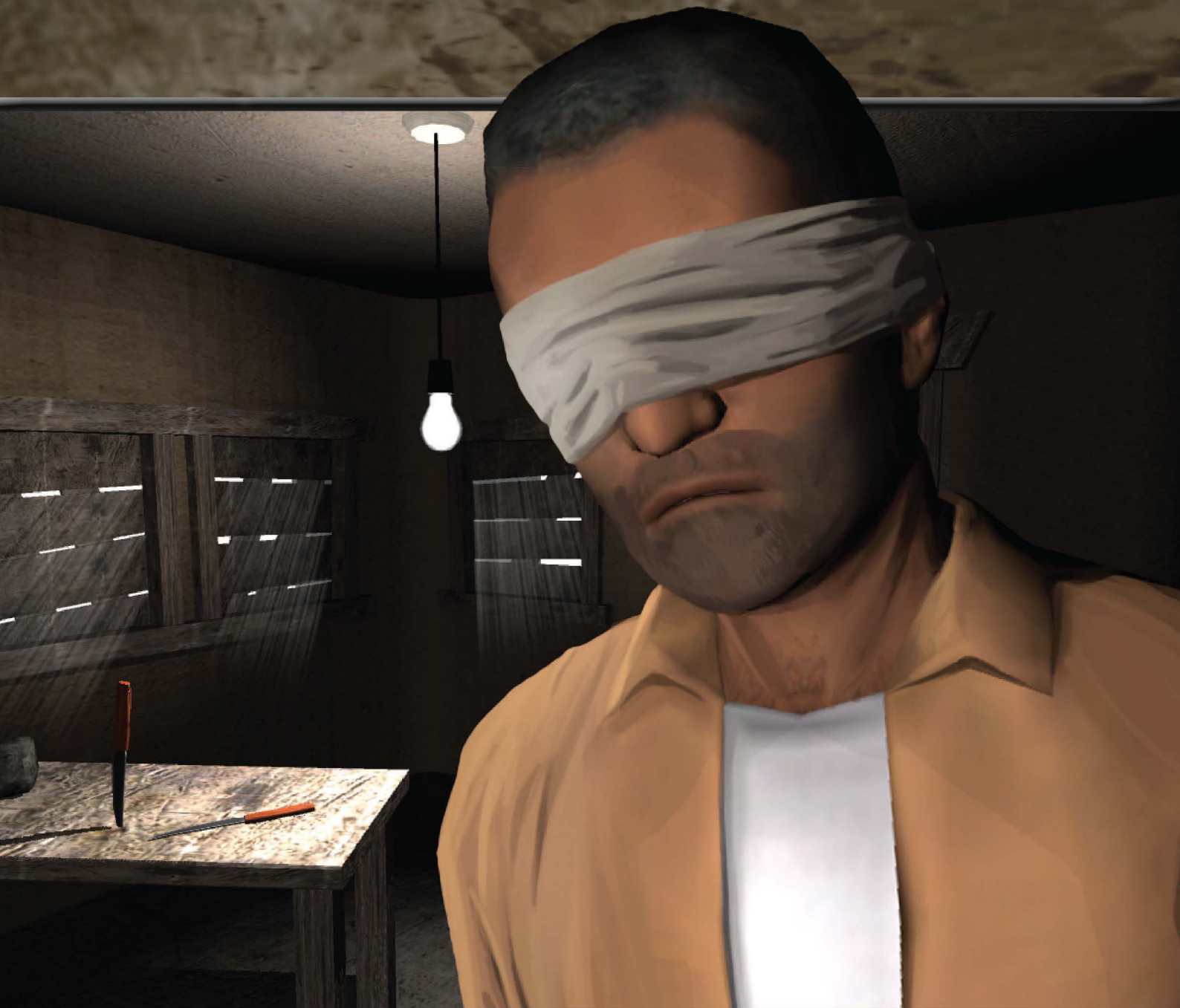


# GLOBAL CONFLICTS AFGHANISTAN



## TOPIC OVERVIEW

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# AFGANISTAN

## Using the topic overview

This leaflet is an introduction to the country of Afghanistan. The aim of the thematic overview is to provide historical background information and an understanding of the country and its current conflicts. The background information may serve as basis for qualified classroom discussions both before and after playing the game.

## THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN



### 11 September 2001

Reactions to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. On 7 October 2001, the USA and Great Britain bombed a number of targets in Afghanistan. They did so as a reaction to the terrorist attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001. The war was called The War Against Terror, and its ultimate goal was to capture Osama bin Laden, destroy Al-Qaeda and topple the Taliban who had supported Al-Qaeda and given them refuge in Afghanistan.

The USA was convinced that Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda were behind the terrorist attacks. At first, bin Laden denied any involvement in the attacks, but in 2004 (just before the presidential election) he admitted on tape that he and Al-Qaeda were responsible.

Before the USA attacked Afghanistan, they had asked to have bin Laden extradited, but the Taliban refused to talk to the American president, George W. Bush. Since 1996, Osama bin Laden had been staying in Afghanistan training the Al-Qaeda network with the blessing of the Taliban rulers.

After 11 September, the Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia withdrew their diplomatic recognition of the Taliban. After this, Pakistan was the only country that retained its diplomatic ties to the Taliban. The USA and Great Britain led the war, starting out with air raids and later deploying ground troops. Later, a number of other NATO countries joined in, and in December 2001 the ISAF was established.

## The international forces - ISAF

In December 2001, the UN Security Council established ISAF (the International Security Assistance Force). ISAF was put in charge of the international presence across Afghanistan. The ISAF works for peace, stability, reconstruction and development in the country.

The war continues; Hamid Karzai becomes president on **November 12, 2001**, Kabul fell and Western forces gained control of the city when the Taliban troops fled. In the weeks before, the USA had carpet-bombed and conquered Taliban forces in other towns, the Taliban were weakening, and it looked as if they might collapse completely.

**November 13, 2001**, Al-Qaeda and Taliban troops, maybe along with bin Laden himself, entrenched in the Tora Bora cave complex close to the Pakistani border. Here, they planned their fight against the Northern Alliance (which consisted of local warlords who had offered to help the US and NATO troops).

**November 16, 2001**, the USA started bombing Tora Bora, and after 10 days of bombardment, the Taliban surrendered.

**December 17, 2001**, the USA had gained control of the caves. Reportedly, 100-200 civilians were killed during the bombardment of the caves and other Al-Qaeda positions. Having gained control of the caves, the US searched for bin Laden and the rest of the Al-Qaeda leaders, but they had probably left the area during the truce a few days earlier.

**June 13, 2002**, American troops and their Afghan allies had consolidated their control of the country. A large-scale meeting between various Afghan factions was arranged, and Hamid Karzai was inaugurated as president of an interim government.

**August 2003**, NATO sent troops to Kabul on a peacekeeping mission.

**October 9, 2004**, Hamid Karzai won the presidential election.

## Instability in Afghanistan

The efforts of the USA and its allies meant that the Taliban regime was removed from power. But their troops kept fighting the invading forces. The country is now more unstable than it was before the war started: Al-Qaeda has not been restricted in its movements, Taliban rebels keep fighting, and local warlords are fighting too. Furthermore, drug manufacturing is on the rise, and the government is fragile and has little control outside Kabul.

In November 2006, the UN Security Council warned that Afghanistan might end up as a so-called "failed state", a state with a weak state apparatus and a government that has poor control of the country due to factors such as widespread drug trafficking and violence.

## IMPORTANT TERMS AND PERSONS

### Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda is a militant, Sunni Muslim organisation with members in many places across the world. The organisation was founded by Osama bin Laden among others in the late 1980s. The declared purpose of the Al-Qaeda is to remove non-Muslims from Muslim countries. In a 1998 manifesto, Al-Qaeda writes that it is the duty of all Muslims to kill Americans, military personnel as well as civilians, as well as their allies across the world. It is uncertain how large Al-Qaeda is.

Besides the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, Al-Qaeda has been behind a number of other terrorist bombings including the bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, the bombings in Bali in 2002 and the bombing of the London subway in 2005.

### Hamid Karzai

Hamid Karzai is the president of Afghanistan. He was inaugurated by the UN in December 2001 as head of an interim government. In 2004, he was elected democratically.

### ISAF

The ISAF (the International Security Assistance Force) is the name of the international coalition of countries that have soldiers stationed in Afghanistan. The ISAF works for peace, stability, reconstruction and development in the country.

The ISAF was established by the UN in 2001 and operates under NATO command in Afghanistan.

#### June 2011

- ISAF force counted 132,203 soldiers from 47 different nations.
- 2,433 ISAF soldiers had been killed in Afghanistan, and about the same number of civilian casualties.

### Mujahideen and Jihad

En mujahideen is a person carrying out Jihad. The word mujahideen is used about Muslims fighting for freedom from Western values and colonialism.

*Generally speaking, Jihad refers to the fight of Muslims for Islam.*

The word Jihad is used in varying degrees of strength: it is often used about armed struggles to further Islam and Muslim interests, for instance it is used about the Muslim struggle against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan 1979-1992. But it may also denote a more peaceful battle, namely the internal struggle of each individual Muslim to grow strong in faith.

## Osama bin Laden

Osama bin Laden was a Saudi terrorist who founded and led the Al-Qaeda. As a young man, he joined various Islamist groups, and in 1979 he went to Afghanistan to fight the Soviet occupation forces. He recruited Arab volunteers who went to Afghanistan to fight. Osama bin Laden was among the people who received financial support from the USA to fight the Soviet occupation forces.

*Bin Laden was killed in May 2011 by US special forces*

## The Taliban

The Taliban is an Islamist movement that controlled large parts of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. The rule of the Taliban was not recognized internationally except by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the Arab Emirates. The Taliban was established and gained strength during the civil war in Afghanistan after 1992.

The Taliban offered to establish order and stability in Afghanistan, and they were supported by many including Pakistan and the country's own dominant ethnic group, the Pashtuns. Despite the fact that the Taliban promoted an extremist religious ideology, many (including the USA and other Western observers) hoped that the Taliban would be able to curb the various parties involved in the civil war and consequently have an overall positive effect.

The Taliban ruled Afghanistan according to strict Islamist principles: theft was punished by cutting off the hand of the offender and adultery by stoning. Women were not allowed to show themselves in public without wearing a burka, and neither were they allowed to work or get an education. TV, pictures and music were strictly forbidden. The Taliban is no longer ruling the country, but they still have a lot of power in many areas, and Taliban soldiers are continuing their fight, now against the international forces in Afghanistan.

### 11. september 2001

On 11 September 2001, the USA suffered a major terrorist attack: two were hijacked and flown straight into the two World Trade Center towers in New York City. The towers collapsed after an hour and an hour and a half respectively.

Two more planes had been hijacked: one was flown into the Pentagon headquarters in Washington D.C., and the other crashed into a field in Pennsylvania. In total, more than 3,000 people died in the attacks.

**Osama bin Laden and the terrorist network of Al-Qaeda turned out to be behind the attacks.**

## 30 YEARS OF AFGHAN HISTORY

### **Soviet occupation and communism 1979-1989**

From 1879 to 1919, Afghanistan was controlled by the British though formally independent. In 1919, the country gained its freedom and for several decades it was a fairly stable monarchy. But the Soviet Union had its eye on Afghanistan and tried to exert their influence. They supported communist efforts such as de-privatisation (nationalisation) of formerly privately held businesses and organisations.

In 1978, a communist party (the PDPA – People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan) seized power in a bloody military coup, and in 1979 the Soviet Union occupied Afghanistan to secure the position of the PDPA. The population now faced a tough decade of oppression and violence, partly because of socialist reforms and partly because a number of armed groups, collectively called the mujahideen, who fought against the Soviet occupiers. The USA, who was fighting its own battle with communism at the time (the so-called Cold War), supplied the mujahedins with stinger missiles to shoot down Russian helicopter gunships. The mujahedins also received support from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

During the occupation by the Soviets, 15,000 Russian soldiers and somewhere between 600,000 and 2 million Afghan civilians were killed. A little over 5 million people, i.e. one fifth of the population, fled to Iran and Pakistan, and 2 million fled within Afghanistan.

The Soviet Union pulled out of Afghanistan in 1989. They had suffered great losses, and the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end to the Cold War was just around the corner.

When the Soviets left Afghanistan, some 1.2 million refugees returned to the country, but many had to flee all over again because of new unrest.

### **Civil war 1992 – 1996**

The Afghan communist party survived for three years after the Soviet Union left the country. An Islamic government then arose and proclaimed Sharia law. But they did not have much power or widespread control, and the country quickly descended into chaos and civil war. Warring factions fought the government and each other hoping to gain power and control.

During this period, the Afghan population suffered a number of violations of basic human rights: killings, kidnappings, capture, rape and torture were committed by all factions during the civil war.

Half a million people fled the country during this period. Girls were kept home from school and married off at a very young age as a sort of protection from harm, while boys as young as 12 years old had to fight for some warlord or other.

## Taliban rule 1996-2001

The Taliban movement started as a fairly obscure Pashtun movement from Kanahar, during the civil war the Taliban grew larger and stronger. The Taliban wanted to put an end to violence and create peace by enforcing harsh punishments. They recruited unskilled Pakistani workers to fight their cause and received financial and technical support from the Pakistani Government.

The Taliban rose to power and introduced strict rules based on an extremist interpretation of Islam and Sharia. The rules were particularly hard on women: they weren't allowed to work or educate themselves. They could not participate in public life and were only allowed to leave their homes in the company of a male family member and dressed in a so-called chador, a dress that covers the entire body except the eyes. The windows of houses had to be shuttered so no one could look in at the women, and women were not allowed to laugh so loud that it could be heard in the street.

That the women weren't allowed to work was actually hard on the boys as well, since most teachers had been women up to the time when the Taliban came to power. Consequently, the boys' access to schooling became severely limited as well.

Furthermore, dancing TV and radio were banned for everyone, and stealing was punished by cutting off the offender's hand or arm. On Fridays, adulterers and other criminals were executed in stadiums and people were forced to watch. The radical Taliban regime was also hard on world heritage artefacts: non-Muslim artworks were destroyed including two immense Buddha statues near the town of Bamiyan.

As the years passed, the Taliban gradually lost the support they had enjoyed in the beginning because of widespread poverty and unemployment and repeated violations of human rights.

An alliance of warlords from the country's northern provinces supported by India, Iran and Russia tried to defeat the Taliban but did not succeed. In September 2001, the Taliban had control of 80% of Afghanistan.

## AFGHANISTAN TODAY

In the following, the most important aspects of today's Afghan society are presented in an attempt to outline the problems that the country faces today.

### Unemployment, poverty and bleak prospects

After 30 years of war and oppression, Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world. Many people lack the most basic necessities like food, clothes and shelter. It is hard to rebuild a country that lacks reliable enforcement of law and order and has a weak infrastructure and economy. The Afghan government has ratified the most important international human rights convention, but its power does not reach far beyond Kabul.

There's a long way to go before Afghanistan will be regarded as a well-functioning state. In June 2011, half the inhabitants of Afghanistan were living below the poverty line.

Most Afghans regard poverty and unemployment as essential contributors to the bad state of the country, and when they look at the future most see only more poverty and unemployment. As a result, many decide to join the Taliban: Young men and half-grown boys are easily tempted to join because the Taliban can offer them a little money and a way out of unemployment.

## Security

Security in Afghanistan has grown steadily worse, and the number of suicide bombings and roadside bombings is rising. In June 2011, half the country was considered so dangerous that the UN would no longer station staff there.

## Refugees

In June 2011 there were still 3 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran, and more than 250,000 Afghans lived in refugee camps in South and East Pakistan. However, 5 million people had returned to the country between 2002 and 2008.

76% of the population had been forced to leave their homes at some point because of the wars. Half had to flee to other countries while the other half fled to other parts of Afghanistan.

17% were considering leaving the country because of the ongoing conflicts.

## A traumatised population

The population is severely traumatised having been subjected to capture, torture, sexual abuse, property damage, theft, hunger and flight. It is very stressful to live in a permanently unpredictable environment. In 2011, it was estimated that two out of three Afghans were suffering from depression or anxiety attacks. Human rights are violated regularly, and the population is trapped between a corrupt government who cannot ensure basic human necessities and warlords and insurgents who oppress and abuse people.

### June 2011

- 21% of the population had been tortured, half of them while being kept prisoners.

The international community has promised to help the Afghan government stabilise Afghanistan and to contribute to the reconstruction of the country through military and economic support. But it is hard to control international aid in a country fraught by corruption, bad infrastructure and lack of organisation.

## Corruption and fraud

Corruption is a big problem because it hampers the development of the country. Emergency aid ends up in the wrong pockets, and even though the country receives a lot of money from other nations, poverty continues to be a huge problem. The Afghan administrative system is also plagued by corruption and power abuse at all levels, and elections are usually marred by widespread electoral fraud.

## Opium

The majority of the population of Afghanistan depend directly on agriculture and livestock farming. The Taliban regime prohibited the cultivation of opium poppies, but since their fall in 2001, many Afghan farmers have changed to crops that are better suited for export, opium in particular.

There are several reasons why this leads to more hunger and poverty: The population no longer gets the crops that would have been harvested had the opium not been there; the drug export economy is plagued by corruption and violence; and finally, the drug export economy is fueling the insurgence groups, who in turn hamper the country's development further. The Afghan government is working to fight the entire drug economy, and in recent years they have managed to reduce opium cultivation by supporting the cultivation of other crops.

## Support for Al-Qaeda

Nations who contribute to the ISAF forces often find it hard to understand why they meet with such resistance in Afghanistan. Why are people not happy to be helped and freed from a tyrannical regime? Only 5% of the Afghans support Al-Qaeda, and yet many are fighting the foreign troops.

### **The resistance against the ISAF may have several causes:**

Part of the resistance has its roots in various insurgent Afghan groups, Al-Qaeda as well as others, who want to seize power.

The ISAF forces are regarded as a foreign invasion and takeover, and although people disagree with the Al-Qaeda, they do not want to be ruled by foreign parties either.

Some turn to the Taliban for protection simply because they are the ones who seem best able to provide protection at the moment.

The result is a situation where it seems as if resistance grows the more soldiers are sent to Afghanistan. Several commentators have pointed out that the situation is similar to that of the Vietnam War.

## Attacks on schools

During the last ten years of war, many Afghan schools have been attacked. There have been assaults and killings, bombs and acid attacks. These attacks are carried out by the Taliban and other rebel groups in an attempt to destabilise and discredit the government and scare the locals into taking their children out of the public schools. Over time, the Afghan rebels have changed their tactics, and 2005 and 2006 saw an increase in the number of schools burned or bombed.

**There are several groups with different motives who may be behind these school attacks:**

The Taliban or other groups rebelling against the Afghan government and its international allies. They bomb the schools to restrict the government's activities in the country.

School bombings may also be rooted in ideological protests: radical Islamists are against girls going to school and against teaching that departs from that of the Quran schools.

Schools get bombed as a sign of refusal to recognize the authority of the government, i.e. as part of a power struggle. Attacks against schools and teachers are used as demonstrations of power because schools and their staff are easy targets of high symbolic value.

The groups behind the school bombings use fear as a weapon: sometimes they threaten to bomb the school, for instance in so-called night letters, anonymous threatening letters or leaflets delivered in secret. These make people keep their children at home, and the rebel groups have gained their victory, even without actual bombings, the schools have been conquered.

Because of these threats against schools and because of poverty and poor organisation in general, many of Afghanistan's children no longer go to school. Some sources say that 7 out of the country's 12 million children do not go to school, while others claim that the number is more likely 2 million. Two thirds of the children who do not get to go to school are girls.



## Afghan perceptions

Afghan perceptions of reasons for the current state of their country In 2009, a number of organisations (Scribd: The Cost of War) have made a joint survey of Afghan perceptions of reasons for the current state of their country.

### The results were as follows:

- 70% regarded unemployment and poverty as dominant reasons for the conflict.
- 48% regarded corruption and inefficiency as dominant reasons for the conflict.
- 36% pointed to the Taliban
- 25% pointed to the interference of others
- 18% pointed to Al-Qaeda
- 18% pointed to the presence of international forces
- 17% pointed to the lack of support from international society
- 17% pointed to local warlords
- 14% pointed to criminal groups

## TEACHING - LINKS

### The Free Dictionary

<http://www.thefreedictionary.com>

### Wikipedia

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)

(Remember that information found on Wikipedia may not be completely accurate - always double-check your facts)

### The World Factbook

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

### ISAF

<http://www.isaf.nato.int/>

### Human Rights Watch

<http://www.hrw.org/fr/node/11295/section/6>

### The Cost of War

<http://www.scribd.com/fullscreen/22702177>



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