

# Afghanistan

During the late 1990s, under Taliban rule, Afghanistan served as a safe haven for al-Qaeda. In response to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the U.S. conducted Operation Enduring Freedom to remove the Taliban from power in Afghanistan and eliminate the al-Qaeda threat from the region, and to restore democracy and freedom to Afghanistan.

From the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan during the 1980s, civil war in the early 1990s, and then stringent Taliban rule from 1996 to 2001, Afghanistan has struggled to be a secure and sovereign nation. U.S. and coalition forces were able to topple the Taliban regime within about a month of invading Afghanistan in October 2001, and forced the Taliban and al-Qaeda leadership to flee across the border to Pakistan's tribal areas.

Afghan citizens went to the polls in 2004 to elect Hamid Karzai as president, but have since become disillusioned by continued corruption within the government and the lack of basic services and development in their communities. After a period of relative calm from 2002 to 2005, the Taliban, operating from their bases in Pakistan, were able to resume operations in Afghanistan, especially in the southern and eastern parts of the country, which now face a full-blown insurgency.

To reverse the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, President Obama deployed 21,000 additional troops and assigned Lt. General Stanley McCrystal as the top American commander in Afghanistan. The U.S. and international forces are trying to eliminate terrorist threats and provide security for the Afghan people while also trying to reduce negative perceptions of U.S. and NATO forces. General McCrystal urged his troops to use air strikes only when absolutely necessary, in an effort to reduce civilian casualties.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**1. Build up the Afghanistan National Army.** President Obama made a commitment to increase Afghan security forces to 134,000. This is not enough. Some U.S. officials say a force of 250,000 is necessary. Investing more resources into expanding the ANA will speed the process

## Notes

of Afghanistan's assuming responsibility for its own security and reduce the future investment of U.S. blood and treasure.

**2. Protect Afghan civilians.** Average Afghans do not support the harsh policies and violent tactics of the Taliban, but they also are angry about growing civilian casualties and intrusive searches by coalition forces. Last year there was a 60 percent rise in Afghan civilian casualties. Washington must put a new emphasis on deploying ground troops to protect Afghan citizens from Taliban advances and depend less on aerial bombing, which risks killing innocent bystanders.

**3. Maintain international support and cooperation for the Afghanistan mission.** Although there are tensions among NATO members on tactics in Afghanistan, it is critical that the Afghanistan mission remain an international endeavor. Successful international cooperation is also needed to ensure U.S. domestic political support for fighting in Afghanistan. The Taliban and other terrorist organizations cannot be allowed to reclaim Afghanistan as a hub from which to plot terrorist attacks with global consequences.

**4. Support Pakistan in fighting terrorism, but make clear that the U.S. will not tolerate dual policies toward terrorists.** Pakistan's cooperation is needed to achieve a secure and stable Afghanistan that will not again become a safe haven for terrorists. Gaining Pakistan's full cooperation has proved difficult, and Islamabad often continues to view the Afghan Taliban as an asset in its efforts to counter the regional influence of its historical arch-rival, India. The U.S. needs to support Pakistan with economic aid and should also directly aid grassroots organizations subject to strict monitoring of their activities. However, future military assistance to Pakistan should be conditioned to ensure that U.S. aid does not wind up undermining U.S. objectives in Afghanistan. The future direction of the region, including the outcome of the war in Afghanistan, pivots on Pakistan's ability to overcome multiple socio-economic challenges as well as its willingness to fight terrorism in all its forms within its own borders.

## FACTS AND FIGURES

■ About 75 percent of supplies for NATO operations in Afghanistan currently travel through Pakistan. But an increase in attacks on these supply lines, including the recent destruction of the bridge through the Khyber Pass, demonstrate that the U.S. needs to secure supply lines through other countries.

■ Afghanistan accounts for about 90 percent of global opium production in 2007. More than half of it is grown in the Helmand region, where 4,000 Marines have recently embarked on an operation to roll back Taliban influ-

ence. The Taliban are partly funded by the opium crop, but also by wealthy private individuals from Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

- The median age of an Afghan citizen is 17.6 years.
- The population of Afghanistan is 33,609,937.
- The ethnic breakdown of Afghanistan is: Pashtun, 42 percent; Tajik, 27 percent; Hazara, 9 percent; Uzbek, 9 percent; Aimak, 4 percent; Turkmen, 3 percent; Baloch, 2 percent; other, 4 percent.
- Afghanistan had a GDP real growth rate of 7.5 percent, based on a 2008 estimate.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

James Phillips, "Success in Afghanistan Requires Firm Presidential Leadership, Not Half-Measures," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 2607, September 4, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/AsiaandthePacific/wm2607.cfm>

Lisa Curtis, "Worth fighting for security, stability," commentary in the *Des Moines Register*, July 27, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Press/Commentary/ed072709c.cfm>

Lisa Curtis, "From Strategy to Implementation: Strengthening U.S.-Pakistan Relations," testimony before the United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services, and International Security. Delivered on July 7, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/AsiaandthePacific/tst070809a.cfm>

K. Alan Kronstadt and Kenneth Katzman, "Islamist Militancy in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Border Region and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service *Report for Congress* RL34763, November 21, 2008, at [http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RL34763\\_20081121.pdf](http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RL34763_20081121.pdf)

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