

☰ Topic Page: [War in Afghanistan \(2001–present\)](#)

Definition: **war on terrorism** from *Dictionary of British History*

The military campaign that began in Oct 2001, when US and British forces attacked Afghanistan in an attempt to destroy the terrorist network of Osama bin Laden and to bring down the fundamentalist Taliban regime. It was provoked by the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on Sept 11, in which several thousand people (including about 60 Britons) perished.



Image from:

[Afghanistan in Philip's Encyclopedia](#)

Summary Article: **Afghanistan War**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

US-led military action against Afghanistan beginning 7 October 2001. This first strike in the war on terror followed the refusal of the Taliban regime to surrender Saudi-born terrorist Osama bin Laden, the leader of the al-Qaeda terrorist network responsible for the attacks on New York City and Washington, DC, on 11 September 2001. The Taliban regime was deposed and replaced in December 2001 by a democratic Islamic Republic of Afghanistan under a United Nations-endorsed interim administration, headed by Hamid Karzai. Afghanistan held its first national presidential elections on 9 October 2004, with Karzai elected. The government's authority beyond the capital, Kabul, began slowly to improve, but there remained security concerns across the country, with Taliban insurgency activity continuing and increasing from 2006. Reconstruction depended heavily on international aid.

In December 2009, US President Barack Obama announced a 'surge' in US troop numbers in Afghanistan from 44,000 to 84,000 in an effort to break the insurgency, and set a date of 2014 for withdrawal of US forces. By spring 2011, the US was spending \$6.7 billion a month on its mission in Afghanistan and in June 2011 President Obama announced that 33,000 US troops would be withdrawn from the country by the summer of 2012. As of September 2011 the Afghanistan War had claimed the lives of around 38,000 Taliban fighters, 14,000 anti-Taliban coalition fighters, and around 30,000 civilians.

Build up to military action On 17 September 2001, Pakistan delivered a US ultimatum to the Taliban that they should hand over bin Laden or face massive retaliation by the USA and its allies. Taliban mullahs (clerics) rejected the US demand. On 24 September, US president George W Bush announced a freeze on the financial assets of bin Laden and more than two dozen suspected terrorists and their organizations. The next day Saudi Arabia cut off diplomatic relations with the already isolated Taliban regime and thousands fled Kabul for the Pakistani border, fearing imminent US air strikes. In addition to US forces deployed for the campaign, the UK contributed 4,200 ground troops. Other European countries also agreed to send military personnel: France offered 2,000 troops, Germany 3,900, and Italy 2,700. Australia subsequently also committed 1,550 of its forces.

Strikes begin On 7 October 2001, assisted by the UK and using bases in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the US began the 'Operation Enduring Freedom' military offensive in Afghanistan. Night- and day-time strikes, using bombers and cruise missiles, hit targets associated with Taliban and al-Qaeda, including terrorist training camps, air defences, and communication facilities. After a week of strikes on the

cities of Kabul, Kandahar, and Jalalabad, the Taliban offered to hand over bin Laden to a third party, but Bush rejected any negotiation and the bombing continued. Muslims around the world reacted angrily to the attacks, taking to the streets and burning US flags. Anti-US riots also took place across Pakistan, the USA's key diplomatic ally. However, on 4 November the head of the 22-nation Arab League dismissed an appeal by bin Laden for Muslims to join a jihad (holy war) against the West.

The air strikes were coordinated with the provision of military assistance to the Afghan opposition forces, the 15,000-strong Northern Alliance, a largely ethnic Tajik and Uzbek body backed by Russia and Iran that had been battling with the Taliban for five years. The Northern Alliance was provided with Russian weapons and military advice from US special forces. On 9 November the Northern Alliance captured the strategic northern town of Mazār-e-Sharīf. Alliance forces captured the Afghan capital Kabul on 13 November, and the city of Jalalabad a day later. Burhanuddin Rabbani, the country's exiled former leader, was once again declared president, as Taliban troops retreated to the southern stronghold of Kandahar. However, Kandahar fell on 8 December.

By late November, a large part of the 50,000-strong Taliban army was surrounded in the northern town of Kunduz, and forced to surrender. The Taliban retained control over areas in the Pathan (or Pashtun) south, but many of its leaders, including bin Laden, had fled to mountain retreats. US aircraft kept up their bombardment of the Tora Bora region of eastern Afghanistan in a bid to find bin Laden, and the reward for his capture was raised to US\$25 million.

On 4 December rival Afghan ethnic groups, meeting in Bonn, Germany, under UN supervision, agreed on a blueprint for a new Afghan government. Hamid Karzai, a Pathan chief, would lead an interim administration in which members of the mainly Tajik and Uzbek Northern Alliance would hold the three principal posts of foreign minister, defence minister, and interior minister. This administration was inaugurated on 22 December. However, Abdul Rashid Dostum, the chief Uzbek warlord, said that he would not work with the new administration.

A UN-mandated, international security assistance force (ISAF), initially led by the UK and designed to provide security in Kabul, was gradually built up to a strength of 4,000–5,000 in January 2002. Turkey and Bulgaria, both Muslim countries, would join other European countries in providing troops to support the new interim Afghan government. The USA announced that it intended to build a long-term base in Kyrgyzstan. On 10 January, US forces took prisoner 364 men said to be members of the Taliban or al-Qaeda, and flew them to a camp in the US Naval base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, for interrogation. There was widespread international concern over the treatment of the prisoners.

Political consolidation and economic reconstruction In June 2002, a loya jirga (grand tribal council) of around 1,500 delegates from across Afghanistan convened in Kabul to approve a new government. Hamid Karzai, the leader of the interim administration, was elected as president for 18 months. The former monarch, Muhammad Zahir Shah, deposed in 1973, meanwhile renounced any political role in the new administration. Despite the acceptance of a new government, the grand council proceedings exposed deep regional and tribal divisions. The continuing threat to Karzai's government was underlined as the president narrowly survived an assassination attempt in September in Kandahar, and a car bomb exploded in Kabul, killing at least 25 people. On 11 August 2003, the ISAF was placed under the strategic command of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). It was the western alliance's first ground mission outside Europe. However, two days later Afghanistan suffered its most violent day in several months, leaving at least 64 people dead in a series of incidents.

In 2004, there was further political progress and an improvement in security. A new national constitution was adopted on 4 January, paving the way for democratic elections and establishing an Islamic republic. Nine months later, on 9 October, Afghanistan held its first national presidential elections. Karzai was declared the official winner with about 55% of the vote and inaugurated on 9 December. Further elections, at parliamentary and local level, were planned for spring 2005. To enhance security, Karzai's government continued to work closely with the ISAF, which was authorized by the UN Security Council since October 2003 to operate beyond Kabul in the form of joint civilian-military Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). The core of an Afghan national army and police force was also being trained.

To help rebuild Afghanistan economically, rich donor countries pledged \$4.5 billion in January 2002. At an international conference in Berlin, Germany, in March–April 2004, donors pledged a further \$4.5 billion over the next year and a total of \$8.2 billion over three years.

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