

Operation Enduring Freedom

The War in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom) began in October, 2001 in response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. Following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 and the fall of the Afghan Communist government in 1992, a protracted civil war raged on between the various factions of anti-Communist Afghan fighters, who called themselves the Mujahadeen.



Mullah Mohammed Omar, a Mullah (Islamic religious leader) and a member of the Pashtun ethnic group led a new armed group called the Taliban. The word Taliban means "student", and they attracted the support of Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaida organization.

In 1994, the Taliban attacked and defeated local warlords and acquired a reputation for order and military success. From that point onward, until they seized Kabul in September, 1996, the Taliban fought against several militias and warlords, eventually defeating them all. Moscow feared the Taliban as a source of aid and support for the rebels it has fought in Chechnya and Tajikistan. Iran, dominated by Shiite Islamic fundamentalists, was at odds with the Sunni Muslim Taliban, largely over the treatment of the Afghan Shiite minority called the Hazaris.

Pakistan's role in the Taliban success is controversial, as it is generally believed that several Taliban military victories are directly attributable to armed Pakistani intervention.

After seizing Mazar-i Sharif, the Taliban provoked the hostility of the area's Shiite Hazari minority, and the warlord, General Malik, ended his relationship with the Taliban. The result was the execution of at least 3,000 captured Taliban soldiers by Malik and the Hazaris. In August, 1998, the Taliban retook Mazar-i Sharif and summarily massacred at least 2,000 Hazaris. Also, several Iranian citizens, including diplomats, were killed, nearly touching off an Iran-Taliban war. Throughout the years of the Taliban's ascendancy, Iran supplied arms and military training to the "United Front/Northern Alliance" forces in Northern Afghanistan who were fighting the Taliban. The Northern Alliance includes the Uzbek forces of General Dostum, the Tajik troops of former President Rabbani and the Shiite Hazaris led by Haji Mohammed Mohaqiq.

In 1998, following the terrorist bombings of American embassies in Africa, the United States launched a cruise missile attack on training camps belonging to bin Laden's Al-Qaida organization in Afghanistan.

Through the autumn of 2001, the Taliban continued to pressure the Northern Alliance, often with the aid of Osama bin Laden and his Arab forces. On September 9, 2001, the Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud was mortally wounded in an assassination attempt carried out by two Arab men posing as journalists. This attack was the work of bin Laden's organization as a possible prelude to the airline hijackings and terrorism in the United States on September 11. The Northern Alliance responded to Massoud's killing with an aerial attack on Kabul the night of September 11.

It is now known that the killing of Massoud was coordinated with the terror attacks on the United States which took place on September 11. As the United States assigned blame for the attacks on bin Laden and al Qaida, plans began to take the fight to al Qaida and its Taliban sponsors as the first phase of what became known as the Global War on Terror.

The War in Afghanistan began on October 7, 2001 with allied air strikes on Taliban and al Qaida targets. On the ground, American, British and other Allied special forces troops worked with the Northern Alliance to begin a military offensive to overthrow the Taliban. This alliance between the Northern Alliance and the Allies led to coordination between Allied air attacks and ground attacks by the Northern Alliance. These attacks led to the fall of Kabul on Nov. 13, 2001, as the Taliban retreated from most of northern Afghanistan.

As more Allied troops entered the war and the Northern Alliance forces fought their way southwards, the Taliban and al Qaida retreated toward the mountainous border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

From 2002 onward, the Taliban focused on survival and on rebuilding its forces. From 2005 to 2007, the Taliban has increased its attacks and was using suicide bombers and other tactics from the Iraq War.

On February 27, 2007, while on a diplomatic trip to Afghanistan, an apparent assassination attempt was made by Taliban insurgents, who claimed that Vice President Cheney was a target in the attack. A suicide bomber blew up a checkpoint at Bagram Air Base outside of Kabul, killing 20, including an American soldier. Cheney was unhurt in the attack.

In the spring and summer of 2008, the violence in Afghanistan claimed more coalition (foreign) troops than died in the concurrent Iraq War. The Taliban, enjoying strong bases in Pakistan, enjoyed resurgence and showed that it could launch large, coordinated, and effective attacks on coalition and Afghan forces.

US forces are still involved in Afghanistan attempting to destroy al Qaeda and its leaders including Osama bin Laden.