani soil to carry out an operation against militants in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province but 'Pakistan reacted angrily to the action, saying 20 innocent villagers had been killed by US troops'.^[162] However, despite tensions between Pakistan and the U.S., the United States has continued to increase the use of remotely piloted drone aircraft in Pakistan's border regions, in particular the Federally Administered Tribal Regions (FATA) and Balochistan; as of early 2009, drone attacks were up 183% since 2006.^[163]

A poll by Gallup Pakistan in the summer of 2008 found only 9 percent of Pakistanis in favour of the U.S. drone attacks and 67 percent against, with a majority ranking the United States as a greater threat to Pakistan than its archrival, India, or the Pakistani Taliban.^[164]

By the end of 2008, the Taliban apparently had severed remaining ties with al-Qaeda.^[165] According to senior U.S. military intelligence officials, there are perhaps fewer than 100 members of Al-Qaeda remaining in Afghanistan.^[166]

In a meeting with General McChrystal, Pakistani military officials urged international forces to keep their fight on the Afghan side of the border to prevent militants from fleeing into Pakistan. Pakistan noted that it has 140,000 Pakistani soldiers on its side of the border with Afghanistan to monitor and address militant activities, while the Coalition only has 100,000 soldiers to police the Afghanistan side of the border.^[167]

2009: Southern Afghanistan

Further information: 2009 in Afghanistan, Military operations of the War in Afghanistan (2001–present)#2009 Operations, and Khyber Border Coordination Center

Northern Distribution Network

In response to the increased risk of sending supplies through Pakistan, work began on the establishment of a Northern Distribution Network (NDN) through Russia and several Central Asian republics. Initial permission for the U.S. military to move troop supplies through the region was given on January 20, 2009, after a visit to the region by General Petraeus.^[168] The first shipment along the NDN route left on February 20 from Riga, Latvia, then traveled 3,212 miles (5,169 km) to the Uzbek town of Termez on the Afghanistan border. U.S. commanders have stated their hope that 100 containers a day will be shipped along the NDN.^[169] By comparison, currently 140 containers a day are shipped through the Khyber Pass.^[170]

On May 11, 2009, Uzbekistan president Islam Karimov announced that the airport in Navoi, Uzbekistan was being used to transport non-lethal cargo into Afghanistan. Due to the still unsettled relationship between Uzbekistan and the United States following the 2005 Andijon massacre and subsequent expulsion of U.S. forces from Karshi-Khanabad airbase, U.S. forces were not involved in the shipment of supplies. Instead, South Korea's Korean Air, which is currently involved in overhauling Navoi's airport, officially handles logistics at the site.^[171]

Originally only non-lethal resources were allowed on the NDN. In July 2009, however, shortly before a visit by President Obama to Moscow, Russian authorities announced that U.S. troops and weapons could use the country's airspace to reach Afghanistan.^[172]

Additionally, human rights advocates are concerned that the U.S. is again working with the government of Uzbekistan, which is often accused of violating human rights.^[173] Nevertheless, U.S. officials have promised increased cooperation with Uzbekistan, including further assistance to turn the Navoi airport into a major regional distribution center for both military and civilian ventures.^{[174] [175]}

Increase in US troops

In January, about 3,000 U.S. soldiers from the 3rd Brigade Combat Team of the 10th Mountain Division moved into the provinces of Logar and Wardak. Afghan Federal Guards also fought along with U.S. Troops. The troops were the first wave of an expected surge of reinforcements originally ordered by George W. Bush and increased by Barack Obama.^[176]

In mid-February, it was announced that 17,000 additional troops would be deployed to the country in two brigades and additional support troops; the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade of about 3,500 from the 7,000 Marines, and the 5th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, a Stryker Brigade with about 4,000 of the 7,000 US Army soldiers.^[177] The U.S. commander in Afghanistan, General David McKiernan, had called for as many as 30,000 additional troops, effectively doubling the number of troops currently in the country.^[178]



A U.S. Army soldier with 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division, fires his weapon during a battle with insurgent forces in Barge Matal, during Operation Mountain Fire on 12 July 2009.

On September 23, NBC News reported that a classified assessment of the war in Afghanistan by General McChrystal included his conclusion that a successful counterinsurgency strategy would require 500,000 troops and five years of fighting.^[179]

In November, the U.S. ambassador in Kabul sent two classified cables to Washington expressing deep concerns about sending more U.S. troops to Afghanistan until President Hamid Karzai's government demonstrates that it is willing to tackle the corruption and mismanagement that has fueled the Taliban's rise. Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry, a retired three-star general who in 2006–2007 commanded U.S. troops in Afghanistan, also expressed frustration with the relative paucity of funds set aside for spending on development and reconstruction in Afghanistan.^[180] In subsequent cables, Ambassador Eikenberry repeatedly cautioned that deploying sizable American reinforcements would result in "astronomical costs" — tens of billions of dollars — and would only deepen the dependence of the Afghan government on the United States.

On November 26, 2009, Afghan President Hamid Karzai made a public plea to the United States to engage in direct negotiations with the Taliban leadership. In an interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour, Karzai said there is an "urgent need" for negotiations with the Taliban, and made it clear that the Obama administration had opposed such talks. There was no formal American response.^{[181] [182]}

On December 1, 2009, President Barack Obama announced at The United States Military Academy at Westpoint that the U.S will be sending 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan. Antiwar organizations in the United States responded quickly, and cities throughout the U.S. saw protests on December 2 in response.^[183] Many protesters compared the decision to deploy more troops in Afghanistan to the expansion of the Vietnam War under the Johnson administration.^[184]

Kunduz Province campaign

In April, German forces stepped up their efforts to retake some rebellious areas of Kunduz province, considered to be the most dangerous part of Northern Afghanistan by ISAF commander McChrystal. The fighting centres upon the areas to the west and south of the city of Kunduz with a main focus on an area between the town of Chahar Dara in the West and the Kunduz river in the east. Up to now this campaign consisted of several large offensives linked by countless skirmishes and gunfights. Operations of German, Afghan, U.S., and Belgian troops were still ongoing as of December 2009. Insurgent militias suffered more than 650 casualties in this period. At least 86 coalition troops were wounded or killed. On September 4, a devastating NATO air raid was conducted 7 kilometres to the southwest of Kunduz where Taliban fighters had hijacked civilian supply trucks, killing up to 179 people including over 100 Afghan civilians.



U.S. Army Soldiers cross the Arghandab River to assist Afghanistan police on a humanitarian mission



French soldiers conduct a live-fire exercise, with their Nexter Systems Caesar self-propelled wheeled armored vehicles, outside of Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, Aug. 14, 2009.

Operation Khanjar and Operation Panther's Claw

“We're doing this very differently. We're going to be with the people. We're not going to drive to work. We're going to walk to work.”

— Brig. Gen. Lawrence D. Nicholson, commander of the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade, July 2, 2009.^[185]

On June 25, 2009, American officials announced the launch of Operation Khanjar ("strike of the sword").^[186] About 4000 US Marines from the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade^[185] and 650 Afghan soldiers^[187] are currently involved in Operation Khanjar, which will be staged on the Helmand River. Khanjar follows a British-led operation named Operation Panther's Claw in the same region.^[188] Officials call it the Marines' largest operation since the 2004 invasion of Fallujah, Iraq.^[185] Operation Panther's Claw was aimed to secure various canal and river crossings to establish a permanent International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) presence in the area.^[189]

Initially, Afghan and American soldiers have been moving into towns and villages along the Helmand River^[185] to secure the civilian population from the Taliban. The main objective of the operation is to push troops into insurgent strongholds along the river. A secondary aim was to bring security to the Helmand Valley in time for presidential elections, set to take place on August 20.

The first aggressive phase will last 36 hours, where the secondary aim will be achieved first.

Taliban's gains

The Taliban can sustain itself indefinitely, according to a December 22, 2009, briefing by Major General Michael T. Flynn, the top U.S. intelligence officer in Afghanistan. He wrote, "The Taliban retains [the] required partnerships to sustain support, fuel legitimacy and bolster capacity."^[190] The 23-page briefing states that "Security incidents [are] projected to be higher in 2010." Those incidents are already up by 300 percent since 2007 and by 60 percent since 2008, according to the briefing.^[191] NATO intelligence at the time also indicated that the Taliban had as many as 25,000 dedicated soldiers, almost as many as before 9/11 and more than in 2005.^[192]

On August 10, 2009, Stanley McChrystal, the newly appointed U.S. commander in Afghanistan, said that the Taliban has presently gained the upper hand and that the ISAF is not winning in the eight-year-old war. In a continuation of the Taliban's usual strategy of summer offensives,^[193] the militants have aggressively spread their influence into the north and west Afghanistan, and stepped up their attack in an attempt to disrupt August 20 presidential polls.^[194] Calling the Taliban a "very aggressive enemy", he added that the U.S. strategy in the months to come is to stop their momentum and focusing on protecting and safeguarding the Afghan civilians, while also calling it "hard work".^[195]



U.S. Soldiers pass through a village while on a dismounted patrol.

The Taliban's claim of disrupting August 20 elections is largely disputed, claiming over 135 incidents of violence; media was asked to not report on any violent incidents, however,^[196] causing many outlets to hail the elections as a success, even though some estimates give the voter turnout as much less than the expected 70 percent. In southern Afghanistan where the Taliban holds the most sway, there was a low voter turnout and sporadic violence directed at voters and security personnel. The chief observer of the European Union election mission, General Philippe Morillon, said the election was "generally fair" but "not free".^[197]

Western groups and election observers had difficulty accessing the southern regions of Afghanistan, where at least 9 Afghan civilians and 14 security forces were killed in attacks intended to intimidate voters. The Taliban released a video days after the elections, filming just up the road between Kabul and Kandahar, a major route in Afghanistan on election day, stopping buses, cars, and asking to see their fingers. The video went on to showing ten men who had voted, being talked to by a Taliban militant, they went on to say they may pardon the voters because of the Holy month of Ramadan^[198] The Taliban also attacked towns with rockets and other means of indirect fire. Amid claims of widespread fraud, both of the top contenders, Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah, claimed victory in the election. Reports also suggest that the turnout was lower than the last election, and there are fears that a results dispute can turn violent, even though both candidates vowed not to incite violence in case of a loss.^[199]

After Karzai's alleged win of 54 per cent, which would prevent a run off with his rival, Abdullah Abdullah, over 400,000 votes had to be discounted for Karzai, and many more with hundreds of thousands of votes and polling ballots being accused of fraud. Making the real turnout of the elections much lower than the official numbers, many nations criticizing the elections as "free but not fair".^[200]

In December, an attack on Forward Operating Base Chapman, used by the Central Intelligence Agency to gather information and to coordinate drone attacks against Taliban leaders, killed at least six CIA officers and was a major setback for the agency's operations in the region.

2010: American/British offensive and Afghan peace initiative

Further information: 2010 in Afghanistan

In January, 2010, American officials said privately that the Pakistanis are reluctant to go after the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network because they see them as a future proxy against Indian interests in Afghanistan when the Americans leave.^[201] However, in their public statements U.S. officials had previously praised Pakistan's Military effort against the militants during its offensive in South Waziristan in November 2009.^[202] Afghan President Hamid Karzai also started peace talks with Haqqani network groups in March 2010.^[203] Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari said that Pakistan has lost over 35 billion U.S. dollars during the previous eight years as a result of the fight against militancy.^[204] According to the Afghan government, approximately 900 Taliban were killed in operations conducted during 2010.^[205] Due to increased use of IEDs by insurgents there was a significant increase in the number of injured coalition soldiers, mainly Americans, losing one limb or more or suffering major injury to their

genital and pelvic areas.^[206]

Peace Initiatives

In October 2008 Defense Secretary Gates asserted that a political settlement with the Taliban was the endgame for the Afghan conflict. "There has to be ultimately – and I'll underscore ultimately – reconciliation as part of a political outcome to this," Gates stated.^[207]

By 2010 peace efforts began. In early January, Taliban commanders held secret exploratory talks with a United Nations special envoy to discuss peace terms. Regional commanders on the Taliban's leadership council, the Quetta Shura, sought a meeting with the UN special representative in Afghanistan, Kai Eide, and it took place in Dubai on January 8. It was the first such meeting between the UN and senior members of the Taliban.^[208]

On January 26, 2010, at a major conference in London which brought together some 70 countries and organizations,^[10] Afghan President Hamid Karzai told world leaders that he intends to reach out to the top echelons of the Taliban within a few weeks with a peace initiative.^[11] Karzai set the framework for dialogue with Taliban leaders when he called on the group's leadership to take part in a "loya jirga" – or large assembly of elders—to initiate peace talks.^[12] Karzai also asked for creation of a new peacemaking organization, to be called the National Council for Peace, Reconciliation and Reintegration.^[11] Karzai's top adviser on the reconciliation process with the insurgents said that the country must learn to forgive the Taliban.^[209]

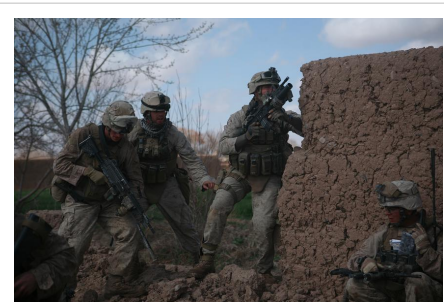
In March 2010, the Karzai government held preliminary talks with Hezb-i-Islami, who presented a plan which included the withdrawal of all foreign troops by the end of 2010. The Taliban declined to participate, saying "The Islamic Emirate has a clear position. We have said this many, many times. There will be no talks when there are foreign troops on Afghanistan's soil killing innocent Afghans on daily basis."^[210]

In July 2010, The Guardian newspaper reported that the campaign to "win hearts and minds" of Afghan civilians by US troops has been proving more difficult than expected. One US Army report read: "It seems to always be this way when we go there [to meet civilians]. No one wants anything to do with us." And a report on meeting up with school representatives mentioned students throwing rocks at soldiers and not welcoming their arrival, as has been reported on several occasions elsewhere.^[211]

In September 2010 General David Petraeus commented on the progress of peace talks to date, stating, "The prospect for reconciliation with senior Taliban leaders certainly looms out there...and there have been approaches at (a) very senior level that hold some promise."^[212]

Marja offensive

In early February Coalition and Afghan forces began highly visible plans for an offensive, codenamed Operation Moshtarak, on the Taliban stronghold near the village of Marja.^[213] It began on 13 February and, according to US and Afghan officials, was the first operation where Afghan forces led the coalition.^[214] The offensive involves 15,000 US, British and Afghan troops. It is the biggest joint operation since the 2001 invasion that ousted the Taliban. The troops are fighting over an area of less than 100 square miles (260 km²), with a population of 80,000.^[215]



U.S. Marines with Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment return fire on Taliban forces in Marjeh in February 2010

Troop surge

Deployment of additional US troops continued in early 2010, with 9,000 of the planned 30,000 in place before the end of March and another 18,000 expected by June, with the 101st Airborne Division as the main effort. The Pentagon anticipates that US troops in Afghanistan will outnumber those in Iraq for the first time since 2003.^[216]

The CIA from a request by General Stanley McChrystal, the commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, is planning to increase teams of operatives, including their elite paramilitary officers from Special Activities Division (SAD), with U.S. military special operations forces. This combination worked well in Iraq and is largely credited with the success of that surge.^[217] The CIA is also increasing its campaign using Hellfire missile strikes on [Al-Qaeda in Pakistan. The number of strikes in 2010, 115, more than doubled the 50 drone attacks that occurred in 2009.^[218]

The surge in troops also meant a sixfold increase in Special Forces operations.^[219] There were 700 air strikes in September 2010, alone versus 257 in all of 2009. From July 2010 to October 2010, 300 Taliban commanders and 800 foot soldiers were killed.^[220] Hundreds more insurgent leaders were killed or captured as 2010 came to a close.^[219] General David Petraeus characterized the damage Special Forces were inflicting on the insurgents this way: "We've got our teeth in the enemy's jugular now, and we're not going to let go."^[221]

The CIA created what would be called Counter-terrorism Pursuit Teams (CTPT) at the beginning of the war.^[222]^[223] This force grew to over 3,000 soldiers by 2010 and is considered one of the "best Afghan fighting forces".^[223] According to Woodward book "Obama's War", Firebase Lilley as one of the nerve centers for the covert war conducted by the CIA's SAD.^[223] These units have not only been highly effective in operations against the Taliban and al-Qa'ida forces in Afghanistan,^[224] but have expanded their operations into Pakistan.^[225] They were also important factors in both the "counterterrorism plus" and the full "counterinsurgency" options discussed by the Obama administration in the December 2010 review.^[226]

Taliban offensive

The Taliban announced an offensive for the spring and launched several attacks against ISAF and Afghan government forces. Attacks include a car bomb against a NATO convoy in Kabul which killed 18 people including six NATO soldiers and separate attacks against two of the largest ISAF bases in Afghanistan, Bagram and Kandahar Air Bases.^[227] ^[228] Overall, 2010 saw the most insurgent attacks of any year since the war began, peaking in September at more than 1,500. Insurgent operations increased "dramatically" in two-thirds of Afghan provinces.^[229]

Wikileaks disclosure

On July 25, 2010, the release of 391,832 classified documents from the Wikileaks organization was made public. The documents cover U.S. military incident and intelligence reports from January 2004 to December 2009.^[230] Some of these documents included sanitised, and "covered up", accounts of civilian casualties caused by Coalition Forces. The reports also included many references to other incidents involving civilian casualties like the Kunduz airstrike and Nangar Khel incident.^[231]

The leaked documents also contain reports of Pakistan collusion with the Taliban. According to *Der Spiegel*, "the documents clearly show that the Pakistani intelligence agency Inter-Services Intelligence (usually known as the ISI) is the most important accomplice the Taliban has outside of Afghanistan."^[232] *The New York Times* was especially alarmed by the level of collusion with the Taliban, having concluded that Pakistan "allows representatives of its spy



U.S. Marines with Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) destroy an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) cache in Southern Shorsurak, Helmand province in June 2010.

service to meet directly with the Taliban in secret strategy sessions to organize networks of militant groups that fight against American soldiers in Afghanistan, and even hatch plots to assassinate Afghan leaders." *The Guardian*, however, did not think there was "a convincing smoking gun" for complicity between Pakistan intelligence services and the Taliban.^[233]

Kandahar offensive

A U.S. and Afghan military offensive, called Operation Hamkari, focusing on the Afghan province of Kandahar was launched soon after the Muslim holiday of Ramadan, which ended September 10. The Kandahar offensive was originally planned to be launched during July, but was delayed for further preparations.^[234] The offensive did not begin as one specific operation, but rather a series of operations in Kandahar City and its surrounding districts throughout the late summer and fall in 2010. Places where operations were conducted included Malajat, Zhari, Arghandab and the Horn of Panjwayi. Operations conducted in 2010 is credited with putting severe pressure on insurgent operations and increasing security in some key areas such as in Panjwayi. Unlike operations of previous years, Operation Hamkari featured the extensive use of Afghan National Security Forces, including the Afghan Border Police (ABP), led by Spin Boldak ABP Commander Gen. Abdul Razziq.

Operation Bawaar was the Canadian aspect of the 2010 Kandahar offensive. It involved the hold and build in the district of Zangabad as well as the Ground Line of Communication (GLOC) project to Mushan - all in an area known as the Horn of Panjwai.

Pakistan and U.S. tensions

Tensions between Pakistan and the U.S. were heightened in late September after several Pakistan Frontier Corps soldiers were killed and wounded. The troops were attacked by a U.S. piloted aircraft that was pursuing Taliban forces near the Afghan-Pakistan border but for unknown reasons opened fire on two different Pakistan border posts. In retaliation for the strike, Pakistan closed the Torkham ground border crossing to NATO supply convoys for an unspecified period. This incident followed the recent release of a video allegedly showing uniformed Pakistan soldiers executing unarmed civilians.^[235] After the Torkham border closing, the Pakistani Taliban attacked the NATO convoys carrying supplies, killing several of the drivers and destroying around 100 tankers.^[236]

Kill team allegations

Allegations surfaced in September about a group of U.S. Army soldiers who allegedly engaged in random killing of Afghan civilians. They are further accused of dismembering the bodies of the dead civilians and keeping bones and skulls as trophies.^[237] In December 2010, Sgt. Robert Stevens pleaded guilty for firing at unarmed Afghan civilians (who escaped unhurt). As part of his plea bargain, he was sentenced to 9 months in exchange for testifying against 11 soldiers, some of whom face murder charges.^[238]

Raids on Taliban leaders

Beginning in May, 2010 NATO special forces began to concentrate on surgical operations to capture or kill specific Taliban leaders. As of March 2011, according to the US military, the operations had resulted in the capture or killing of more than 900 low and mid-level Taliban commanders. The effectiveness of the operations in defeating the Taliban was not yet known.^[239]

2011: U.S. and NATO Drawdown

Further information: 2011 in Afghanistan

Death of Osama bin Laden

On May 1, 2011, US officials announced that al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was assassinated in a Special Operation to kill or capture Osama Bin Laden, conducted by the CIA and United States Navy SEALs (under the direction of President Obama), in Pakistan. Crowds gathered outside the White House in Washington, DC, chanting "USA, USA" after the news emerged, and President Barack Obama addressed the nation and the world from the East Room of the White House to tell the world of the operation.^[240]

Battle of Kandahar

The Battle of Kandahar was part of an offensive named after the Battle of Bad'r that took place on March 13, 624, between Medina and Mecca. The Battle followed an announcement, April 30, 2011, that Taliban would launch their Spring offensive throughout the country.^[241]

On May 7, 2011, the Taliban launched a major offensive on Government buildings in Kandahar. Around 12:30 PM local time, the Taliban unleashed a major assault on government buildings throughout the city. The Taliban said their goal was to take control of Kandahar city. At least eight locations were attacked: the governor's compound, the mayor's office, the NDS headquarters, three police stations and two high schools.^[242]

The battle continued onto a second day, May 8, 2011. The BBC's Bilal Sarwary called it

"the worst attack in Kandahar province since the fall of the Taliban government in 2001, and a embarrassment for the Western-backed Afghan government."^[243]

US Chopper Crash

On August 6, 2011, Taliban fighters shot down a US Chinook helicopter which caused the death of 30 U.S Soldiers, including 17 Navy Seals who were part of unit Seal Team Six. It was the same unit who allegedly killed Osama Bin Laden, although none of the deceased partook in the operation.^[244] Several Afghan troops were also killed.

Withdrawal

On June 6, White House officials claimed that President Obama would make a decision on troop withdrawal "soon".^[245] Withdrawals are currently scheduled to start in July, with the last troops leaving in 2014. On June 7, 2011, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee Carl Levin remarked that he wanted "at least 15,000 troops leaving this year".^[246] On June 22, President Obama addressed the nation from the White House and announced that 10,000 troops would be withdrawn by the end of 2011 and an additional 23,000 troops will leave the country by the summer of 2012.^[17] In July 2011 Canada withdrew all of its combat troops, and has transitioned to a training role.

Following suit, other NATO countries announced reductions in troop numbers. The United Kingdom has stated that it will gradually start withdrawing some of its troops, however it has not yet specified numbers or dates.^[247] France has announced that it would withdraw roughly 1,000 soldiers by the end of 2012, with 3,000 soldiers remaining in Afghanistan at that point. Several hundreds would gradually come back at the end of 2011 and in the beginning of 2012, when the Afghan National Army takes control of the Surobi district. The remaining troops will continue to operate in Kapisa, and their complete withdrawal is expected by the end of 2014 or earlier if the security in this district is considered good enough.^{[248] [249] [250]}

Belgium announced they would withdraw half of their force starting January 2012.^[251] Norway announced it had started a withdrawal of its near 500 troops, and would be completely out of Afghanistan by 2014.^[252] Equally, the Spanish Prime Minister has announced the withdrawal of troops beginning in 2012 with a target of up to 40 percent of the current force withdrawing by the end of the first half of 2013, and complete withdrawal by 2014.^[253]

Risk of a failed state

In a 2008 interview, the then-head U.S. Central Command General David H. Petraeus, insisted that the Taliban were gaining strength. He cited the recent uptick in attacks in Afghanistan and in neighboring Pakistan. Petraeus also insisted that the challenges faced in Afghanistan are more complicated than the ones that were faced in Iraq during his tour and to turn around the recent events this would require removing militant sanctuaries and strongholds, which are widespread inside Afghanistan.^[254]

Observers also have argued that the mission in Afghanistan is hampered by a lack of agreement on objectives, a lack of resources, lack of coordination, too much focus on the central government at the expense of local and provincial governments, and too much focus on Afghanistan instead of the region.^[255]

In November 2009, Malalai Joya, a former member of the Afghan Parliament and the author of "Raising My Voice," expressed opposition to an expansion of the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and concern about the future of her country. "Eight years ago, the U.S. and NATO — under the banner of women's rights, human rights, and democracy — occupied my country and pushed us from the frying pan into the fire. Eight years is enough to know better about the corrupt, mafia system of President Hamid Karzai. My people are crushed between two powerful enemies. From the sky, occupation forces bomb and kill civilians ... and on the ground, the Taliban and warlords continue their crimes. It is better that they leave my country; my people are that fed up. Occupation will never bring liberation, and it is impossible to bring democracy by war."^[256]



An Afghan market teems with vendors and shoppers on Feb. 4, 2009.

According to a November, 2009 UNICEF report, eight years after the U.S.-led invasion ousted the Taliban, Afghanistan is the most dangerous place in the world for a child to be born. Afghanistan has the highest infant mortality rate in the world—257 deaths per 1,000 live births, and 70 percent of the population lacks access to clean water, the agency said.^[257]

In November, 2009, Afghanistan slipped three places in Transparency International's annual index of corruption perceptions, becoming the world's second most-corrupt country ahead of just Somalia.^[258]

Dr. Abdullah stated:

"I should say that Taliban are not fighting in order to be accommodated. They are fighting in order to bring the state down. So it's a futile exercise, and it's just misleading. ... There are groups that will fight to the death. Whether we like to talk to them or we don't like to talk to them, they will continue to fight. So, for them, I don't think that we have a way forward with talks or negotiations or contacts or anything as such. Then we have to be prepared to tackle and deal with them militarily. In terms of the Taliban on the ground, there are lots of possibilities and opportunities that with the help of the people in different parts of the country, we can attract them to the peace process; provided, we create a favorable environment on this side of the line."^[259]

Pakistan is playing a central role in Afghanistan. A 2010 report published by the London School of Economics says that Pakistan's ISI has an "official policy" of support to the Taliban. The ISI provides funding and training to the Taliban.^[260] "Pakistan appears to be playing a double-game of astonishing magnitude," the report states.^[260] Amrullah Saleh, former director of Afghanistan's intelligence service, criticised:

"We talk about all these proxies [Taliban, Haqqanis] but not the master of proxies, which is the Pakistan army. The question is what does Pakistan's army want to achieve ...? They want to gain influence in the region."^[261]

About the presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan he stated:

"[T]hey fight for the U.S. national interest but ... without them we will face massacre and disaster and God knows what type of a future Afghanistan will have."^[261] (see video ^[262])

Capacity of Afghan security forces

Further information: Afghan National Army#Current status

The plan to transfer security responsibility to Afghan forces is the centerpiece of U.S. President Barack Obama's revised Afghanistan strategy.^[263] Current U.S. policy calls for boosting the Afghan National Army to 134,000 soldiers by October, 2010. By May 2010 the Afghan Army had accomplished this interim goal and was on track to reach its ultimate number of 171,000 by 2011.^[264] This increase in Afghan troops would allow the U.S. to begin withdrawing American forces in July, 2011, as now planned.^[265] The transfer of security responsibilities cannot happen unless the Afghan government and the coalition can recruit, train and retain soldiers.^[263]

At present, the Afghan National Army has severely limited fighting capacity.^[266] Even the best Afghan units lack training, discipline and adequate reinforcements. In one new unit in Baghlan Province, soldiers have been found cowering in ditches rather than fighting.^[267] Some are suspected of collaborating with the Taliban against the Americans.^[266] "They don't have the basics, so they lay down," said Capt. Michael Bell, who is one of a team of U.S. and Hungarian mentors tasked with training Afghan soldiers. "I ran around for an hour trying to get them to shoot, getting fired on. I couldn't get them to shoot their weapons."^[266] In addition, 9 out of 10 soldiers in the Afghan National Army cannot read.^[268]

The Afghan Army is plagued by inefficiency and endemic corruption.^[269] U.S. training efforts have been drastically slowed by the corruption, widespread illiteracy, vanishing supplies, and lack of discipline.^[270] U.S. trainers report missing vehicles, weapons and other military equipment, and outright theft of fuel provided by the U.S.^[266] Death threats have been leveled against U.S. officers who try to stop Afghan soldiers from stealing. Afghan soldiers often find improvised explosive devices and snip the command wires instead of marking them and waiting for U.S. forces to come to detonate them. The Americans say this just allows the insurgents to return and reconnect them.^[266] U.S. trainers frequently must remove the cell phones of Afghan soldiers hours before a mission for fear that the operation will be compromised.^[271] American trainers often spend large amounts of time verifying that Afghan rosters are accurate — that they are not padded with "ghosts" being "paid" by Afghan commanders who quietly collect the bogus wages.^[272]

Desertion also is a significant problem in the Afghan Army. One in every four combat soldiers quit the Afghan Army during the 12-month period ending in September 2009, according to data from the U.S. Defense Department and the Inspector General for Reconstruction in Afghanistan.^[273]

The Afghan National Police provides support to the Afghan army. Police officers in Afghanistan are largely illiterate. Approximately 17 percent of them test positive for illegal drugs. They are widely accused of demanding bribes.^[274] Attempts to build a credible Afghan police force are faltering badly, according to NATO officials, even as they acknowledge that the force will be a crucial piece of the effort to have Afghans manage their own security so American forces can begin leaving.^[275] Taliban infiltration is a constant worry; incompetence an even bigger one.^[275] A quarter of the officers quit every year, making the Afghan government's goals of substantially building up the police force even harder to achieve.^[275]

Possible long-term U.S. role and military presence

Many of the thousands of U.S. troops in Afghanistan are positioned in what experts say are large, permanent bases.^[276]

As of January 2009, hundreds of millions of dollars were being spent on permanent infrastructure for foreign military bases in Afghanistan, including a budget of \$1.6 billion for military installations at the Kandahar Air Field base, described as "a walled, multicultural military city that houses some 13,000 troops from 17 different countries – the kind of place where you can eat at a Dutch chain restaurant alongside soldiers from the Royal Netherlands Army."^[277] The Bagram Airfield, run by the U.S. military, was also expanding according to military officials, with the U.S. military buying land from Afghan locals in different places for further expansion of the base.^{[277] [278]}



A US Soldier from 91st Cavalry Regiment (Airborne) watches cattle make room for a CH-47 helicopter landing in Kunar Province.

In February 2009, The Times reported that the U.S. will build two large new military bases in southern Afghanistan.^[279] One will be built in Kandahar province near the Helmand border, at Maiwand. The other new U.S. military base will be built in Zabul, a province now largely controlled by the Taliban and criminal gangs.^[279]

Geo-strategic military build-up

The dramatic build-up of an indefinite American/American-led military presence in Afghanistan has unsettled some regional powers, including Russia. Russia has agreed to let the United States and NATO use its airspace for logistical purposes, however.^[277]

"Is it all to fight a number of Taliban – 10,000, 12,000 Taliban?" Zamir Kabulov, Russia's ambassador to Kabul, has proposed. "Maybe this infrastructure, military infrastructure, [is] not only for internal purposes but for regional also."^[277] Russia views the large and indefinite military build-up as a potential threat "because Afghanistan's geographical location is a very strategic one," Kabulov said. "It's very close to three main world basins of hydrocarbons: Persian Gulf, Caspian Sea, Central Asia."^{[277] [280] [281] [282] [283]}

Other observers have also noted that through a stronger military presence in Afghanistan, the U.S. may be seeking to strengthen its own position in the region to counter increasingly warm relations among India, China and Russia.^[284]

On November 19, 2010, the Washington Post reported that the U.S. would soon begin deploying M1 Abrams tanks in Afghanistan.^[285]

Since the 1990s, Washington has promoted a trans-Afghanistan gas pipeline.^[282] On 24 April 2008, Pakistan, India and Afghanistan signed a framework agreement to buy natural gas from Turkmenistan.^[286] The United States has tried to discourage India and Pakistan from any deal with Iran.^[281] However, on 16 March 2010 in Ankara, Iran and Pakistan signed an agreement on the Iran–Pakistan–India gas pipeline.^[287] Along with its proximity to the vast Central Asian and Caspian Sea energy sources and being in the midst of the regional powers of India, China, and Russia, Afghanistan also holds strategic significance given its border with Iran.^{[288] [289]}

In 2010, officials from the U.S. Pentagon along with American geologists have discovered nearly \$1 trillion in untapped mineral deposits all across Afghanistan.^[290] An Afghan official has said "this will become the backbone of the Afghan economy" and a memo from the Pentagon stated that Afghanistan could become the "Saudi Arabia of lithium".^[290] U.S. officials fear resource-hungry China will try to dominate the development of Afghanistan's mineral wealth.^[291]

International reactions

Public opinion in 2001

When the invasion began in October 2001, polls indicated that about 88% of Americans and about 65% of Britons backed military action in Afghanistan.^[292]

A large-scale 37-nation poll of world opinion carried out by Gallup International in late September 2001 found that large majorities in most countries favored a legal response, in the form of extradition and trial, over a military response to 9/11: Only in three countries out of the 37 surveyed – the United States, Israel, and India – did majorities favor military action in Afghanistan. In the other 34 countries surveyed, the poll found many clear majorities that favored extradition and trial instead of military action: in the United Kingdom (75%), France (67%), Switzerland (87%), Czech Republic (64%), Lithuania (83%), Panama (80%), Mexico (94%), and other countries.^{[293] [294]}

An Ipsos-Reid poll conducted between November and December 2001 showed that majorities in Canada (66%), France (60%), Germany (60%), Italy (58%), and the U.K. (65%) approved of U.S. airstrikes while majorities in Argentina (77%), China (52%), South Korea (50%), Spain (52%), and Turkey (70%) opposed them.^[295]

Development of public opinion

In a 47-nation June 2007 survey of global public opinion, the Pew Global Attitudes Project found international opposition to the war. Out of the 47 countries surveyed, 4 had a majority that favoured keeping foreign troops: the U.S. (50%), Israel (59%), Ghana (50%), and Kenya (60%).^[296] In 41 of the 47 countries, pluralities want U.S. and NATO troops out of Afghanistan as soon as possible.^[296] In 32 out of 47 countries, clear majorities wanted this war over as soon as possible. Majorities in 7 out of 12 NATO member countries say troops should be withdrawn as soon as possible.^{[296] [297]}

A 24-nation Pew Global Attitudes survey in June 2008 similarly found that majorities or pluralities in 21 of 24 countries want the U.S. and NATO to remove their troops from Afghanistan as soon as possible. Only in three out of the 24 countries – the United States (50%), Australia (60%), and Britain (48%) – did public opinion lean more toward keeping troops there until the situation has stabilized.^{[298] [299]}

Since that June 2008 global survey, however, public opinion in Australia and Britain has also diverged from that in the U.S., and a majority of Australians and Britons now want their troops to be brought home from Afghanistan. A September 2008 poll found that 56% of Australians opposed the continuation of their country's military involvement in Afghanistan, while 42% support it.^{[300] [301] [302]} A November 2008 poll found that 68% of Britons want their troops withdrawn within the next 12 months.^{[303] [304] [305]} On the contrary, in the United States, a September 2008 Pew survey found that 61% of Americans wanted U.S. troops to stay until the situation has stabilized, while 33% wanted them removed as soon as possible.^[306]

In a November 2009 Gallup poll, a record 66% of Americans said things were going badly for the U.S. in Afghanistan, up from 61% in early September. However, while public opinion was divided over Afghan troop requests, a majority of Americans continued to see a rationale for the use of military force in Afghanistan.^[307] A slight plurality of Americans favored troop increases, with 42%–47% favoring at least some troop increases to satisfy the military's requests, 39%–44% wanting reduction, and 7–9% wanting no changes in troop levels. Just 29% of Democrats favor any troop increases while 57% want to begin reducing troops. 36% of Americans approved of Obama's handling of Afghanistan, including 19% of Republicans, 31% of independents, and 54% of Democrats.^[308]

In a December 2009 Pew Research Center poll, only 32 percent of Americans favored increasing U.S. troops in Afghanistan, while 40 percent favored decreasing them. Almost half of Americans, 49 percent, believed that the U.S. should "mind its own business" internationally and let other countries get along the best they can. That figure was an increase from 30 percent who said that in December 2002.^[309]

In a April 2011 Pew Research Center poll, there was little change in the American public's views about Afghanistan, with about 50% saying that the U.S. military effort was going very well or fairly well and only 44% supporting NATO troop presence in Afghanistan. The new survey shows little change since then – 50% favor removing U.S. and NATO troops as soon as possible while 44% favor maintaining the troops in Afghanistan until the situation is stabilized.^[310]

Pentagon management of public opinion

The Pentagon may have recast and timed the release in June 2010 of old information about Afghanistan's substantial mineral wealth, including billions of dollars worth of copper, lithium, iron and gold reserves, as part of a public relations campaign aimed at garnering the waning support of the US public for the war. The decades' old Soviet geological surveys showing vast mineral riches of Afghanistan were known to US officials years ago.^{[311] [312]} The release of the story in June 2010 to the New York Times by the Pentagon appeared to many observers to be part of an effort to buy additional time for the US counterinsurgency.^[312]

Afghan opinions

Recent polls of Afghans have found strong opposition to the Taliban and significant, albeit diminished support of the American military presence. Also, the idea of permanent U.S. military bases vexes many people in Afghanistan, which has a long history of resisting foreign invaders.^[289]

According to a May 2009 BBC poll, 69% of Afghans surveyed thought it was at least mostly good that the U.S. military came in to remove the Taliban – a decrease from 87% of Afghans surveyed in 2005. 24% thought it was mostly or very bad – up from 9% in 2005. The poll indicated that 63% of Afghans were at least somewhat supportive of a U.S. military presence in the country – down from 78% in 2005. Just 18% supported increasing the U.S. military's presence, while 44% favored reducing it. 90% of Afghans surveyed opposed the presence of Taliban fighters, including 70% who were strongly opposed. By an 82%–4% margin, people said they preferred the current government to Taliban rule.^[313]

In a June 2009 Gallup survey, about half of Afghan respondents felt that additional U.S. forces would help stabilize the security situation in the southern provinces. But opinions varied widely across Afghanistan at the time; residents in the troubled South were mostly mixed or uncertain, while those in the West largely disagreed that more U.S. troops would help the situation.^[314]

In December 2009, many Afghan tribal heads and local leaders from the Pashtun south and east—the heartland of the Taliban insurgency—called for U.S. troop withdrawals. "I don't think we will be able to solve our problems with military force," said Muhammad Qasim, a tribal elder from the southern province of Kandahar. "We can solve them by providing jobs and development and by using local leaders to negotiate with the Taliban."^[315] "If new troops come and are stationed in civilian areas, when they draw Taliban attacks civilians will end up being killed," said Gulbadshah Majidi, a lawmaker and close associate of Mr. Karzai. "This will only increase the distance between Afghans and their government."^[13]

In late January 2010, Afghan protesters took to the streets for three straight days and blocked traffic on a highway that links Kabul and Kandahar. The Afghans were demonstrating in response to the deaths of four men in a NATO-Afghan raid in the village of Ghazni. Ghazni residents insisted that the dead were civilians.^[316]



Afghan women wait outside a USAID-supported health care clinic.

Protests, demonstrations and rallies

Further information: Opposition to the War in Afghanistan (2001–present) and Protests against the War in Afghanistan (2001–present)

The war has repeatedly been the subject of large protests around the world starting with the large-scale demonstrations in the days leading up to the official launch of U.S. Operation Enduring Freedom under George W. Bush in October 2001 and every year since. Many protesters consider the bombing and invasion of Afghanistan to be unjustified aggression.^[317] ^[318] The deaths of thousands of Afghan civilians caused directly and indirectly by the U.S. and NATO bombing campaigns is also a major underlying focus of the protests.^[319] New organizations have arisen to oppose the war; for example, in January 2009, Brave New Foundation launched Rethink Afghanistan, a national campaign for non-violent solutions in Afghanistan built around a documentary film by director and political activist Robert Greenwald.^[320]

MoveOn.org, a public policy advocacy group that supported the presidential candidacy of Barack Obama, came out against the President's strategy.^[321] Others expressing opposition to the Obama escalation include "Peace Mom" activist Cindy Sheehan;^[322] former Marine officer and current Rep. John Murtha (D-PA),^[323] newly converted Democratic Senator Arlen Specter (D-PA),^[324] former Republican congressman, military intelligence officer and CIA officer Rob Simmons;^[325] Scott Ritter, U.N. weapons inspector in Iraq from 1991 to 1998;^[326] Christopher Preble, director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute;^[327] Graham Fuller, former CIA station chief in Kabul and former vice-chairman of the CIA's National Intelligence Council;^[328] 2008 Republican Party presidential candidate Rep. Ron Paul (R-TX),^[329] Rep. John Conyers Jr. (D-MI), the first member of the Congressional Black Caucus to endorse Obama over then-Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) for the 2008 Democratic nomination for president;^[330] Alan Khazei, co-founder of the AmeriCorps program City Year;^[331] Rabbi Arthur Waskow, whom Newsweek named one of the fifty most influential American rabbis;^[332] Ron Kovic, author of the memoir *Born on the Fourth of July*;^[333] and conservative columnist George Will.^[334]

Dozens of organizations planned (and eventually held) a national march for peace in Washington, D.C. on March 20, 2010.^[335] ^[336]

A website in relation to a society in University of Sheffield titled the Afghanistan Society works towards demonstrating Afghanistan to young students and to aid the people of Afghanistan, Afghanistan Society is a national society.

Civilian casualties

There is no single official figure for the overall number of civilians killed by the war since 2001, but estimates for specific years or periods have been published by a number of organizations.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported that 2,118 Afghan civilians were killed by armed conflict in 2008, the highest number since the end of the initial 2001 invasion. This represented an increase of about 40% over UNAMA's figure of 1,523 Afghan civilians killed in 2007.^[337]

On March 15, 2009, in an interview with Margaret Warner of *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, General David D. McKiernan, then commander of all foreign military forces in Afghanistan, claimed that 80% of civilian casualties in Afghanistan were caused by the Taliban.

He added that "by the very nature of an insurgency", it "mixes in on purpose with the civilian population."^[338] In contrast to that, UNAMA attributed 55% of the civilian deaths it tracked in 2008 to anti-government forces, 39% to international-led military forces, while the remaining 6% could not be attributed because they died in crossfire or



Victims' of the Narang night raid that killed at least 10 Afghan civilians, including eight schoolchildren.

were killed by unexploded ordnance, for example.^[337]

On May 11, 2009, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates abruptly replaced McKiernan with U.S. Army General Stanley A. McChrystal as the new U.S. commander of all foreign military forces in Afghanistan.^[339] One of General McChrystal's first announcements was a sharp restriction on the use of airstrikes to reduce civilian casualties. Afghan leaders have long pleaded that foreign troops end airstrikes and nighttime raids of Afghan homes.^[340]

According to a report by the United Nations, the Taliban were responsible for 76 % of civilian casualties in Afghanistan in 2009.^[6] The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIGRC) called the Taliban's terrorism against the Afghan civilian population a war crime.^[7]

Very few people in Afghanistan have been unaffected by the armed conflict there. Those with direct personal experience make up 60% of the population, and most others also report suffering a range of serious hardships. In total, almost everyone (96%) has been affected in some way – either personally or due to the wider consequences of armed conflict.^[341]

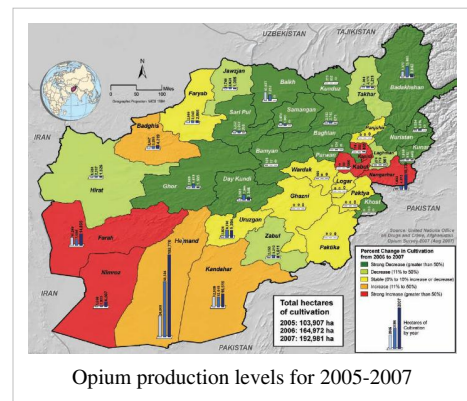
The issue of civilian casualties is recognized as a problem at the highest levels of ISAF command. In a September 2009 report, Gen. Stanley McChrystal wrote "Civilian casualties and collateral damage to homes and property resulting from an over-reliance on firepower and force protection have severely damaged ISAF's legitimacy in the eyes of the Afghan people."^[342] On September 9, 2010, it was revealed that 12 US soldiers face trial over a secret kill team that allegedly killed Afghan civilians at random and collected their fingers as trophies. 5 of the soldiers are charged with murdering 3 Afghan men who were allegedly killed for sport in separate attacks this year. 7 other soldiers are accused of covering up the killings as well as a violent assault on a new recruit who exposed the murders when he reported other abuses, including members of the unit smoking hashish stolen from civilians. The Army Times reported that a least one of the soldiers collected the fingers of the victims as souvenirs and that some of them posed for photographs with the bodies. *The Guardian* newspaper has described the event as "one of the most serious accusations of war crimes to emerge from the Afghan conflict...". Andrew Holmes, Michael Wagnon, Jeremy Morlock and Adam Winfield are four of the five Stryker soldiers who face murder charges.^[343] The fifth soldier is Staff Sgt. Calvin Gibbs who has been described as the ringleader.^[344]

A UN report in June stated that 2,777 civilians were known to have been killed in 2010, with insurgents being responsible for three-quarters of the deaths.^[345] Another United Nations report issued in July 2011 said "1,462 non-combatants died" in the first six months of 2011, with insurgents being responsible for 80 per cent of the deaths.^[346] A coalition report in June 2011 stated that insurgents were responsible for 85% of civilian deaths.^[347]

Drug trade

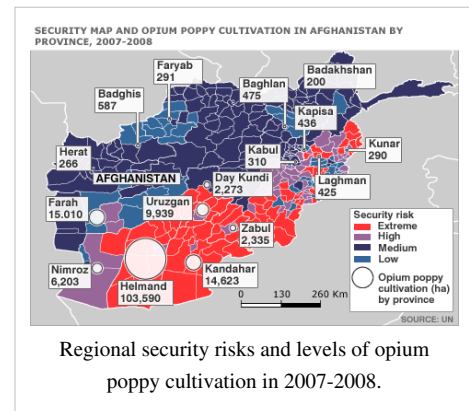
Further information: Opium production in Afghanistan

In 2000, the Taliban had issued a ban on opium production, which led to reductions in Pashtun Mafia opium production by as much as 90%.^[348] Soon after the 2001 U.S. led invasion of Afghanistan, however, opium production increased markedly.^[349] By 2005, Afghanistan had regained its position as the world's #1 opium producer and was producing 90% of the world's opium, most of which is processed into heroin and sold in Europe and Russia.^[350] In 2009, the BBC reported that "UN findings say an opium market worth \$65bn (£39bn) funds global terrorism, caters to 15 million addicts, and kills 100,000 people every year."^[351]



While U.S. and allied efforts to combat the drug trade have been stepped up, the effort is hampered by the fact that many suspected drug traffickers are now top officials in the Karzai government.^[350] Recent estimates by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimate that 52% of the nation's GDP, amounting to \$2.7 billion annually, is generated by the drug trade.^[352] The rise in production has been linked to the deteriorating security situation, as production is markedly lower in areas with stable security.^[353]

The extermination of the poppy crops is not seen as a viable option because the sale of poppies constitutes the livelihood of Afghanistan's rural farmers. Some 3.3 million Afghans are involved in producing opium.^[354] Opium is more profitable than wheat and destroying opium fields could possibly lead to discontent or unrest among the indigent population.^[355] Several alternatives to poppy eradication have been proposed, including controlled opium licensing for poppy for medicine projects.



Human rights abuses

There have been multiple accounts of human rights violations in Afghanistan.^[356] The fallout of the U.S. led invasion, including a resurgence in Taliban forces, record-high drug production, and re-armed warlords, has led to a threat to the well-being and rights of hundreds of thousands of innocent Afghan citizens, according to Human Rights Watch.^[357]

History of human rights abuses in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has suffered extensive human rights violations over the last twenty years. The subsequent war between foreign-backed militia factions brought extensive abuses by the armed factions vying for power.^[358]

The Taliban who ruled Afghanistan for five years from September 1996 until the U.S. attacks in 2001 were notorious for their human rights abuses against women.^[359] They also committed massacres compared by U.N. officials to the ethnic cleansing that happened in Bosnia in the 1990s.^{[38] [39]} According to a 55-page report by the United Nations, the Taliban, while trying to consolidate control over northern and western Afghanistan, committed systematic massacres against civilians.^{[38] [39]} U.N. officials stated that there had been "15 massacres" between 1996 and 2001.^{[38] [39]} They also said that "[t]hese have been highly systematic and they all lead back to the [Taliban] Ministry of Defense or to Mullah Omar himself."^{[38] [39]} The Taliban especially targeted people of Shia religious or Hazara ethnic background.^{[38] [39]} Upon taking Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998, about 4,000 civilians were executed by the Taliban and many more reported tortured.^{[40] [41]} The documents also reveal the role of Arab and Pakistani support troops in these killings.^{[38] [39]} Bin Laden's so-called 055 Brigade was responsible for mass-killings of Afghan civilians.^[42] The report by the United Nations quotes eyewitnesses in many villages describing Arab fighters carrying long knives used for slitting throats and skinning people.^{[38] [39]}

In Afghanistan women and girls today suffer high levels of violence and discrimination and have poor access to justice and education, Human Rights Watch concluded in a December, 2009 report.^[360] One recent nationwide survey of levels of violence against Afghan women found that 52 percent of respondents experienced physical violence, and 17 percent reported sexual violence. Yet because of social and legal obstacles to accessing justice, few women and girls report violence to the authorities. These barriers are particularly formidable in rape cases.^[361] UNICEF estimates that more than 80 percent of females lack access to education centers.^[362] Female literacy is 10%.^[362]

Taliban

According to a report by the United Nations, the Taliban were responsible for 76 % of civilian casualties in Afghanistan in 2009.^[6] The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIGRC) called the Taliban's terrorism against the Afghan civilian population a war crime.^[7] Religious leaders condemned Taliban terrorist attacks and said these kinds of attacks are against Islamic ethics.^[7]

According to Amnesty International, the Taliban commit war crimes by targeting civilians, including killing teachers, abducting aid workers and burning school buildings. Amnesty International said that up to 756 civilians were killed in 2006 by bombs, mostly on roads or carried by suicide attackers belonging to the Taliban.^[363]

During the conflict, NATO has alleged that the Taliban have used civilians as human shields. As an example, NATO pointed to the victims of NATO air strikes in Farah province in May 2009, during which the Afghan government claims up to 150 civilians were killed. NATO stated that it had evidence that the Taliban forced civilians into buildings likely to be targeted by NATO aircraft involved in the battle. US Lieutenant Colonel Greg Julian, a spokesman for General David D. McKiernan, NATO's Afghanistan commander, said of the Taliban's tactics, "This was a deliberate plan by the Taliban to create a civilian casualty crisis. These were not human shields; these were human sacrifices. We have intelligence that points to this."^[364] However NATO has so far not been able to provide this intelligence.

The increase in Taliban power has also led to increased human rights violations against women in Afghanistan, according to the U.S. State Department.^[365]

Elections During Combat

Several elections have been held in Afghanistan since 2001. The most recent election was held September 18, 2010, for the Afghan Parliament with a reported 2,499 candidates competing for 250 seats. During the elections^[366] the Taliban attacked many of those involved, killing 11 civilians and 3 Afghan National Policemen in over 300 attacks on the polls.^[367] The low death toll at the hands of the Taliban can be attributed to stepped up operations specifically targeting the leaders of insurgents planning attacks in the days leading up to the elections.^[368]^[369] which captured hundreds of insurgents and explosives. Turnout at election was only 40%.

Former Afghan warlords

Former Afghan warlords and political strongmen supported by the US during the ousting of the Taliban were responsible for numerous human rights violations in 2003 including kidnapping, rape, robbery, and extortion.^[370]

Controversy over torture

In March 2002, ABC News claimed top officials at the CIA authorized controversial, harsh interrogation techniques.^[371] The possible interrogation techniques included shaking and slapping, shackling prisoners in a standing position, keeping the prisoner in a cold cell and dousing them with water, and water boarding.^[371] A United Nations study in 2011 reported on interviews with 379 detainees. It found those held by police or intelligence services were subjected to beatings, removal of toenails and electric shocks.^[372]



A member of the Taliban's religious police beats a woman in Kabul on August 26, 2001.

White phosphorus use

White phosphorus has been condemned by human rights organizations as cruel and inhumane because it causes severe burns. There are cases that have been confirmed of white phosphorus burns on the bodies of civilians wounded in Afghanistan caused by clashes between U.S. and Taliban forces near Bagram. The United States claims at least 44 instances in which militants have used white phosphorus in weapons or attacks.^[373] In May 2009, Colonel Gregory Julian, a spokesman for General David McKiernan, the overall commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, confirmed that Western military forces in Afghanistan use white phosphorus to illuminate targets or as an incendiary to destroy bunkers and enemy equipment.^[374]^[375] US forces used white phosphorus to screen a retreat in the Battle of Ganjgal when regular smoke munitions were not available.^[376] The Afghan government later launched an investigation into the use of white phosphorus munitions.^[377]

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- Troop Levels in Afghanistan Since 2001 (<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/10/01/world/middleeast/afghanistan-policy.html?ref=world>) – interactive map by *The New York Times*
- Afghanistan Conflict Monitor (<http://www.afghanconflictmonitor.org/>)
- Rule of Law in Armed Conflicts Project: Afghanistan (http://www.adh-geneva.ch/RULAC/state.php?id_state=1)
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