



Afghanistan A Return to Yesterday

On Sunday, August 15, 2021, the eyes of the world were watching as the Taliban, Afghanistan's former totalitarian regime, **moved back** into the capital city of Kabul after 20 years in exile. This invasion forced the collapse of the existing government backed by the United States, and with it returns **one of the most brutal regimes** ever to govern a country. So fundamentally, why does this matter?



A U.S. helicopter flying over Kabul in August, 2021.

Following the terrorist attacks on **September 11th** in 2001, President George W. Bush asked Congress to **authorize the use of military force** against the country that housed and protected the Taliban, who was responsible for the attacks. In doing so, President Bush drove the Taliban from power in Afghanistan, and sent **Osama bin Laden** and his **Al Qaeda** terrorist network, the organization behind the attack, into hiding.

Over the next two decades, the United States, in cooperation with its **NATO** allies, launched global efforts to combat the **war on terror**. Service men and women were deployed to Afghanistan and the Middle East because of these efforts, and in that time, through great sacrifice, helped to establish the foundation upon which fledgling democratic principles could be supported.



President George W. Bush at Ground Zero.

By driving the Taliban from power, **democratic elections** were established, cruel and unusual punishment was eliminated, **women** could serve in the government, girls could attend school, and the press could report freely. The founding principles contained in the **Declaration of Independence** of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of

happiness," started taking root in Afghanistan as the political and social culture of the nation started to change.

Ten years later, in May of 2011, The **Obama Administration** tracked and killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan, concluding one of the world's largest manhunts. During President Obama's time in the Oval Office diplomatic and military measures were ongoing as Afghanistan continued its political and social changes.

Under the Trump Administration, **negotiations** between the United States, the Afghan government and the Taliban took place. An aspect of these negotiations was that the United States would withdraw its troops from Afghanistan by May of 2021 and allow a power sharing arrangement between the Taliban and the elected Afghan government.

Following President Biden's **announcement** in early 2021 that all U.S. military forces would be withdrawing from Afghanistan, the political situation there started to deteriorate faster than expected. Currently, operations are underway to evacuate remaining **U.S. citizens** and **Afghans** who assisted the United States with its military efforts. In little over a month, the political and social progress of the last 20 years seems to have come to a screeching halt as the world waits for what comes next for the people of Afghanistan.

To Think and To Do: Think about our founding principles. How did the changes in Afghanistan prior to the return of the Taliban reflect the principles of freedom and democracy as expressed by our founders?

LEARN MORE:

- [A Timeline of the War in Afghanistan](#), from the Council on Foreign Relations
- [The Afghan Girls Robotics Team](#), from National Public Radio
- [A Historical Timeline of Afghanistan](#), from PBS

