

## **September 11 and the War in Afghanistan (War on Terror)**

Al Qaeda is an international terrorist organization. Osama bin Laden started the organization in 1988 to fight against the Soviet Union, which was trying to take control of the communist government in Afghanistan. Al Qaeda now uses violent attacks to try to convince western and non-Muslim countries to stay out of Muslim countries. While not the only violent attack, the September 11 attack on the United States is well known in America.

Based in Afghanistan, bin Laden organized the attack on the United States. On September 11, 2001, al Qaeda terrorists hijacked four commercial airplanes and intentionally crashed them. Two planes flew into the two towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. One plane flew into the Pentagon in Washington D.C. and one plane crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. The terrorists had planned to crash the fourth plane into a building in Washington D.C. but passengers on the plane stopped the terrorists from reaching that goal. Everyone on board the planes was killed and many people in the buildings died, too.

Al Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan were working with the Taliban, the group running the government of Afghanistan. The Taliban took over the country during a civil war. They promised peace and a return to Muslim values. The Taliban's idea of Muslim values turned out to be extremely conservative. Afghanis could not listen to music, fly kites, or clap at sporting events. Women and girls could not go to work or school. In fact, they could not leave the house unless they were covered completely and accompanied by a male relative. The punishments for breaking these rules were harsh. Many Afghanis were unhappy with the new rules and unhappy because many people lost their jobs and were poor. Other countries were unhappy with the Taliban because they supported terrorists like al Qaeda.

The United States and some allies, including the UK (United Kingdom), decided to invade Afghanistan. They ended the rule of the Taliban and captured many al Qaeda leaders. The Taliban helped other al Qaeda leaders hide in the mountains or escape into neighboring Pakistan. The Taliban and al Qaeda continue to fight against American forces in Afghanistan and the Taliban continues to try to gain control of the country. United States forces in Afghanistan have worked to capture terrorists and earn the trust of Afghanistan's people. The US would also like Afghanistan to have a government that grants citizens freedom to learn, work, and enjoy their culture.

On May 1, 2011, US President Barack Obama announced that a small group of American forces had located and killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan. In June 2011, President Obama announced a plan to begin bringing home many US troops from Afghanistan. There are still US troops in Afghanistan so there are still many different opinions about how successful the war has been and what the United States should plan to do next. As you learn more about this conflict, you can decide your own opinion.