Part III: Afghanistan and Pakistan After 9/11/2001

In the weeks following the September 11 attacks, the United States confirmed that Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network was responsible for the violence. President Bush demanded that the Taliban hand over bin Laden and dismantle al Qaeda.

The Taliban refused to meet the conditions of the United States, although it claimed it would put bin Laden on trial if offered conclusive evidence of his guilt. The U.S. Congress authorized the use of force against those responsible for the attacks.

The international response to the attacks was largely unified and strong. The nineteen members of the United States' most important military alliance, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), declared that the attacks of September 11 amounted to an attack on all NATO members. The UN Security Council passed a resolution to use all means necessary against terrorists. The United States had the support of its close allies and the backing of the UN to use military force in Afghanistan.

The United States quickly reached agreements with all of Afghanistan's neighbors, including Iran and the authoritarian governments in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Pakistan, to ensure cooperation in the planned military campaign.

Osama bin Laden incorrectly predicted the U.S. response. He believed that the United States was a weakening superpower, as shown by its withdrawals from Lebanon in 1983 and Somalia in 1993 after the deaths of U.S. soldiers. He thought that the likely U.S. response would be a missile attack or even withdrawal from the Middle East. Just as he and the *mujahideen* had evaded and defeated the Soviet Union in the 1980s, bin Laden believed that he would remain beyond the reach of the United States in Afghanistan.

The Overthrow of the Taliban

On October 7, 2001, U.S. and British forces began bombing strategic locations in Afghanistan. Operation Enduring Freedom aimed to topple the Taliban and destroy al Qaeda networks in the country. Rather than deploy high numbers of U.S. troops, the U.S. military relied on the Northern Alliance and other local anti-Taliban groups to do the on-the-ground fighting. In addition, the United States paid off warlords across the country to guarantee their cooperation.

Three hundred U.S. troops and one hundred CIA officers in Afghanistan directed U.S. bombers from the ground. The bombing quickly weakened Taliban positions. The United States and its Afghan allies gained a foothold in the north of the country within a matter of weeks. Although U.S. officials wanted to avoid toppling the Taliban government until a new, UN-backed government was in place, the Taliban unexpectedly fled Kabul on November 13, 2001.

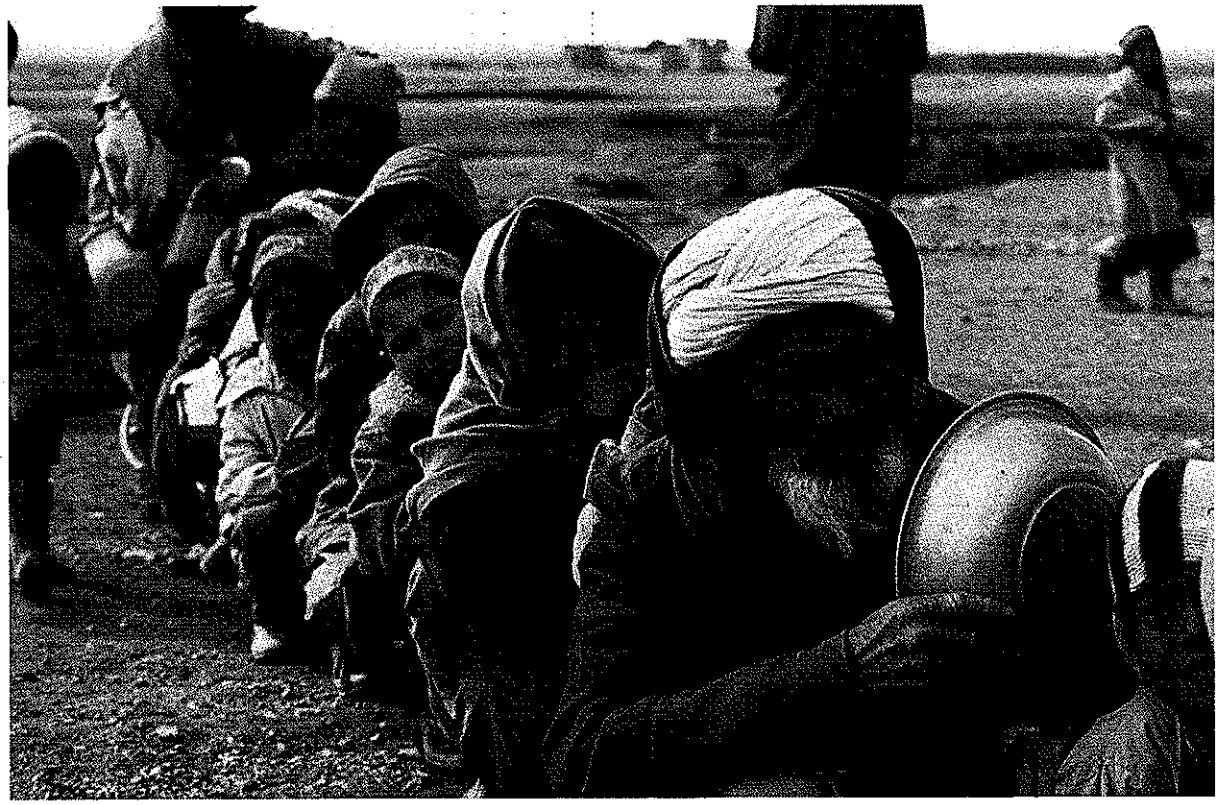
As the Taliban position grew increasingly weak, many Afghan Taliban fighters deserted, often joining the other side. The Taliban needed to rely on foreign fighters to reinforce their numbers. More than nine thousand fighters joined the Taliban from Pakistan, while thousands more came from Uzbekistan and other Arab countries. U.S. and Afghan forces drove the Taliban from the southern city of Qandahar, their last stronghold, in December 2001.

How did the war affect Afghan civilians?

Fearing U.S. bombing, thousands of Afghan civilians fled Afghanistan's cities when it became clear that the United States would lead an attack on the Taliban. Many entered Iran and Pakistan as refugees.

More than three thousand Afghan civilians died during the bombing campaign. The war led to hunger and displacement among much of Afghanistan's population. Fighting also disrupted food aid, which three million Afghans depended on even before the war.

In the hunt for al Qaeda, thousands of Afghans were captured and held in prisons. Many were held in appalling conditions, abused and even tortured by Afghan and U.S.



UN Photo. Eskinder Debebe.

Afghan refugees near Herat, Afghanistan line up for food from the United Nations, Feburary 2002.

military forces. At least eight Afghans died while in U.S. custody. The U.S. government initially claimed the international laws of war that were designed to protect civilians and combatants didn't apply to the Taliban and al Qaeda. But as information about U.S. military abuses became public, there was an outcry in the United States and around the world.

In spite of this, U.S. involvement in Afghanistan initially enjoyed the popular support of many Afghans. After decades of war and strife, many hoped that the involvement of international forces would help create security and stability.

What happened at Tora Bora?

In mid-November, Osama bin Laden and retreating Taliban and al Qaeda forces fled to a complex of caves known as Tora Bora in mountains near the Pakistan border.

Still hesitant to commit many U.S. troops to the war, the U.S. government paid three Afghan commanders to lead their militias in attacks against the al Qaeda and Taliban forces holed up in the caves. But these militias were rivals, and fought each other as much as they fought against the Taliban and al Qaeda.

About five-dozen U.S. soldiers, the bulk of them Special Operations Forces, joined the Afghan militias. These troops directed a U.S. bombing campaign against al Qaeda and Taliban positions in Tora Bora.

U.S. commanders feared that low troop numbers and a weakly secured border with Pakistan would allow al Qaeda and Taliban leaders to slip across the border during the fighting. That is exactly what happened. Although Pakistani officials claimed that they arrested more than two hundred militants at the border during the two weeks of fighting, the bulk of high-ranking Taliban and al Qaeda leaders—including Osama bin Laden—made it safely into Pakistan where they went into hiding.

How was Afghanistan's new government established?

When Bush administration officials drew up plans to topple the Taliban, they were reluctant to involve the United States in what they called "nation building," or rebuilding Afghanistan and its government. But it quickly became clear that in the vacuum left by the overthrow of the Taliban, some nation building would be necessary.

> ***"[I]t would be a useful function for the United Nations to take over the so-called 'nation building'—I would call it the stabilization of a future government—after our military mission is complete."***
>
> —President George W. Bush, October 11, 2001

In late November, the UN organized a meeting with representatives from Afghanistan's anti-Taliban groups and world leaders in Bonn, Germany to choose an interim government and a new leader for the country.

The delegates at the conference selected someone relatively unknown to be Afghanistan's interim leader—Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun leader from southern Afghanistan who had lived in Pakistan for many years and who was backed by the United States. Many believed a majority of Afghans would accept him as a leader.

In what became known as the Bonn Agreement, delegates drew up plans to establish an interim government, central bank, and supreme court. The agreement also stipulated that presidential and parliamentary elections would be held two years later to elect a permanent government.

In 2003, a group of five hundred people from all parts of Afghan society took part in a *loya jirga* (grand council) to write a new constitution. The draft drew on the 1964 constitution of King Zahir Shah, but ultimately included a president and not a king.

Presidential elections were held on October 9, 2004. Hamid Karzai was elected with 55 percent of the vote. Participation was high. More than eight million voted in the elections, nearly fifty percent of them women.

Reconstructing Afghanistan

Afghanistan was one of the poorest countries in the world before the overthrow of the Taliban. The country lacked a comprehensive road system, and the majority of the population did not have electricity, access to basic health care, or education. During the civil war of the 1990s, the national police and army disbanded and local warlords and their militias controlled the countryside. The economy was weak, with few industries or large businesses to employ Afghans. In 2001 life expectancy was forty-five years—one of the lowest in the world.

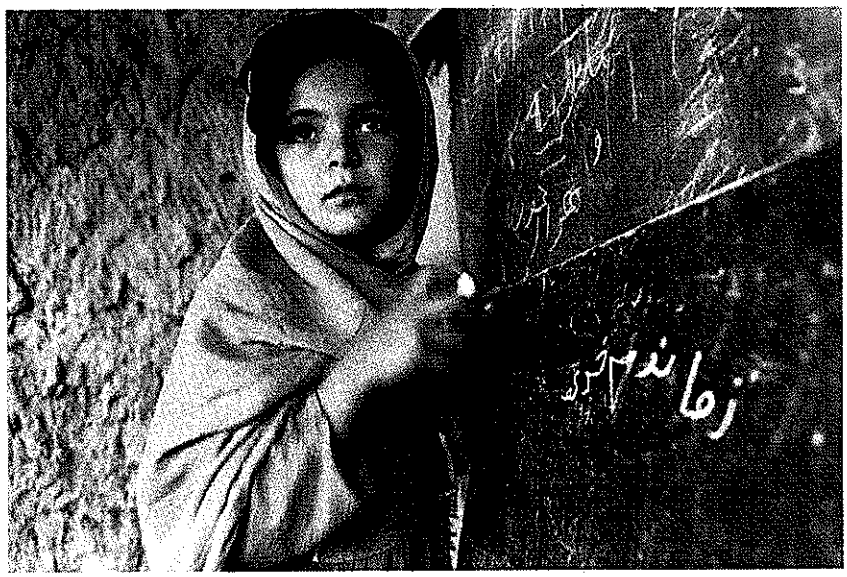
Despite the reluctance of the Bush administration to become involved in "nation building," the international community recognized that Afghans needed help establishing a government and rebuilding their economy after the invasion.

What have been some obstacles to reconstruction?

International governments and organizations pledged billions of dollars for the recovery effort, with the hope that it would stabilize Afghanistan and prevent the return of the Taliban. Ordinary Afghans had high expectations for the ways in which this reconstruction would improve their lives.

The reconstruction effort has had some successes. For example, the "Back to School" program launched in March 2002 saw millions of students return to school, many of them girls who had been unable to study under the Taliban regime.

> ***"It is the largest education program in UNICEF history and the first time we have started nationwide primary education."***
>
> —Eric Laroche, UNICEF, March 2002



UN Photo. Roger Lemoyne.

A girl studies in a community-based school in Nangarhar province. In 2007, the UN supported 3,643 such schools for over 140,000 children with no prior access to formal schools.

International donors invested heavily in health care targeted at women and children, and ensured that there was at least one hospital in every province. As security conditions improved in 2002, two of the five million Afghan refugees living in Iran and Pakistan returned home.

But overall, the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan has largely been unable to improve the living standards of most Afghans. Development projects were designed by international donors, many of whom had little knowledge of Afghanistan's history, culture, and development needs. For example, a donor might build a new school without making sure there were teachers to work there. Donors paid international organizations and foreign contractors to run their projects, which did little to strengthen the capabilities of the central government or create employment for the local population. The efforts were also underfunded, averaging $60 per person per year—far below what was needed to address the country's great development and security needs.

Why was security a problem after the overthrow of the Taliban?

Some of the difficulties of reconstruction and development were related to the insecurity that continued to plague Afghanistan. U.S. officials had tried to keep a limited U.S. military presence in Afghanistan. Initially, there were only six thousand U.S. troops. These troops were charged with hunting down the Taliban and al Qaeda, and not with providing security for the Afghan people. There were also four thousand international troops in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), but this force remained in Kabul.

Instead, to provide security to the rest of the country, the United States funded warlords and their militias, just as it had funded them to overthrow the Taliban. While this may have allowed the United States and coalition countries to keep their troop levels low, it also aggravated rivalries between leaders in different parts of the country. In addition, it put security in the hands of local leaders, rather than the central government. The warlords did not hesitate to torture, abuse, and kill captured Taliban prisoners. Many ordinary Afghans suffered at the hands of the warlords.

> ***"America has replaced the Taliban with warlords. Warlords are still on the U.S. payroll but that hasn't brought a cessation of violence. Not only is the U.S. failing to rein in the warlords, we are making them the centerpiece of our strategy."***
>
> —Senator Joseph Biden, May 17, 2002

The United States and the new Afghan government realized that they would need to train an Afghan army and police force to provide security for the Afghan people. In 2003, NATO took over the leadership of the ISAF

force and expanded operations to the whole country, not just Kabul. Provincial Reconstruction Teams, made up of NATO soldiers and civilians, fanned out across Afghanistan to provide security and assist local Afghan authorities with rebuilding infrastructure, government, and the economy.

In spite of continuing challenges, by 2005 polls showed that most Afghans felt that their country was heading in the right direction. Most Afghans held a favorable opinion of the United States and felt that their situation was better than it had been under the Taliban.

Pakistan and its Role in Afghanistan

It is impossible to look at events in Afghanistan without considering the role that Pakistan plays. Bin Laden's escape in late 2001 into Pakistan highlighted the country's complex and important role. Pakistan's ISI and military had helped bring the Taliban to power and even supported al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan because they trained militants that could help in Pakistan's confrontation with India. But after September 11, the United States demanded that Pakistan's government stop supporting the Taliban and cooperate fully with the United States to catch Osama bin Laden.

What were relations between Pakistan and the United States like just prior to September 11?

In 1999, Pakistan's military led by General Pervez Musharraf began a war against India in an attempt to reclaim the disputed region of Kashmir. When the United States began to worry that Pakistan might use its nuclear arsenal, it pressured Pakistan's democratically elected prime minister to back down.

A few months later, General Musharraf took over the government in a coup. Pakistan became a military dictatorship for the fourth time in its fifty-two year history. Musharraf had been a supporter of the Taliban and the terrorist training camps in Afghanistan, which he saw as a useful source of fighters for Pakistan's struggle with India over Kashmir. These fighters saw the conflict with India as a *jihad.* For their part, although most Pakistanis worried about the threat from India, they did not support Islamic extremism, violence, or the military dictatorship.

Before September 11, the United States pressured Pakistan's military dictatorship to resolve its differences with India peacefully, stop supporting the Taliban, and to hand over terrorists, including Osama bin Laden. Musharraf's government essentially refused.

> ***"I just want to say that there is a difference of understanding on who is a terrorist. The perceptions are different in the United States and in Pakistan, in the West and what we understand is terrorism."***
>
> —General Pervez Musharraf, May 2000

How did the United States gain Pakistan's cooperation after September 11?

Immediately after September 11, the United States warned Pakistan that it would not only pursue al Qaeda, but also punish any countries that aided terrorists. The United States demanded that Pakistan end its support for the Taliban and meet a list of demands for cooperation. These included allowing the United States to use Pakistan's military bases, ending support for the Taliban and al Qaeda, and stopping Pakistani fighters from crossing the border into Afghanistan. U.S. leaders considered using military force against Pakistan if it did not comply.

> ***"We were on the borderline of being or not being declared a terrorist state—in that situation, what would happen to the Kashmir cause?"***
>
> —General Pervez Musharraf, November 27, 2001

Musharraf believed that Pakistan could not resist the United States given the circumstances, but members of the military and the ISI disagreed. They had invested a great deal to strengthen the Taliban and foster Islamic

extremist groups for the struggle in Kashmir. Many were reminded of the United States' short-lived interest in Afghanistan and Pakistan during the Cold War. They feared that the United States would turn its back on the region again someday and that Pakistan would be weakened in its struggle against India.

Outside of the military government, many people in Pakistan hoped that after September 11, Pakistan's army and the ISI would end their support of Islamist extremist groups, both in Afghanistan and in Kashmir. They also hoped that the government would take control of the *madrassas* in Pakistan that were educating extremist militants by the thousands.

To make its demands more palatable, the United States agreed to provide military and financial assistance. When Pakistan agreed to meet the list of U.S. demands, the United States began to provide billions of dollars of aid. Most of this would go to strengthening Pakistan's military. President Bush called Musharraf an important ally in the "global war on terror."

> ***"For years U.S. officials and diplomats...had hectored soldier-politicians such as Pervez Musharraf about human rights and representative government. Of course I believed in these issues with equal conviction, but at this point in history we needed to establish priorities. Stopping al Qaeda was such a priority, and Musharraf was willing to help."***
>
> —U.S. General Tommy Franks, 2004

U.S. support of Musharraf and the military government angered people in Pakistan. They saw President Bush's calls for freedom and democracy around the world as hypocritical, because in the pursuit of terrorists, the United States was willing to support Pakistan's repressive military regime.

How did tensions between India and Pakistan increase?

In the months after September 11, violence by Pakistani militant groups increased in India. On December 13, 2001, a group of five Pakistanis from an ISI-supported terrorist organization attacked the Indian parliament, killing fourteen people before they were shot and killed by security forces. The Indian government and people called it an attack on democracy. India moved its army to the border of Pakistan. India and Pakistan teetered on the brink of war. U.S. officials were reluctant to criticize Musharraf and his government because of their role as an ally against terrorism. This angered the Indian government, which saw the United States supporting an undemocratic Pakistani government that sponsored terrorism.

U.S. officials grew very concerned about the possibility of a war between these two nuclear powers. President Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell put pressure on Pakistan to stop the attacks within India and renounce terrorism. They also worked hard to decrease tensions between the countries—tensions that had increased when cooperation between the United States and Pakistan began after September 11.

Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons

In May 1998, Pakistan conducted its first nuclear tests, a step it saw as essential to counter India's nuclear weapons program. Evidence has emerged that Pakistani scientists, led by a man named A.Q. Khan, sold the equipment and knowledge needed to produce nuclear weapons to Iran, North Korea, and Libya. While some scientists may have acted without the government's knowledge, it is likely that the Pakistani government authorized much of this activity. Another worry is that weapons may fall into the hands of extremists in Pakistan. The United States has provided Pakistan with more than $100 million to help secure its nuclear weapons.

Musharraf had promised to cooperate with U.S. officials, but portions of the ISI and military were reluctant to abandon their relationships with the Taliban, al Qaeda, and other terrorist groups.

Although Pakistan had a role in creating the Taliban, controlling them has not been an easy task. Thousands of Taliban members streamed into Pakistan in the months after September 11 to escape U.S. and allied forces. They brought their brand of violent extremism with them, creating difficulties for Pakistan's government. Musharraf survived two assassination attempts by extremists in December 2003.

The Taliban Return

The Taliban were able to rebuild their strength in the relatively safe haven they found in Pakistan. In late 2001, many of the surviving members of the Taliban and al Qaeda fled Afghanistan into a northwestern part of Pakistan known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Pakistan's government did not have the same authority there as it did in the rest of the country. This was because rules established by the British Empire in 1901 still governed the area, an arrangement that limited the central government's control.

The arrival of thousands of Taliban fighters brought problems for the residents of the region. The Taliban established bases and used violence to impose their extremist religious beliefs on locals. Hundreds of local leaders were murdered by the Taliban in a campaign designed to intimidate the population. The Taliban used its new bases in the FATA and other border regions to organize attacks against U.S. and international forces in Afghanistan.

With the knowledge and support of the Taliban, al Qaeda also set up shop in the FATA. Terrorist attacks in the cities of Madrid, London, and Bali that killed and injured thousands were planned in this region.

As security deteriorated in both countries, relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan grew very tense. Pakistan's government, for its part, was both infuriated and concerned about India's aid to Afghanistan. Afghan President Hamid Karzai called on Musharraf and the ISI

The Iraq War

Even as U.S. forces entered Afghanistan in late 2001, the Bush adminstration began to plan an invasion of Iraq. In January 2002, four months after the attacks of September 11, President George W. Bush identified Iraq as a member of an "axis of evil" that threatened the United States. Members of the Bush administration saw Iraq as part of a "global war on terror." President Bush warned that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and supported terrorism.

In 2003, U.S. forces invaded Iraq and toppled Saddam Hussein's government, which sparked an insurgency against U.S. forces. The United States shifted much of its resources and attention from Afghanistan to Iraq. At the end of 2005 as violence increased in Iraq, U.S. officials cut the U.S. budget for Afghanistan by 38 percent, and the Department of Defense announced that it would cut U.S troops levels in Afghanistan and replace them with NATO forces. Critics warned that the U.S. focus on Iraq would cause security problems in Afghanistan.

"Iraq was more than just a major distraction to Afghanistan. Huge resources were devoted to Iraq, which focused away from nation building Afghanistan. The billions spent in Iraq were the billions that were not spent in Afghanistan."

—Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, June 27, 2007

To this day, no WMD have been found in Iraq, and intelligence officials have been unable to confirm any collaboration between the Iraqi government and al Qaeda.

UN Photo. Jawad Jalali.

A woman in Kabul shopping with her children, September 2008.

to stop their continued support of the Taliban.

> ***"ISI operatives reportedly pay a significant number of Taliban living/operating in both Pakistan and Afghanistan to fight.... A large number of those fighting are doing so under duress as a result of pressure from ISI. The insurgency cannot survive without its sanctuary in Pakistan, which provides freedom of movement, safe havens, logistic and training facilities, a base for recruitment, communications for command and control, and a secure environment for foreign extremist groups. The sanctuary of Pakistan provides a seemingly endless supply of potential new recruits for the insurgency."***
>
> —Afghan intelligence report presented to Afghan President Karzai, June 24, 2006

Why were the Taliban able to mount an insurgency inside Afghanistan?

Sporadic Taliban attacks had been ongoing in Afghanistan since 2003 with little local support. But as conditions in the country failed to improve, some Afghans began to support the Taliban. This was particularly the case in the south, among the poorest and most neglected regions of Afghanistan. The Taliban set up courts in the regions they controlled, administering their own version of justice. While their punishments were often brutal, for many Afghans this was the only way they could get any justice at all. The local, government-run courts were corrupt and faced endless delays. In regions the Taliban controlled, crime dropped dramatically. At the same time, the Taliban—opposed to the education of girls—killed 85 teachers and students and burned down 187 schools in 2006.

How did the Taliban's ideology and tactics change?

The Taliban's ideology evolved after 2001. In exile in Pakistan, the Taliban's leaders became more closely connected with al Qaeda. Whereas in the 1990s they focused solely on Afghanistan, now they connected their struggle to wider Islamist causes, such as the jihadist struggles against Western influence in the Middle East. Where they had once banned television, they now used the Internet and DVDs to spread their message and reach a wider audience. At the same time, when they returned to Afghanistan they portrayed themselves as nationalists fighting a foreign occupation because they knew this would appeal to Afghans more than their radical Islamist ideology.

By 2006, the Taliban had also adopted new military tactics, including suicide attacks, roadside bombings, and the use of improvised explosive devises (IEDs). The Taliban and al Qaeda had seen how effective these tactics were against U.S. military forces in Iraq. In some cases, Taliban fighters even went to Iraq to train in these new, deadly methods of war. In 2006, the number of suicide attacks in Afghanistan increased 400 percent, from 27 in 2005 to 149 the following year. (There had been no history of suicide bombing in Afghanistan prior to the arrival of al Qaeda.) Similarly, the number of IED attacks more than doubled, from 783 in 2005 to 1,677 in 2006.

How did the United States and the international community respond to the Taliban insurgency?

Over the course of 2006, Taliban fighters launched attacks not only in the south but also across western and eastern provinces, with some attacks only forty miles from Kabul. U.S. and NATO forces had drastically underestimated the size and organization of Taliban forces, and the offensive caught them off guard. NATO countries were unwilling to risk high troop casualties, and so NATO forces relied on airpower to strike back against the Taliban.

NATO was further crippled by the restrictions that most contributing countries placed on their troops. For example, some troops could not attack the Taliban; others were not authorized to interfere in the drug trade. Governments had placed these restrictions on their troops as a way of making the deployment more agreeable to their citizens back home.

These restrictions created divisions among NATO countries. Some countries—the United States, Great Britain, and Canada in particular—felt that they were shouldering an unfair load of the burden in Afghanistan. The war in Afghanistan had become increasingly unpopular around the world.

Who are the Taliban Today?

It is an oversimplification to think of the Taliban as a large, unified group with identical interests and motivations. The Taliban is actually made up of an array of distinct groups and individuals with diverse motivations, and this makes defeating them militarily or pursuing a political resolution to the conflict complicated. U.S. and Afghan officials believe the Taliban is made up of four distinct types of people. There are Islamic extremists, the majority of whom are foreigners who came to the region in response to al Qaeda's call for support to the Taliban. There are also Pakistani fighters, many recruited to the training camps located throughout the FATA. In Afghanistan, unemployed youth have joined the Taliban, as have many from disaffected tribes throughout the east and south. Many of these individuals are part-time farmers and part-time fighters, and some officials believe that these last two groups—driven to support the Taliban because of their frustration with the state of the country—could be won over by job creation, education, and development. There is currently a debate about whether it is possible, or even desirable, to negotiate an end to fighting with the Taliban leadership.

U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Brian Ferguson.

Afghan soldiers destroy poppy plants on May 4, 2011. Poppies are the source of opium, a key ingredient in many narcotic pain medications as well as in the illegal drug heroin. In 2007, Afghanistan produced 93 percent of the world's heroin. The huge profits made from the drug trade have fueled corruption among government officials and Afghan security forces, hindered the development of a legal economy, and helped fund the Taliban and al Qaeda. Experts have linked the rise in the poppy industry to the failure of reconstruction. Many farmers see poppy as the only option open to them, especially as economic development has stalled.

How did the fighting affect people in Afghanistan?

The resumed fighting took a heavy toll on Afghanistan's civilian population. Eighty percent of those killed by Taliban suicide bombs were civilians. In addition, Taliban fighters often hid among local populations, making it difficult for international forces to identify them. NATO's aerial bombing campaigns caused civilian casualties to skyrocket. Many Afghans began to question the international community's commitment to Afghanistan.

By the time President Bush left office at the end of 2008, the Taliban were stronger than they had been at any time since 2001. They controlled large parts of the country, and had set up parallel governments and courts in many areas. By 2008, more U.S. soldiers were dying in Afghanistan than in Iraq.

Obama's War

In November 2008, Barack Obama was elected president of the United States. He came into office promising to reinvigorate the campaign against the Taliban and al Qaeda, which he believed had been sidetracked by the war in Iraq.

How did President Obama change U.S. policy?

President Obama pushed Afghanistan to the top of the U.S. foreign policy agenda. He emphasized the importance of focusing on the threat from al Qaeda, and linked success in Afghanistan to the stability of Pakistan.

After years of funneling money to Pakistan's military, in 2009 the United States tripled nonmilitary aid to Pakistan to $1.5 billion per year for five years. The goal is to strengthen Pakistan's economy and democratic institutions. President Obama believes that the U.S. relationship with Pakistan is a key component of the U.S. approach to Afghanistan. The Obama administration sees reducing tensions between India and Pakistan an important step to a solution in Afghanistan.

President Obama also called for additional U.S. troops to be sent to Afghanistan. These troops would train the Afghan police and military, and establish a base level of security throughout the country. The United States deployed an additional 30,000 troops over the course of 2009 and 2010, bringing the total number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan to 100,000 by August 2010.

How did a new government in Pakistan affect the region?

Pakistan also had a change of government and its own crisis. Facing increasing resistance to his autocratic government from Pakistan's

public, Musharraf had resigned and agreed to allow democratic elections. After a Pakistani militant group assassinated Benazir Bhutto, the leader of the opposition to Musharraf's party, her husband Asif Ali Zardari stepped in and became Pakistan's president in 2008. Zardari publicly challenged the ISI, saying that the group for years had been pretending to fight terror while actually supporting it. Zardari also declared that India and Pakistan did not have to be mortal enemies and proposed that Pakistan promise not to launch a first strike of nuclear weapons. These were dramatic statements. Pakistan seemed poised to begin a new relationship with India.

But relations with India were badly shaken by a sixty-hour terrorist assault in the Indian city of Mumbai later that year. In November 2008, ten terrorists from the Pakistan-based terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba killed more than 160 people in the center of Mumbai. Some believe that Pakistani extremists wanted to derail any possibility of reconciliation with India.

Violence exploded in Pakistan as well. The Taliban, with the help of al Qaeda, organized terrorist attacks in major cities throughout Pakistan. In 2009, about twenty-five thousand Pakistanis were killed or injured by militants. Hundreds of soldiers were killed and thousands more wounded in a major military offensive in the FATA against the Taliban. The fighting forced more than two million Pakistanis from their homes. Many Pakistanis have begun to see the Taliban and extremists as a serious threat to Pakistan.

What are the major challenges in Afghanistan today?

There are a number of key challenges to achieving peace and improved conditions in Afghanistan. The most pressing issues are the lack of economic development, weak democratic institutions, corruption, and insecurity.

Economic Development: Afghanistan today remains one of the poorest countries in the world. Life expectancy hovers at around forty-five years. (In comparison, life expectancy in the United States is about seventy-eight years.) Only 28 percent of Afghans can read and write. International aid and development projects have done little to improve life for the majority of Afghans.

The economy is heavily dependent on foreign aid. The United States invested more than $18 billion dollars in the country between 2001 and 2011. But the majority of this money has gone to short-term aid, rather than into long-term development projects that will lead to sustainable improvements in the standard of living.

The government has done little to spur economic growth. The country has no industry or manufacturing sectors to speak of, and it depends on importing the goods it needs from other countries. There has also been little in the way of job creation. The CIA estimates that about 35 percent of Afghan workers are unemployed. The Afghan National Workers Union puts this figure much higher, at 70 percent. Whatever the actual figure, unemployment remains a huge problem for many Afghans. In the absence of viable alternatives, the poppy economy has continued to attract many farmers and other unemployed workers.

Establishing Democracy: In 2009, Afghanistan held presidential elections. But enthusiasm was muted. Many viewed President Karzai as weak and indecisive. Support for his administration had declined both domestically and internationally. Many Afghans were frustrated with the government's inability to improve security, establish the rule of law, and fight corruption. And even though Afghan's leaders have been trying to strengthen the central goverment since the reign of Adbur Rahman (1880-1901), many Afghans turn first to local leaders and not the central government to resolve their concerns.

Early reports of the election showed Karzai facing stiff competition from Abdullah Abdullah, his former foreign minister. Amid widespread accounts of electoral fraud and cheating, both candidates claimed victory. But Karzai refused to hold a run-off, necessary in

The Drone War

One highly controversial tactic the United States has used against targets inside the country of Pakistan are missile attacks from drones. Drone is a term for what the U.S. military calls an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV). UAVs are not flown by pilots; instead they are directed by human controllers on the ground. They are equipped with powerful cameras that a controller can use to see a target. The drones carry missiles that can be fired at individuals on the ground.

Most of the drone attacks take place in the FATA. The U.S. military aims the drones at the Taliban, al Qaeda, and other extremist groups who are allied with the Taliban. The CIA obtains information from sources on the ground, electronic surveillance, and Pakistan's intelligence services to identify targets. Since 2004, drone attacks have killed between 1,300 and 2,100 militants in Pakistan.

The number of attacks increased dramatically under President Obama. In 2009, the United States launched fifty-eight attacks, more than the total number of attacks in George W. Bush's eight-year presidency. The number increased to 117 in 2010. The attacks are controversial and highlight some of the problems of the war. The United States does not acknowledge that they conduct these attacks. But it is an open secret that the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) runs the drone program, which officials claim is one of the most successful programs against al Qaeda and the Taliban. At least twelve high-level al Qaeda leaders have been killed. Supporters argue that the attacks have forced al Qaeda to operate more cautiously.

"There were many areas where we once had freedom, but now they have been lost.... We are the ones that are losing people, we are the ones facing shortages of resources. Our land is shrinking and drones are flying in the sky."

—Ustadh Ahmad Farooq, al Qaeda's media chief in Pakistan, January 23, 2011

The drone attacks are deeply unpopular in Pakistan, where 90 percent of people oppose them. One reason for their unpopularity is that civilians are often killed in drone attacks. Analysts estimate that the missile strikes have killed between three hundred and seven hundred civilians. Although the attacks are extremely unpopular with the Pakistani public, they are carried out with the private support of Pakistan's government. Many people in Pakistan are very angry with their government for allowing the United States to use these weapons in Pakistan. It is likely that the drones are launched from a secret airbase in Pakistan. Because the program is secret, the method for determining who or what is a legitimate target is unknown. Critics argue that any U.S. government program designed to kill people should receive more public scrutiny. They also think that the attacks may push more Pakistanis to join militant groups against the United States.

cases such as this where neither candidate receives more than 50 percent of the vote. After a months-long standoff, Abdullah ended his candidacy and Karzai remained president.

The international community was aware of the ballot stuffing, intimidation, and other fraud perpetrated by Karzai and others on election day. Nevertheless, hoping to avoid the potential chaos of a contested election, world leaders rallied behind Karzai and endorsed his victory in the election.

"This has been a difficult election process for Afghanistan and lessons must be learned.... Afghanistan now faces significant challenges and the new president must move swiftly to form a government that is able to command the support of both the Afghan people and the international community."

—Ban Ki-moon, secretary general of the United Nations, November 2, 2009

For their part, many Afghans question the commitment of the international community to making real, long-term improvements in Afghanistan when world leaders are willing to endorse a fraudulent election. And although they support democracy, some Afghans wonder if the model of a strong central government can be effective in Afghanistan.

Corruption: Despite pressure from the West, corruption has continued to plague Afghanistan. It has pervaded the government in the form of hugely inflated salaries, bribes, and payoffs.

Corruption has become widespread not only among government officials, but also in the police force, the court system, and among foreign contractors. In 2009, the Kabul Bank had to be bailed out when it was discovered that the bank had lent hundreds of millions of dollars to its own shareholders to fund questionable business projects abroad. In 2008, the UN reported that the Afghan Finance Ministry, the government department in charge of collecting taxes and setting the government's budget, did not know where 80 percent of its funds were going.

Corruption has become a major problem not only within the upper levels of government but also for the majority of Afghans. In a 2010 study released by the United Nations, 59 percent of Afghans cited corruption as their biggest concern, above other issues such as violence, unemployment, and poverty.

> ***"It is almost impossible to obtain a public service in Afghanistan without greasing a palm: bribing authorities is a way of life."***
>
> —Antonio Maria Costa, head of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

In a country where the average yearly income is less than $1000 per person, a culture of bribes and payoffs has made life even more difficult for many people.

President Karzai's failure to stem the corruption that runs rampant through his government has become a sticking point for Western leaders and a growing source of frustration for the Afghan people.

Insecurity: Afghans face the threat of violence on a daily basis. According to the UN, 2,777 Afghan civilians were killed in 2010, the most since the war began. While the Taliban and other insurgents caused 75 percent of these civilian deaths, NATO was responsible for 16 percent. Foreign forces have come under heavy criticism from President Karzai and Afghan civilians for the many civilian casualties that result from airstrikes. The number of U.S. and coalition military deaths each year has also continued to climb; 2010 was the deadliest year yet of the conflict.

The Taliban are responsible for most of the violence, but there are also other local and international groups that have contributed to the violence. For example, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, a militant Islamist group from neighboring Uzbekistan with ties to al Qaeda, is responsible for a number of attacks in the north. The drug trade has heightened the rivalries among competing warlords, and other local groups have led attacks against the current government and international forces in bids for power and influence.

In recent years, foreign and domestic troops have made gains against the Taliban in many areas. But foreign forces recognize that the challenge will be preserving the gains they have made and preventing the Taliban from returning and reestablishing their links in those communities.

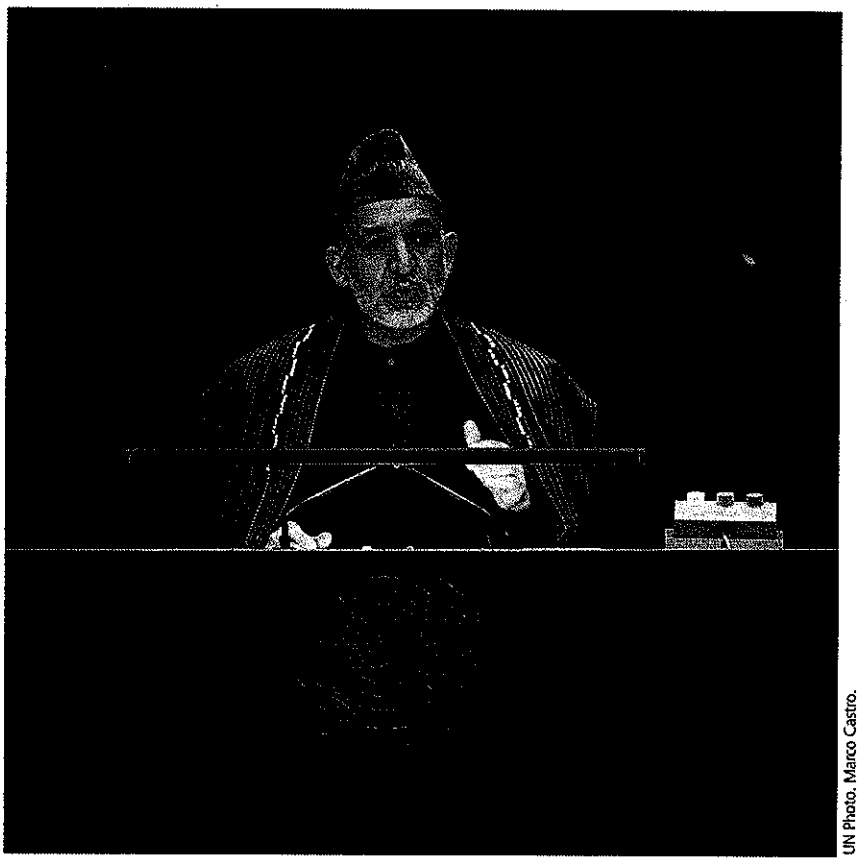
What are the plans for a U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan?

Despite the continued insecurity, Afghan and international leaders have worked to schedule a timetable for the transfer of security responsibilities from international forces to the Afghan army and national police. In June 2011, President Obama announced that the United States would withdraw ten thousand soldiers from Afghanistan by 2012. Beginning in July 2011, Afghan forces are scheduled to take responsibility for security in a number of

provinces, with full control to Afghans by 2014.

Some Afghans believe that security will improve as foreign troops withdraw and that the Taliban is only fighting because of the presence of foreign forces. Other Afghans fear that the Taliban will take advantage of this transfer of power to launch new attacks and make inroads in areas that were relatively secure.

> ***"The Taliban are saying... 'The Americans are leaving and your lives will not be spared.'"***
>
> —Hajji Kala Khan, Afghan tribal elder, June 2011



UN Photo. Marco Castro.

Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai speaks at the United Nations in New York on September 25, 2007. Karzai has grown increasingly critical of U.S. and NATO military operations in Afghanistan and has called for talks with the Taliban. The United States has serious concerns about extensive corruption in Karzai's government and amongst his family members.

There is debate about whether it may be possible to negotiate a settlement with the Taliban in which international forces could continue to pursue al Qaeda and large numbers of troops could withdraw from Afghanistan. Others believe that Taliban and al Qaeda are inextricably linked and will never negotiate a settlement with the Afghan government and its allies. Exploratory negotiations among the Afghan government, Taliban leaders, and U.S. officials were underway in 2011.

How has support for the war declined in the United States and other countries?

In June 2011, there were 130,000 troops in Afghanistan, 100,000 of them from the United States and 30,000 from the remaining forty-eight countries that make up the ISAF-NATO coalition. But support for this war, both in the United States and among coalition countries, has grown thin.

For many, the war in Iraq and a crippling worldwide economic crisis made Afghanistan the "forgotten war." In the United States, many today question the rationale for spending billions of dollars each month in Afghanistan, when the United States is struggling with economic troubles and a ballooning national debt. Some have questioned whether it is even possible to "win" in Afghanistan. Many in the international community have serious concerns about the ability of Karzai's government to tackle the mounting problems in the country today.

With waning support among populations around the world, some U.S. allies have already announced plans to reduce their troop numbers. The call for further troop reductions has increased since May 2011, when President

Obama announced that U.S. special forces had killed Osama bin Laden.

How has the killing of Osama bin Laden affected the region?

On May 1, 2011 U.S. special forces stormed a compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan and killed Osama bin Laden. Bin Laden, the mastermind of the September 11 attacks, had eluded U.S. forces for ten years.

The killing of bin Laden raised serious questions about the U.S. relationship with Pakistan. Abbottabad is less than forty miles from Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. Bin Laden's compound was one mile away from a Pakistani military academy. Many U.S. politicians have questioned how bin Laden was able to live there without detection. Others argue that this incident suggests that he was, in fact, aided by Pakistan's intelligence agency.

> ***"A lot of people on our side wonder how this could have happened without the Pakistanis knowing. If they weren't complicit, they were incompetent, so why should we bother partnering with them?"***
>
> —Daniel Markey, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, May 2011

U.S. officials worry that Pakistan's government is waging a selective battle against extremists: pursuing some, while ignoring or protecting others. Another worry is that Pakistan's government does not have full control over the actions of its army and the ISI. While Pakistan's leaders promise to cooperate with the United States—and they have in many ways—other parts of the government may not be as willing.

At the same time, many Pakistanis were angry about the U.S. raid, arguing that it violated their country's sovereignty. Although the U.S. government had been in contact with Pakistani officials, it did not get permission for U.S. forces to enter the country. This raises important issues about U.S.-Pakistan relations. Clearly, the United States chose not to inform the Pakistan government because it feared that information about the raid would somehow reach bin Laden and allow him to escape. For their part, Pakistan's government believes that the United States has no intention of treating them as an equal partner in fighting the Taliban and al Qaeda who have killed and wounded thousands of Pakistani citizens.

Many have questioned what effect the death of bin Laden will have on the strength of al Qaeda. After his death, there were reports of the Taliban fleeing Afghanistan back into Pakistan. Some experts argue that without its famous leader, al Qaeda's influence and appeal in the Muslim world will decrease. Others argue that his death could provide a rallying point, and fear that it might spark violence among al Qaeda sympathizers.

You have just read about the complex issues that affect the United States in Afghanistan. The issues raise some important questions about U.S. policy in the region. In the coming days, you will have an opportunity to consider four distinct options for U.S. policy in Afghanistan. Each of the four options that you will explore is based on a distinct set of values and beliefs. You should think of the options as a tool designed to help you better understand the contrasting strategies that people in the United States may use to craft future policy.

After you have considered the four options, you will be asked to create an option that reflects your own beliefs and opinions about where U.S. policy should be heading. You may borrow heavily from one option, combine ideas from two or three options, or take a new approach altogether. You will need to weigh the risks and trade-offs of whatever you decide.