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## Afghanistan (1978- )

Afghanistan is culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse. Afghanistan's history of conflict and hunger is intermingled with cold war politics, struggles in neighboring countries, and the country's susceptibility to earthquakes and drought. In the past three decades, Afghanistan has experienced a series of civil wars and external interventions. There have been large-scale civilian casualties not just from the fighting itself, but also from the disruptions to agriculture, trade, nutrition, and health care.

After a series of coups, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. Soviet forces occupied Afghanistan until 1989, but despite having more than 100,000 troops in the country, they never achieved control of the countryside. The rebel *mujahideen*, a loose conglomeration of anti-Communist parties, were trained, armed, and financially supported by several governments. The United States, China, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan supported the main force of Sunni *mujahideen*. Iran supported pro-Khomeini elements among the minority Shi'a communities. It is estimated that the US spent more than \$3 billion dollars helping the rebels during the decade, and that other countries spent another billion dollars.

The fighting produced an enormous humanitarian crisis, driving about 2 million refugees into Iran and 3 million into Pakistan. In the chaos brought by the war, the country became the largest producer of opium; by the late 1990s, increasing amounts of opium were refined into morphine and heroin inside the country. Local powerbrokers ('warlords') gained control over regions of the country, providing security for drug traffickers and addressing some humanitarian needs in order to win regional backing, often by concluding deals with UN agencies or NGOs.

When the Soviets withdrew, they left a weak and divided regime in power. That government collapsed in 1992, and a massively destructive civil war among competing groups of erstwhile *mujahideen* and regime militias eventually opened the way for the Pakistan-backed Taliban to gain support and territory. The Taliban took control of the capital Kabul in 1996 and then extended their control over 90 percent of the country by 1998. The government was recognized officially only by three countries, and it drew international criticism for its harsh policies, treatment of women, and the sanctuary it provided to the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda. The Northern Alliance, a grouping of former *mujahideen* and regime militias mainly drawn from the ethnic groups of northern Afghanistan, held the country's UN seat and continued to fight the Taliban, but it controlled relatively little of the national territory.

Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, the United States government led a war that destroyed al-Qaeda assets and ousted the Taliban with the help of the Northern Alliance and other commanders. A UN-led process of negotiation instituted a new government under the leadership of Hamid Karzai. The UN Security Council mandated a multinational force, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), to help maintain security in Kabul. In 2003 ISAF came under NATO command and expanded throughout the country. In 2006 most of the US-led coalition merged with ISAF under NATO command. Insecurity still plagues the country, fighting continues between coalition forces and the Taliban, the drug trade still thrives, and local commanders still exercise *de facto* control in much of the country. The Taliban and al-Qaeda have re-

established safe havens in Pakistan from which they direct the insurgency in Afghanistan, leading to increasing pressure on the military regime of President Pervez Musharraf in Pakistan.

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#### *Online Resources*

Human Rights Watch (2001) *Afghanistan - The Crisis of Impunity: The Role of Pakistan, Russia, and Iran in Fueling the Civil War*.

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Reuters Alertnet Country Profile

BBC Country Profile and Timeline

#### *Timeline*

1964 - Political polarization occurs with the introduction of a constitutional monarchy

1973 - Former Prime Minister Daoud seizes power in a coup

1978 - Coup overthrows Daoud, Taraki becomes president

1979 - Taraki overthrown, Amin becomes president; Soviet Union invades, overthrows Amin and Soviet-backed Karmal becomes president

1979 - Western-backed *mujahideen* guerillas begin fight against Soviet occupation

1986 - US arms *mujahideen* with Stinger laser-guided anti-aircraft missiles; Karmal resigns, Najibullah becomes president

1988 - Afghanistan, US, USSR, and Pakistan sign peace agreement

1989 - Soviet troops withdraw; fighting to overthrow Najibullah continues

1992 - Najibullah deposed; fighting continues

1992- Rabbani becomes president under Peshawar Agreement

1994 - Taliban capture Qandahar and southern Afghanistan

1995 - Taliban capture Herat, reach the outskirts of Kabul

1996 - Taliban ousts Rabbani from Kabul, imposes strict Islamic law; opposition continues

fighting

1998 - Al-Qaeda bombs US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania; US responds with missile strikes on al-Qaeda bases in Afghanistan; Taliban capture most of northern Afghanistan.

2000 - Clashes between Taliban and Northern Alliance increase

2001 - US invades Afghanistan and topples Taliban; conference in Bonn, Germany, establishes interim Afghan government

2002 - ISAF arrives in Afghanistan; low-level fighting continues

2004 - Afghanistan approves Constitution; presidential election results in first elected head of state in Afghan history.

2005 - First parliamentary and provincial elections in more than 30 years

2006 - Taliban renew offensive from bases in Pakistan using suicide bombings, improvised explosive devices and other techniques learned from Iraq