

The Afghanistan war: A simple explanation

By Angie Drobnic Holan on Monday, October 12th, 2009 at 1:28 p.m.



A U.S. Marine patrols in southern Afghanistan with Afghan army members.

A quick review of recent history

Afghanistan lies between Saudi Arabia and India, and it's directly bordered to the west by Iran, to the east by Pakistan, and to the north by former Soviet republics. It also shares a small border with China. In 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in order to prop up a communist government. The war dragged on for 10 years, with the United States supporting the Islamic insurgents who resisted the Soviets (recently popularized by the movie *Charlie Wilson's War*). By the 1990s, the Soviets had left, the Americans had lost interest and parts of the country were lawless and chaotic.

Enter the Taliban. Roughly translated, the word means "student," and members of the Taliban came together out of strict Islamic schools. They countered Afghanistan's warlords and imposed order, but they also banned music and forced women to wear head-to-toe coverings. The United States initially supported the Taliban but became wary after news reports about the repression of women and other human rights violations. In 1996, the Taliban took over the capital city of Kabul — roughly, the same time Osama bin Laden arrived in Afghanistan after being ousted from Sudan. Bin Laden's group, al-Qaida, set up training camps in Afghanistan, and al-Qaida planned the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, there.

After the terrorist attacks, the United States invaded Afghanistan, removed the Taliban and chased bin Laden into the mountainous region on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Bin Laden disappeared, and the United States has had a military presence in Afghanistan ever since.

The Iraq war and the election of Barack Obama