

The United States' 20-year war in Afghanistan is layered and complex. It is About the Speakers difficult to convey all events in one timeline. Some key events concerning U.S. involvement in the war are included below.

September 11, 2001: Thousands of Americans die because of four Al-Qaeda suicide bombers flying into the World Trade Center in New York City. A few days later, President George W. Bush begins the United States mission to “win the war on terrorism” despite not officially declaring war with Afghanistan.¹

October 7, 2001: With support from the United Kingdom, Operation Enduring Freedom is officially launched by the U.S. military which includes airstrikes and ground conflict on al-Qaeda and the Taliban.²

December 2001: Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden escapes from the caves of Tora Bora and flees to Pakistan.³ May 2003: U.S. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld says that “major combat” is no longer necessary. The Afghan government is reconstructing to a more democratic system, and life for Afghan women and girls is improving.⁴

August 22, 2008: An uncontrolled fire breaks out from a U.S. gunship in Herat province, killing dozens of Afghan civilians. Afghan President Karzai (2001-2014) condemns the U.S. for their carelessness which corroborates the Taliban’s claims about foreign forces on Afghan soil doing more damage than providing protection.⁵

January 2009: When President Bush leaves office there are 30,000 troops stationed in Afghanistan. The Taliban was also planning a complete resurgence.⁶

February 17, 2009: President Barack Obama says that he plans to send 17,000 more troops to Afghanistan. There are currently 37,000 troops. About nine months later President Obama commits another 30,000 forces to Afghanistan in addition to the 68,000 already present. He says this troop surge is only temporary and sets the first U.S. troop withdrawal plan for July 2011.⁷

May 1, 2011: U.S. forces kill Bin Laden, the primary target of the “war on terror,” in a Taliban compound in Pakistan.⁸

December 5, 2011: World leaders meet at the Bonn Conference to discuss the future of Afghanistan. Instead of making a plan for Afghanistan to achieve a “self-sustaining and secure government,” President Karzai asks for \$10 billion for security and reconstruction in exchange for continued aid from foreign forces.⁹

March 2012: U.S. and Taliban officials plan to have peace talks in Qatar two months later. A failed prison swap stalled the talks. President Karzai’s trust of foreign troops wavers as there are allegations of a U.S. soldier murdering 16 Afghan villagers.¹⁰

May 27, 2014: President Obama announces a timeline to withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2016. Two candidates wanting to succeed President Karzai promise to sign a security agreement that is a pre-requisite of any post-2014 U.S. troop presence.¹¹

October 15, 2015: The 2016 troop withdrawal plan is abandoned by President Obama. When he leaves office, there are 5,500 troops in Afghanistan in 2017.¹²

August 2017: President Donald Trump doubles back on his campaign promises to remove all troops from Afghanistan. He approves an additional 3,900 troops in Afghanistan, making the new total about 14,000 troops. President Trump announces the new strategy in Afghanistan which includes a focus on Pakistan hiding terrorist groups and a granting of authority to U.S. commanders to use more military force.¹³

January 2018: Violence in Kabul rapidly increases. Many Afghan civilians believe that the presence of U.S. troops is directly related to the hundreds of soldiers and police dying each week.¹⁴

February 2019: Peace talks between U.S. representative Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban official Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar begin but excludes the Afghan President Ghani (2014-2021). President Trump plans to pull out 7,000 troops. Months later President Trump calls off peace talks with Taliban leaders after Khalilzad reports an agreement had been reached.¹⁵

September 12, 2020: Representatives of the Taliban and of the Afghan government and civil society meet face to face in Doha, Qatar. This occurs after several months of delay over a prisoner swap introduced in the U.S.-Taliban deal the previous year. The Afghan government wants a truce while the Taliban insists on an Islamic-run Afghanistan.¹⁶

April 14, 2021: President Joe Biden declares that the remaining 3,500 U.S. and NATO troops must leave Afghanistan by September 11 regardless of the state of the war. The Taliban is firm on their decision to not engage in any negotiation or talks until all foreign troops leave.¹⁷

August 15, 2021: The Taliban takes over the Kabul and the presidential palace after news spreads that President Ghani flees the country. Former Afghan President Karzai and former chief executive under Ghani, Abdullah, work with the Taliban to shift Afghanistan to complete Taliban rule.¹⁸

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Information sourced from:

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