

# Table of Contents

## **TERRORIST ATTACK: THE RETALIATION**

Introduction .....	5
What History Will Show .....	7
Afghanistan's History of War and Resistance .....	8
An Uncertain Future .....	17
Discussion, Research, and Essay Activities .....	19

# TERRORIST ATTACK: THE RETALIATION

## *Introduction*

On October 7, 2001, the United States finally delivered its long-anticipated response to the terrorist attacks of September 11. U.S. and British military forces began a sustained campaign of bombing targets in Afghanistan, the country President George W. Bush had singled out as the first and prime target in his “war on terrorism.” Afghanistan’s Taliban regime, committed to an ultra-fundamentalist form of Islam and a strong anti-Western stance, has been playing host to Osama bin Laden and his terrorist Al-Qaeda group since 1998. Bin Laden was the prime suspect in the devastating attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the United States had demanded that the Taliban turn him over without preconditions or negotiations or face harsh consequences. When these terms were not met, the joint U.S.-British task force, originally dubbed “Operation Infinite Justice,” began its strikes against Taliban military installations and suspected Al-Qaeda bases inside Afghanistan.

At the outset, the war on terrorism in Afghanistan received widespread support around the world. The nations of the European Union endorsed the Anglo-American effort, some of them even pledging additional military aid. For its part, Canada was one of the first countries to promise assistance, in the form of a naval task force and the possible deployment of an elite special-forces unit inside Afghanistan itself once ground operations began there. Pakistan, Afghanistan’s neighbour and one-time ally, also reluctantly endorsed the U.S. military campaign, despite the strong opposition of a small but vocal minority of Islamic fundamentalists in that country who sympathized with both bin Laden and the embattled Taliban regime. The former Soviet republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, also bordering Afghanistan, agreed to permit U.S. forces to use their territory as staging areas for its military strikes and possible ground assaults.

At the same time as bombers, fighter jets, and Tomahawk cruise missiles were hitting various targets in Afghanistan, the country’s main opposition military force, the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance, was preparing for a major offensive. For years, this group has been waging a largely ineffectual campaign to oust the Taliban from power, hemmed in on the northern reaches of Afghanistan where its base of support among the country’s ethnic minority groups was concentrated. Shortly before September 11, Taliban agents posing as journalists dealt it a major blow by assassinating its fabled leader, the legendary guerrilla fighter Ahmed Shah Massoud. But after the U.S. and British air strikes began, the Alliance sensed that its time had come at last, and its forces boasted that they would take Kabul, the Afghan capital, before the winter snows arrived. Its political and military spokesmen urged the United States to step up the bombing of Taliban front-line forces in order to make its long-awaited offensive easier to conduct.

From the beginning of the military campaign, the leading U.S. and British officials had repeatedly claimed that it was not directed against the people of Afghanistan but was instead targeting bin Laden, his terrorist group, and their hosts, the country’s Taliban government. They were also insistent that their operations should not be construed as a war on Islam in general. This was important, because the chances for success of the Anglo-American war effort against terrorism rested largely on building and maintaining the widest possible international coalition of countries pledged to endorse it. This had to include a number of Middle Eastern and Muslim states in the region, such as traditional U.S. allies like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, but also once-suspect states like Iran and Syria. In deference to Islamic sensibilities, the code name for the military campaign was changed from “Operation Infinite Jus-

tice” to “Operation Enduring Freedom,” because in Islam only Allah can dispense such justice. Bush stopped using the term *crusade* in reference to a Western coalition against terrorism because the term triggered centuries-old resentment among Muslims who recalled the brutalities the Christian crusaders committed against them in medieval times. Along with bombs, U.S. planes were also dropping humanitarian aid packages for desperate Afghan war refugees, containing emergency food rations, blankets, and other essential supplies. Every effort was made to win the propaganda war against bin Laden and the Taliban, who called on Muslims around the world to rise up in protest against the Western states attacking Afghanistan, and, they alleged, Islam itself.

But as the first weeks of the bombing passed, it became disturbingly obvious that civilians in Afghanistan were being killed and wounded. At first, Taliban claims that large numbers of innocent people were dying in U.S. air strikes were brushed off as propaganda. But when independent media outlets such as the Al Jazeera network, the Arab world’s equivalent of CNN, began to televise video clips of bombed houses and non-military sites, along with graphic images of dead and wounded Afghans, including women, children, and old people, U.S. and British denials became harder to accept. After U.S. bombs twice hit a Red Cross warehouse in Kabul storing food and other humanitarian relief supplies, questions about the accuracy of the bombing became louder and more critical. Expressions of regret at unintended “collateral damage” and vows that coalition forces would be more careful in the future were beginning to sound hollow to those who had doubted the wisdom and practicality of the bombing campaign from its inception.

By early November 2001, winter was approaching in Afghanistan. Ramadan, the holiest month in the Islamic religious calendar, was also about to begin. Osama bin Laden had neither been captured nor killed, and was still issuing video clips and faxes to his supporters in other Muslim states, urging

continuing resistance to the Western campaign against him. U.S. planes were bombing Afghanistan more frequently, and with greater intensity, in an effort to destroy the military and political capacity of the Taliban. The Northern Alliance continued to make confident boasts about its imminent victory, with very few concrete gains to show for itself. As for the Taliban regime, it appeared no closer to collapse than it had a month before, despite the punishing air strikes its forces had sustained. Hundreds of thousands of Afghan civilians were flocking over the borders to safety in neighbouring Iran or Pakistan in a desperate effort to flee from the war. An untold number of their fellow citizens were also on the move inside Afghanistan itself, internal refugees in their own country, a place that had known nothing but war and destruction for almost a quarter-century.

When the war on terrorism began, leaders like Bush, Britain’s Prime Minister Tony Blair, and others cautioned that there would be no easy, early, or dramatic victories. To a public traumatized by the terrible events of September 11, and looking for redress in a quick act of retaliation and revenge, followed by the capture or killing of bin Laden, such warnings at first went largely unheeded. Support for military action remained high in opinion polls conducted in the United States, Britain, Canada, and other Western nations. But as the military campaign in Afghanistan was about to enter its second month, with little measureable success thus far, and a growing number of civilian casualties, some voices of concern and protest were beginning to be heard. As the prospect of U.S., British, and even Canadian ground forces being deployed in Afghanistan was becoming more likely, there were those who worried that the war on terrorism might just turn into the first bitter and frustrating Vietnam-style military campaign of the 21st century, or even a wider conflict that might destabilize and engulf the whole region of South-central Asia, with untold consequences for the rest of the world.

# TERRORIST ATTACK: THE RETALIATION

## *What History Will Show*

“What we need now is an international coalition acting in a precise, measured way on many fronts against terrorism and its perpetrators, not a general war on already oppressed peoples.”  
— Patricia McClung, Palo Alto, California, in a letter to the editor of *The New Yorker Magazine*, October 8, 2001

In an article titled “What Terrorists Want,” in the October 29th issue of that same magazine, Nicholas Lemann proposes a thesis based on the work of political scientists studying civil wars all over the world, wars that Lemann says usually involve terrorism on the part of the insurgents in civil wars. He says, in part, “. . . bin Laden’s goal [is] to get the United States to disengage completely from the Middle East, by inducing fear in the general public which turns into pressure on the government. . . . He could [also] be understood as someone who is trying to start a civil war, or a series of civil wars, in the Middle East. . . . In this view, bin Laden wants, in the short run, to help his radical Islamic allies start insurgencies, and in the long run, to help these insurgencies to get control of the national governments of as many Muslim countries as possible.”

The global terrorism “war” and the current war in Afghanistan have been described as war as it has never before been seen. At this point, all parties concerned, including the general public around the world, are struggling not only to understand what is actually happening but to predict the outcome of the retaliation. Only time and historical distance will be able to fully answer these questions, but it is important that we try to predict from the information we currently have what the effects, implications, and results will be of the current actions.

With this in mind, as you view this part of the November 2001 *News in Review* program, look for information, details, issues, and concepts that, in your opinion, will eventually be recognized as defining factors in the outcome of the retaliation. You may wish to focus on issues such as:

- geography
- critical reasoning and strategic planning
- timelines
- humanitarian concerns
- national historical roles and responses to global conflicts
- risks
- precedents
- universal principles
- rhetoric
- emotion
- societal, cultural, and religious values

# TERRORIST ATTACK: THE RETALIATION

## ➤ *Afghanistan's History of War and Resistance*

### **PART ONE: Where Geography Shapes History**

As you read the information below, highlight words and phrases that will help you explain the connection between geography and history. How do you think it impacts on what is happening in Afghanistan today?

“When Allah had made the rest of the world, He saw that there was a lot of rubbish left over, bits and pieces and things that did not fit anywhere else. He collected them all together, and threw them down on to the earth. That was Afghanistan.” — old Afghan proverb

To many in the West, Afghanistan is a little-known land, despite the fact that it has been the scene of many wars involving powerful foreign states that invaded it, from ancient times to the present day. Comprising 647 500 square kilometres (slightly larger than France), it is divided by the Hindu Kush mountain range. To the south of the mountains, the country's main ethnic group, the Pashtuns, make their home, along with some non-Pashtun minorities. The Persian-speaking Tajiks and the Hazaras, a people believed to be the descendants of the Mongol hordes of Genghis Khan, inhabit the Hindu Kush region itself. To the northwest, the country's Uzbek group occupies a frontier zone. And in the remote Pamir mountains of the far north, where Afghanistan meets Tajikistan, China, and Pakistan, which the Venetian traveler Marco Polo once called “the roof of the world,” a number of isolated and distinct groups live in the high mountain valleys.

There are few countries in the world today of which it can be as truthfully said that geography has determined the history, culture, religion, and political and social life of a people. Afghanistan sits at the crossroads of eastern, central, and south Asia, and has been a key site in the history of human migration since the prehistoric Aryan people first invaded it over 6000 years ago. It is a rough, wild, sparsely inhabited, and desert land, studded with huge mountains and interspersed with lush and beautiful valleys through which run fast-flowing rivers. Its people are known for their independence, stubborn adherence to traditions, and resistance to outside invaders who have repeatedly entered their territory across the centuries, seeking to conquer it, usually in vain.

The routes running through Afghanistan's landlocked territory have been of immense strategic value to outside powers from ancient times. A crossroads of many civilizations, the country has at various periods been a transit point between them, a place where they shared their cultures, a buffer zone separating them, and the site of fierce resistance to their dreams of occupation. Rich in archaeological sites and treasures, many of which have been only recently damaged or destroyed, Afghanistan was also a centre for some of the world's oldest religions, including Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Manichaeism. Near the city of Mazar-I-Sharif, in the northwestern part of the country, are the ruins of the ancient city of Balkh, believed to be one of the oldest human inhabited sites in the world, and once a thriving focal point for Buddhist, Persian, and Turkic art, architecture, and culture.

The legendary Silk Road, an ancient trade route linking China to Europe, ran directly through Afghanistan. In 329 BCE, the armies of the great Macedonian general Alexander the Great arrived, on their way to invade India. Although Alexander is known in history for never losing a battle, the rugged hill tribes of Afghanistan conducted a relentless hit-and-run war against his Macedonian legions, eventually forcing him to withdraw and abandon his plans for further conquests. But he left behind a fascinating and unique civilization that combined both Buddhist and Greek culture, the kingdom of Bactria, which was to last for a few hundred years, a remarkable fusion of European and Asian societies.

In 654, the Arab armies that had exploded out of the Arabian peninsula in the years following the Prophet Mohammed's proclamation of a new religion—Islam—reached Central Asia and stormed over the Oxus River into Afghanistan. For the next few hundred years, the region was under the domination of the Persian Samanid and Ghaznavid dynasties, during which time art, architecture, culture, and learning flourished in centres like Balkh and the oasis town of Herat. But in 1219 another conqueror, the fierce Mongol chieftain Genghis Khan, swept through Afghanistan on his way west, destroying the major centers and leaving piles of skulls on their outskirts as signs of his passing. But even these warriors left something lasting behind them—the Hazara people, whose Mongol features to this day tell of their descent from Genghis's soldiers and local Afghan women.

During the 14th century, Timur the Lame—or Tamerlane as he is known in the West—a descendent of Genghis Khan, conquered Afghanistan and established a huge empire in Central Asia from his capital in Samarkand, now in Uzbekistan, where he is still regarded as a national hero. In 1405, his son Shah Rukh moved the imperial capital to Herat, which Tamerlane had conquered in 1381. Under the rule of the Turkic Timurid dynasty Herat flourished as a centre of Central Asian culture and was one of the most sophisticated cities in the world. A century later, the emperor Babur declared, "The whole habitable world has not such a town."

For the next few centuries, Afghan rulers descended from Tamerlane expanded their influence into what is now Pakistan and India. In 1504, Babur conquered Kabul and then Delhi, where he established the powerful Mogul empire that was to hold sway over the Indian subcontinent until the British arrived in the 18th century. Because it had been the scene of so many invasions over time, Afghanistan became a complex mixture of cultures, languages, and ethnic groups. These include the Pashtuns, comprising about 40 per cent of the population, and significant minorities such as the Tajiks (25 per cent), Uzbeks (six per cent), and Hazaras (20 per cent). The Pashtuns, mainly concentrated in the southern and central parts of Afghanistan, came to dominate the country during the 18th century, when their chieftain Mir Wais rebelled against Persian rule. Like most Afghans, the Pashtuns adhered to the Sunni branch of the Islamic faith and strongly opposed the Persian shah's attempts to impose the Shi'ite religion on them. In 1747, a meeting of Pashtun tribal leaders known as the Loya Jirga elected Ahmad Shah Durrani king of Afghanistan. This ruler established a dynasty that was to prevail until its last member, King Zahir Shah, was deposed in a coup in 1973.

Durrani was the father of modern Afghanistan, and he captured Kashmir and parts of India, establishing a powerful but short-lived empire. In 1780 he concluded a treaty with the Central Asian ruler the Amir of Bukhara, establishing the Oxus or Amu Darya River as the country's

northern boundary, which it still is today. However, after Durrani's death his descendants were unable to prevent the region from sliding into intermittent inter-tribal conflict. Sensing a power vacuum in a part of the world both of them viewed as strategically important, the rival Russian and British empires began their struggle to gain influence, if not control, over Afghanistan.

## **PART TWO: The Great Game**

History is a dynamic force in human civilization. It is a powerful, active process that is influenced by actions, reactions, and motives. After reading the information below, suggest what dynamic is especially significant in Afghanistan, past and present.

“When you're wounded and left  
On Afghanistan's plains,  
And the women come out  
To cut up what remains,  
Just roll to your rifle  
And blow out your brains,  
And go to your God  
Like a soldier”

— from “The Wounded British Soldier” by Rudyard Kipling

The Russian empire was expanding eastward during the late 18th and 19th centuries. On their way to dominating the entire Eurasian land mass from St. Petersburg on the Baltic to Vladivostok on the Pacific, the Russians met resistance from the British, who had established their colonial rule over India by this time. The flashpoint for this conflict between two of the world's most powerful empires of the day was Afghanistan. To shore up their position in India and ensure that the Russians could not use Afghanistan as a corridor through which it might invade, the British made repeated military attempts to suppress the Afghan tribes and submit them to their will. Despite its world-power status, Britain's repeated efforts to subdue the country resulted in utter failure, including the slaughter of 4500 troops and 12 000 of their dependents during their withdrawal from Kabul in 1842. After losing their second Afghan War in 1880, the British changed their tactics, and offered cash bribes to various tribal chieftains in return for their loyalty against the Russians. Both sides entered into what became known in European diplomatic circles as the “Great Game,” a long-running effort to play on ethnic rivalries within Afghanistan in order to gain control over it.

Britain sought to keep the ruling Pashtun Durrani kings weak through a mixture of bribery and threats. This meant that non-Pashtun minorities in the north became increasingly independent of the central authorities based in the country's capital, Kabul. Pashtun control over Afghanistan was further undermined when the British imposed a new border dividing the country from its colony of India in 1893. The Durand Line, which still demarcates the boundary separating Afghanistan from Pakistan, divided ethnic Pashtuns on both sides. To this day, there is a significant Pashtun minority in Pakistan, many of whose members are strong supporters of Afghanistan's ruling Taliban regime today.

To consolidate their position of influence within Afghanistan, the British armed and backed a ruthless Pashtun ruler called Amir Addul Rehman, or the “Iron Amir,” who imposed his iron-

fisted rule over the country during the last decades of the 19th century. He used the money and weapons his British backers gave him to crush rival Pashtun tribes, and then turned his attention to the country's non-Pashtun peoples, whom he subjected to harsh treatment, including forced migrations and even massacres. A devoted follower of Islam, the Amir banned all non-religious education, strengthened the powers of the mullahs (religious authorities), and sought to shelter his country from any foreign, especially Western, influences. These policies were to be pursued a century later, when the Taliban established its hold over the country.

In 1919, Afghanistan's independence was officially recognized, and under the rule of the Iron Amir's successors, efforts were made to modernize the country. A small, educated elite of politicians and civil servants in Kabul wrote its first constitution. But the widening divide between the urban centers and the tribal countryside, where longstanding ethnic hatreds and rivalries still festered, made such attempts to mould Afghanistan into a modern country immensely difficult. Two of the country's first post-independence monarchs were assassinated, and periodic revolts among the tribal minorities further contributed to its political instability. In 1933, the country's last Durrani king, Zahir Shah, came to the throne.

### **PART THREE: In the Crucible of the Cold War**

A crucible is a container in which metals or other materials are subjected to very high heat, often so that they melt. Metaphorically, the term also refers to an extreme test or trial and often has a connotation of inevitability. After reading the information below, suggest why Afghanistan has been a crucible.

“For many educated people in premodern societies, communism offered a way of both catching up with and resisting the West; and the ideology had a powerful and often generous sponsor in the Soviet Union. But the hasty, ill-adapted borrowings from Soviet communism . . . more often than not imposed new kinds of pain and trauma on such a traditional society as Afghanistan, and helped to push the country even further away from the modern world.”  
— from *The Making of Afghanistan* by Pankaj Mishra

During the 1960s and early 70s, Kabul was a dynamic, Westernized centre with a thriving university where various ideologies and political movements struggled for influence. Under the rule of King Zahir Shah, a free press had been established, women had achieved considerable independence in urban areas, and a growing middle class was hoping that their country would now become a modern, secular state. Among the strongest proponents of these were the members of the small but influential communist party, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). Their main rivals, both on the university campus and in the broader Afghan society as a whole, were the Islamic fundamentalists who shared the communists' suspicion of the West but rejected the example of the Soviet Union as an alternative to it. Many of the political leaders who were to impose their will on the Afghan people, often with brutal force, gained their first experience during this time, heading small rival university factions that would later form political parties and military forces.

In 1973, Zahir Shah was overthrown in a palace coup led by his cousin Mohammed Daoud. The king went into exile in Rome, where at the time of this writing he still awaits a call to return to his homeland as the head of a new coalition government. Pro-communist elements within the armed forces, along with a branch of the PDPA, had supported Daoud's coup,

hoping it would lead to the crushing of the Islamic fundamentalists and new overtures to the Soviet Union. Islamic militants like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who had fought the communists on the Kabul university campus, fled to Pakistan and established a base in the border city of Peshawar. He was soon joined there by Berhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmed Shah Massoud, who would later become leaders of the anti-communist *mujahedeen* (holy warriors).

Under Daoud's rule, Afghanistan once again sought to use its strategic position to curry favour from the world's two rival empires of the Cold War era: the Soviet Union and the United States. Both countries poured foreign aid into Afghanistan, most of which went to strengthen the country's armed forces, with little reaching the impoverished peasantry in the countryside. Five years after seizing power, Daoud was himself overthrown and killed in a bloody coup led by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The communists had become disillusioned with Daoud's incompetence and corruption and now sought to impose their own dream of a modernized Afghan society on the country. Itself bitterly divided between two factions, the PDPA immediately began to institute a number of radical social reforms, including handing over once-feudal estates to landless peasants in the countryside, curbing the influence of the mullahs, and, most controversially, opening schools for girls. Almost immediately, conservative Islamic fundamentalist elements declared *jihad* (holy war) on the communist "infidels" in Kabul.

As successive PDPA leaders and factions engaged in a self-destructive, internecine power struggle, the Afghan countryside rose up in opposition to it. Despite their actions, the PDPA leaders were almost totally incapable of comprehending the nature of the semi-medieval society they sought to govern. By late 1979, the situation had reached such a desperate point that the Soviet Union sent its army over the Amu Darya river into Afghanistan. Yet another empire had invaded the country.

One of the first acts of the Soviet occupiers was to remove and murder the fanatical leader of the PDPA regime and replace him with a more moderate figure, Babrak Karmal, who was believed to be sympathetic to the adapting of his people's Islamic values to the modern world. But by now Afghanistan had become a battlefield in one of the Cold War's proxy fights, like Vietnam, where the Soviets and the United States both backed their respective sides in a bitter, drawn-out conflict that wreaked havoc on the people it engulfed. The Soviet occupation was brutal, and countless villages were levelled and their people massacred in an effort to crush the resistance of the *mujahedeen*. For their part, the Islamic fundamentalist rebels quickly found strong support from the United States, seeking to settle the score with the Russians after their own humiliating defeat in Vietnam. Under CIA direction, over two billion dollars worth of weapons were transferred through Pakistan to the *mujahedeen*, including state-of-the-art Stinger surface-to-air missiles capable of downing Soviet helicopter gunships.

Along with U.S. weaponry and Pakistani assistance, the *mujahedeen* also welcomed a foreign legion of militant Islamic activists from various countries in the Arab and Muslim worlds, including a young Saudi-born millionaire called Osama bin Laden. These so-called "Afghan Arabs" were recruited in their host countries by CIA agents who assisted their passage to Afghanistan through the anti-Soviet staging centre of Peshawar, Pakistan. For a decade the Afghan war raged on, with the Soviets increasingly incapable of using their superior military power to subdue the dogged resistance of the *mujahedeen* and their U.S. and Pakistani back-

ers. During this time over a million Afghans lost their lives, and much of the countryside was devastated. On coming to power in 1985, the new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev realized that his country's Afghan venture to bolster a communist regime had instead turned into a "bloody wound" that was weakening his own government's hold on power. In 1989, he announced that Soviet forces would withdraw from the country, leaving a pro-communist government headed by Mohammed Najibullah clinging desperately to power in Kabul as the confident *mujahedeen* prepared to take power. Satisfied that they had finally delivered pay-back to the Soviets for their Vietnam loss, the Americans quickly lost interest in Afghanistan, and neither knew nor cared which *mujahedeen* faction was likely to rise to a position of ascendancy in the post-communist period.

## **PART FOUR: The Ascendancy of the Taliban**

How and why did the Taliban achieve its position of dominance and superiority in Afghanistan? Formulate an answer to this question by reading the following carefully. Compare your analysis with that of others.

"We have a common task—Afghanistan, the USA and the civilized world—to launch a joint struggle against fundamentalism. If fundamentalism comes to power in Afghanistan, war will continue for many years. Afghanistan will turn into a centre of world smuggling for narcotic drugs. Afghanistan will be turned into a centre for international terrorism." — Mohammed Najibullah, President of Afghanistan, shortly before he was overthrown in 1992

In the Pashtun language, the word *talib* means student, and the group known as the Taliban, which now rules Afghanistan, originated in the *madrassas* (Saudi Arabia-financed religious schools) of Peshawar, Pakistan, during the anti-Soviet war. There, a young generation of militant Islamic fundamentalists were taught (many would say indoctrinated in) a Saudi Arabian form of Islam more extreme and uncompromising than any known elsewhere in the Muslim world. These students began to apply the values of their religion to every aspect of social and political life, and developed a new ideology—Islamism—that was soon to gain influence from North Africa to Indonesia. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Najibullah government made strong efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement with some of the more moderate *mujahedeen* groups and offered to restore Islamic values into the country's social and cultural life. But resistance leaders like Rabbani, Hekmatyar, and Massoud were totally dismissive of such appeals, insisting instead on nothing short of the complete destruction of the remains of the communist regime and its replacement by a state based on Islamic principles. From 1989 to 1992 they fought the Najibullah government, which by this time could only control Kabul and a few other urban centres, and at the same time began jockeying for power in the country's new political order.

In 1992 Kabul fell to the *mujahedeen*, and Rabbani claimed the presidency with the backing of Massoud. But opposition from Hekmatyar and other tribally based factions soon turned the capital into a killing ground it had never been during the Soviet war. The city was practically destroyed as rival *mujahedeen* factions fought for control in its streets, and countless civilians were killed. In 1994, Rabbani and Massoud withdrew, and Hekmatyar's largely Pashtun group, backed by Pakistan, seized control. The various *mujahedeen* groups by this time were financing their operations from the profits from the country's lucrative drug trade, based on the production of the opium poppy, from which heroin is derived. They also controlled the

major smuggling routes between Central Asia and Pakistan. Largely autonomous, and contemptuous of any sense of law and order, the *mujahedeen* quickly lost the romantic freedom-fighter aura that had enveloped them when they were battling the Soviets. To many Afghans, it seemed that they were no better than the hated, foreign-backed regime they had displaced.

In the southern city of Kandahar, a local mullah and veteran of the anti-communist resistance named Mohammed Omar was so disgusted with the behaviour of the occupying *mujahedeen* forces that he organized Taliban opposition to them, eventually driving them out. From their base there, the Taliban recruited supporters from the Pashtun region of the country, drawing idealistic young Islamic militants too young to have fought the Soviets, but eager to prove their manhood in the traditional Afghan military style. The Taliban captured Herat in 1995, and then proceeded to turn their attention to the capital, which fell to them in 1996. Aided by Pakistan's rulers, who wanted to see order restored inside Afghanistan, the Taliban imposed its fanatical version of Islamic *sharia* (religious law) on every part of the country except the far north, where non-Pashtun minorities continued to back the forces of Rabbani and Massoud, and who became known as the United Front or Northern Alliance.

What kind of regime did the Taliban want to establish? In the words of its Minister of Information, "The most important thing is for the rules of Islam to be brought to Afghanistan. Islam is Islam everywhere. The only difference is that some people are saying it, but they are not doing it practically. Right now we are strong enough to bring peace to our country. We want to solve its problems and avoid its divisions. We are going to keep our borders and national integrity, because we have to overcome all these divisions." Upon taking Kabul in 1996, one of the Taliban's first acts was to seize Najibullah and his brother from the protective custody the United Nations had extended to them after they fell from power four years before and lynch them before a howling crowd, after cruelly torturing them. Anyone suspected of PDPA or moderate *mujahedeen* sympathies was executed. Convicted criminals were put to death in mass executions held in a soccer stadium that had been built with United Nations development aid funds. Women were completely barred from any occupations and professions, and were severely restricted from appearing in public at all. The burqa, a garment that totally covers the female form except for a grilled area around the eyes, became mandatory. Education for women and girls was eliminated. Being allowed to be outside only in the company of a husband or male relative and then to be fully covered has deprived them of sunshine and is causing consequent health problems.

Anything considered opposed to Islamic values, like alcohol, music, television, or games and pastimes like chess, were outlawed. The university was closed. The remaining treasures in Kabul's museum that had not suffered damage during the war, including priceless statues from the Bactrian period, were destroyed. And in 2001, the Taliban made good on its long-standing threat to blow up the immense statues of Buddha that had been carved into the rocky cliff-faces of Bamiyan, near Kabul, where they had witnessed previous conquerors come and go for thousands of years. As archaeologists and lovers of culture around the world watched in horror, these impressive structures were blown apart by artillery shells, to the accompanying shouts from Taliban gunners of "*Allah o akbar*" (God is great).

At first, some Afghans welcomed the Taliban. If their rule was harsh and uncompromising, at least it had succeeded in putting an end to the infighting and corruption that had marked the

*mujahedeen* power-struggle era. But to middle-class urban residents in Kabul, Herat, and other centres, the Taliban represented the worst kind of dogmatic, backward-looking Islamic fundamentalism they feared would forever ruin their country's hopes of progressing toward modernization and secularism. Thousands of them fled the country, many finding their way to the West while others waited in friendly neighbouring countries like Iran, from where they hoped one day to return to their homeland once the Taliban's oppressive rule had ended. Despite the fact that its brutality had earned it the status of a pariah state in the international community, recognized only by its benefactors—Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates—the Taliban did not attract the attention of the United States until 1998, when President Bill Clinton ordered missile strikes against alleged bin Laden terrorist bases located in Afghanistan.

By this time, the Taliban had extended a warm invitation to former “Afghan Arabs” like bin Laden and other Islamic militants to come to Afghanistan and use it as a base of operations for their struggles. In return, bin Laden invested considerable sums of his family's money in restoring the country's shattered transportation infrastructure. The 1998 U.S. raids on his Al-Qaeda bases in Afghanistan, retaliation for his organization's bombing of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in which hundreds of people were killed, were militarily fruitless but fuelled bin Laden's determination to continue his terrorist campaign against the Americans for their support of the Saudi regime he hated. Secure in Afghanistan, and enjoying the full backing of the Taliban regime, he continued to issue denunciations of the West and warn of future violent actions against U.S. interests.

## **PART FIVE: “Enduring Freedom” and Beyond**

“Afghanistan is an easy place to march into, but it is far more difficult to march out of.”

— Alexander the Great

Any military campaign is fraught with risks. After reading the following, explain in your own words what the U.S. and its allies had to win or to lose in Operation Enduring Freedom.

The horrific terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, stunned the world and galvanized the determination of the U.S. government to seek out and destroy those responsible for them. Bin Laden and his group, along with their Taliban hosts, instantly became the first targets of retaliation. The bombing campaign against Afghanistan began on October 7, as part of a full-scale military operation President George W. Bush has called “Operation Enduring Freedom.” A broad international coalition of nations was assembled to endorse this war on terrorism, including Muslim countries like Pakistan that border Afghanistan and had once supported the Taliban. It was hoped that crippling air strikes against it would cause the Taliban regime to collapse, or at least agree to hand over bin Laden in return for an end to hostilities against it. Failing that, there was also the chance that bin Laden might himself be killed in a bombardment or captured alive during an elite special-forces assault inside Afghanistan.

Almost a month after the military strikes began, none of these eventualities had come to pass. The bombing continued, and a mounting toll of civilian casualties and a looming refugee crisis posed serious problems for the United States in its efforts to both hold the coalition

together and convince the world that its strategy of bombing Afghanistan was working. At the same time, bin Laden's videotaped speeches were reaching a receptive audience in many Islamic countries, while the Taliban's determination in the face of U.S. bombardment was also attracting admiration from Muslims critical of the West. There was growing concern that with winter approaching in Afghanistan, military operations might have to be scaled down or even suspended entirely, to resume in 2002. International relief agencies warned of a refugee crisis of staggering proportions as millions of Afghans displaced by the war grew desperately short of food and protection against the coming snows. Public opinion in the United States, Canada, and other Western countries remained strongly supportive of a war on terrorism in general, but there were signs of growing impatience with the meager results achieved so far, and also some concern that innocent people were suffering while the terrorists and their backers remained unharmed.

The possibility of the deployment of ground forces to root out bin Laden and his group, and perhaps even topple the Taliban regime itself was appearing more likely in early November 2001. As the United States switched its tactics from air strikes against selected targets to massive carpet bombing of front-line Taliban positions in the north of the country, it seemed more likely that the opposition Northern Alliance forces were being primed for their long-promised major offensive to capture Kabul. But the strategy of sending U.S., British, or possibly even Canadian troops into the country where so many other invaders throughout history had faced such resistance and sustained such losses caused many to hesitate. A large ground operation in Afghanistan would inevitably result in considerable military casualties, for the Taliban would prove to be a formidable foe—fighting on its own terrain, and using the skills developed during the war against the Russians to their maximum effect.

There was also a deep concern that even if the Taliban were overthrown, and a new government composed of the Northern Alliance, the exiled king, or other opposition forces assumed power in Afghanistan, the country's deep-seated problems would not soon disappear. Many Afghans feared that once the outside powers had achieved their goals or tired of the fighting, they would abandon the country to its fate once again, as had happened so many times in the past. Afghanistan is a country that has been practically destroyed by almost a quarter-century of incessant warfare, much of it the responsibility of foreign powers such as the former Soviet Union, Pakistan, and the United States. It remains to be seen if the same commitment that is urging the continuation of the war on terrorism in that country will be sustained for the much more long-term objective of peacemaking, humanitarian assistance, and economic reconstruction that the people of Afghanistan both long for and deserve.

## Summary Activities

1. Summarize why Afghanistan was targeted for U.S. and allied military strikes.
2. Identify and explain in detail the main strategic, political, moral, and diplomatic problems the U.S. and allied governments faced in their efforts to be successful in Operation Enduring Freedom.

# **TERRORIST ATTACK: THE RETALIATION**

## ***An Uncertain Future***

The terrorist attacks and the military response to them created a mood of deep uncertainty and anxiety about what consequences might follow. Below are some of the major concerns that have been raised. Discuss how the events of September 11 and their aftermath have contributed to each of the situations described.

### **1. The Possibility of Further Terrorist Attacks**

Almost two months after September 11, Americans remained on a high state of alert as their government continued to issue warnings of possible future terrorist actions. A mysterious anthrax scare was sweeping the nation. Whether or not Osama bin Laden's group or any other terrorist organization was responsible for this had not been proven, but the sense of fear sometimes amounting to panic was widespread. There were also warnings that bridges in California or other important transportation links could be targeted. U.S. government leaders like Attorney-General John Ashcroft and Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge appeared to be issuing contradictory messages to the American people, on the one hand urging them to return to their normal lives, while on the other continuing to caution them that further unspecified attacks could take place at any moment.

### **2. The Economic Impact of September 11**

The North American economies were already slowing down before the terrorist attacks, but the aftermath of September 11 probably pushed them into a full-blown recession. The airline and tourism industries were hardest hit, but growing consumer unease was also having a negative effect on the retail sector of the economy, as the all-important Christmas season approached. Unemployment rates in the United States in November rose to levels unseen since the recession of the early 1980s, and the Canadian dollar fell to record lows as foreign investors put their money into U.S. dollars as a secure currency in a time of growing financial crisis. Economists disagreed over how long and how serious the economic slump might be, but they were unanimous in their view that it was happening, and that governments needed to take steps to address it. In Canada, some advocated increased government spending in social programs and job-creation as well as increased security measures. The United States planned to run a deficit for the first time in years to stimulate growth, and interest rates were slashed to encourage borrowers to invest in new economic activity. Whether such steps would help slow down the recession was not clear, but there was growing evidence that the long economic boom the United States had been riding since the mid 1990s was over. The effects this might have on the global economy were also far from clear, but deeply disturbing to many observers.

### **3. The Middle East Crisis**

The ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians entered a more serious and potentially dangerous stage for the Middle East region after September 11. Emboldened by what he viewed as a revulsion against terrorism in the United States, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon sent tanks and troops into Palestinian-controlled zones to root out groups that had been conducting attacks against targets inside the country. But instead of being supported by his traditional ally the United States, Sharon faced great pressure to withdraw his forces immedi-

ately. The reason for this was the United States' need to keep Arab states in the region on its side in the campaign against terrorism in Afghanistan. For a time, Sharon relented, ordering his forces to pull out and committing his government to new talks with the Palestinians. But the assassination of a hardline Israeli cabinet minister by units from a radical Palestinian group triggered a new crisis in late October. The Middle East appeared to be on the verge of a dangerous escalation of violence as both Israel and the Palestinians consolidated their opposing positions. U.S. and British leaders desperately sought to revive the troubled peace process, realizing that if a full-scale conflict erupted, the potential consequences for the campaign against terrorism could be catastrophic.

#### **4. Iraq as a Potential Target**

When President Bush declared war on international terrorism shortly after the attacks of September 11, he was careful to state that Afghanistan was not the only potential target for military strikes. He declared that any country whose government harboured or aided terrorist groups of global reach could be considered a possible enemy. While one-time “terrorist states” like Iran, Libya, and Syria all denounced the World Trade Center and Pentagon bombings Iraq was conspicuously silent on the issue. For some time, the United States and Britain had sought a reason for resuming the pressure they had once applied on Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein to open his country to United Nations inspection teams monitoring his military actions. It now appeared that if any credible link could be established between Saddam's regime and the group believed to have masterminded the attacks on the United States, then a pretext for military action would exist. Early in the crisis Bush had assured Jordan's King Abdullah that the United States had no intention of attacking Iraq. As the bombing campaign in Afghanistan appeared to be failing to achieve its hoped-for results, however, there was a growing impression that further terrorist targets in other countries were under consideration. But if the United States and Britain were to launch yet another punishing military assault on Iraq without solid justification, then their support in other Arab states in the region could evaporate.

# TERRORIST ATTACK: THE RETALIATION

## *Discussion, Research, and Essay Activities*

- 1. Prepare a visual display or storyboard using photos, images, maps, and newspaper or magazine articles dealing with the war on terrorism that began on October 7, 2001, illustrating its impact on Afghanistan and/or Canada's role in it.
- 2. Read and discuss the novel *The Breadwinner* by Canadian writer Deborah Ellis, which deals with the story of an 11-year-old girl and her family in war-torn Afghanistan. It is published by Groundwood Books in Toronto, and is available to schools.
- 3. Read and prepare a book report on one of the following books dealing with the issues discussed in this story: *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction*, by Walter Laqueur; *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America*, by Yossef Bodansky; *Unholy War: Afghanistan, America, and International Terrorism*, by John K. Cooley; *Terrorism: Today's Biggest Threat to Freedom*, by John Pynchon Holmes and Tom Burke; *War at the Top of the World*, by Eric S. Margolis; *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Taliban Movement in Afghanistan*, by Michael Griffin; *Losing Control: Global Security in the 21st Century*, by Paul Rogers; *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* by John L. Esposito; *Islam: A Very Short Introduction*, and *Islam in the World*, by Malise Ruthven; *No God But God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam*, by Geneive Abdo; *Taliban: Ascent to Power*, by M. J. Gohari; *The Taliban Phenomenon in Afghanistan, 1994-97*, by Kamal Matinuddin; *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, by Ahmed Rashid; *Warriors of the Prophet: The Struggle for Islam*, by Mark Huband.
- 4. Find out more about the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and how Canadian relief agencies like the Red Cross, Save the Children, UNICEF, and others are trying to assist residents in that country.
- 5. As a class, debate what policy you think Canada should adopt regarding the war on terrorism. Should our country support the U.S.-led military action against Afghanistan and other possible targets, or should it instead be urging another solution to the problem, and if so, what?
- 6. Consult newspapers, magazines, and relevant Web sites to obtain a file of articles presenting differing opinions on the war on terrorism, its causes, prosecution, and possible consequences. With your classmates, discuss the various viewpoints presented in the articles, and determine which positions you most agree and/or disagree with, and why.