

# Afghanistan War comes to a close: Recap of Major Events

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Courtesy of Corporal Andy Benson RAF/MOD/Wikimedia Commons

After 20 years of war in Afghanistan, US military forces have officially left the country. As the military began their evacuation the Taliban quickly took control of Kabul in just 10 days, 80 days less than US defense officials had predicted.

As the Taliban began their reascension to power, the Afghan president Ashraf Ghani and other officials evacuated the country, but many regular citizens were not as lucky. Many Afghan citizens began to swarm airports attempting to flee the country. Several people died trying to board the planes and there were unconfirmed videos floating around that supposedly showed people falling from planes that they had clung to.

Several US citizens remain stranded as well as thousands of Afghan allies who aided the US and are fearful of retribution from the Taliban.

Amid criticism of President Biden's handling of the evacuation Biden continues to defend the troop withdrawal even calling it an "extraordinary success."

Now that the war has officially ended and the new Taliban government is vying for international recognition, that is still being debated globally, it is more important than ever to look back on the key events from the two decade war.



Courtesy of Alexandar Grashenkov/Wikimedia Commons

## Creation and Rise of the Taliban

On Dec. 24, 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and implemented a Communist government, sparking resistance among the mujahideen, a group of Islamic resistance fighters who opposed the Soviet's presence. With backing from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the US and foreign volunteers, who eventually formed al-Qaeda to coordinate their fighting efforts, the mujahideen were finally able to drive the last of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan on Feb. 15, 1989. Once the Soviets were gone the common cause that held the mujahideen together was gone and the different groups that had once been united began to fight for control of the country. During this time one of the many groups that came from the mujahideen, the Taliban, prevailed and gained control with help from members of al-Qaeda over most of the country by 1996.

September 11, 2001



Courtesy of Robert J. Fisch/Wikimedia Commons

Members of al-Qaeda, a terrorist organization that was originally based in Afghanistan during the reign of the Taliban, hijacked four planes and crashed them into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon outside Washington D.C. and a Pennsylvania field.

November 13, 2001



Photo Courtesy of SSGT Cecilio Ricardo, USAF/US National Archives

The Northern Alliance, a different offshoot of the mujahideen that fought alongside the US forces against the Taliban, takes control of Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan forcing them to retreat to Kandahar, a southern-city in Afghanistan.

December 2001

Kandahar, the Taliban's final stronghold, is overtaken marking the end of their power.

August 2003

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) takes over command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) which was created to assist the Afghan troops in their fight against the Taliban. This is their first commitment outside Europe.

February 17, 2009

President Barack Obama announces that the US will send 17,000 more troops to Afghanistan in addition to the 36,000 American and 32,000 NATO troops already there.

May 2, 2011



Courtesy of Hamid Mir/Wikimedia Commons  
Osama Bin Laden is found and killed by US military forces.

April 2013



Courtesy of thierry ehrmann/Flickr

Mullah Omar, the founder and leader of the Taliban dies causing division among members who disagree about who his successor should be. It is not revealed that he is dead until two years later although rumors had long suggested that he was dead.

May 2014

Obama announces a plan to withdraw most US troops by 2016. The plan calls for reducing troop numbers to 9,800 by the end of 2014 with the remaining troops staying to train Afghan forces.

2015

Taliban suicide and complex attacks increase by 78 percent in the first 6 months compared to the first six months of 2014 according to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

August 21, 2017

President Trump announces that the US military will continue to remain involved in the war.

February 2020

Trump signs a peace deal with the Taliban agreeing to the withdrawal of US forces by May 1, 2021 as long as the Taliban follows through on its agreement to not allow terrorist groups, such as al-Qaeda, to use Afghanistan to plan attacks.

August 15, 2021

As US troops withdraw the Taliban quickly take control of Kabul and the Afghan government. There are several possible reasons for the Taliban's lightning quick takeover. According to NPR one is the corruption that has plagued Afghan forces with some generals stealing money meant for soldiers as well as others selling essentials like firewood. Another reason may have been a lack of motivation partially sparked by the withdrawal of US forces according to what Stephen Biddle, professor of international and public affairs at Columbia University told CNBC.

October 7, 2001

After the Taliban refuses President George Bush's demands to turn over Osama Bin Laden, the leader of al-Qaeda, British and US militaries launch Operation Enduring Freedom by conducting several airstrikes.

December 5, 2001

The Bonn Agreement is signed establishing a six month interim government with leader Hamid Karzai.

June 2002



Courtesy of ISAF Headquarters Public Affairs Office/Flickr  
Karzai is made the leader of the new transitional government.

January 2004

Afghanistan's new constitution is adopted by the Loya Jirga and Karzai wins the presidential elections.

December 1, 2009

Obama announces that an additional 30,000 troops will be deployed in Afghanistan.

June 22, 2011

Obama announces that the US will begin to withdraw troops from Afghanistan.

June 2013

NATO turns over all control of security in Afghanistan to Afghan forces.

December 28, 2014

NATO ends its combat mission in Afghanistan.

October 2015

Obama discards his plan to withdraw all US troops by 2016 leaving 5,500 troops still in Afghanistan when he leaves office.

September 7, 2019

Trump calls off peace talks with the Taliban after an American soldier is killed by the group.

April 14, 2021



Courtesy of Eric Haynes  
President Biden announces a plan to withdraw all US troops by Sept. 11.

August 30, 2021

The last US military plane departs from Hamid Karzai International Airport putting an official end to the 20 year long war.