**CAUSES OF CONFLICT:**

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 (See the [Afghan Civil War](http://www.historyguy.com/afghan_civil_war.html)).

In this realm of chaos, some former Mujahadeen found a leader in Mullah Mohammed Omar. A Mullah is an Islamic religious leader. A former Mujahadeen fighter who returned to his home village after the fall of the Communist regime, this member of the Pashtun ethnic group led a new armed group called the Taliban. The word Taliban means "student," and many of the original recruits to Omar's movement were Islamic religious students. Other former Mujahadeen leaders of Pashtun background joined with the Talibanas this new group sought to impose law and order on the country. The particular law they sought to impose was an extreme version of Islamic law. Under Taliban-imposed law, women are not allowed to work outside the home or attend school. Men are expected to grow beards and attend religious services regularly. Television is banned, and religious minorities such as the Hindus were required to wear some sort of identifying clothing. Also, in 2001, the Taliban ordered the destruction of all non-Islamic idols and statues in areas under their control. They also attracted the support of Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaida organization.

In 1994, the Taliban attacked and defeated local warlords and began to gather a reputation for order and military success. Pakistan soon began supporting them, partially as a means of establishing a stable, friendly government in Kabul. The continual fighting between the former Mujahadeen armies caused waves of refugees to flood Pakistan's border regions and interfered with Pakistani trade in the region. In late 1994, the Taliban took control of Kandahar, acquiring a large supply of modern weapons, including fighter aircraft, tanks and helicopters. In January of 1995, the Taliban approached Kabul.

From that point onward, until they seized Kabul in September, 1996, the Taliban fought against several militias and warlords, eventually defeating them all. Several anti-Taliban leaders and their forces fled to the northern part of the country to continue fighting against the Taliban. One of these leaders, or warlords, was Ahmed Shah Massoud.

From his loss of Kabul until 1999, Ahmed Shah Massoud's forces remained within artillery range of the capital city, which he attacked regularly. After his pullout from Kabul, Massoud also began receiving military supplies from both Russia (now non-Communist) and Iran, both of whom feared the growing power of the Taliban. Russia has fought Muslim rebels in its own Chechnya region and on behalf of the government of Tajikistan. 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.

By 1997, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates recognized the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan. 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 (who do not meet the Taliban'sstrict religious standards), and the warlord, General Malik, ended his dalliance 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. As this crisis heightened, Iran massed nearly 250,000 troops on the Iran-Afghan border. 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, theTaliban 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 Massoudwas 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](http://www.historyguy.com/new_war/september11.html) in the United States on September 11. The Northern Allianceresponded 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.

**DESCRIPTION OF CONFLICT:**

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 the present (winter 2007), the Taliban has increased its attacks and is using suicide bombers and other tactics from the[Iraq War.](http://www.historyguy.com/GulfWar2.html)

On February 27, 2007, while on a diplomatic trip to Afghanistan, an apparent assassination attempt was made by Taliban insurgents, who claimed that 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 a resurgence and showed that it could launch large, coordinated, and effective attacks on coalition and Afghan forces. One of the deadliest attacks came on French troops in mid-August, with a force of about 100 Taliban ambushing French forces near Kabul. Ten French troops were killed, and 21 wounded. The same day also saw an attack by a squad of suicide bombers on an American base near the Pakistani border.

The new Obama Administration called for significantly increasing the size of the American military presence in Afghanistan, and allies in Europe are expecting President Obama to pressure them to provide more troops as well.