



## PRESS KIT

### Series on Canada in Afghanistan #2: Background on War in Afghanistan

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#### War in Afghanistan: Where did it come from?

By 2006, Afghans have been living with uninterrupted conflict for 25 years. Soviet forces began arriving in Afghanistan in 1979. Upon their withdrawal in 1989, a violent civil war erupted among different Afghan factions. Many cities were destroyed during this period, tens of thousands killed, and rape was a constant threat facing women and girls. In 1996, the Taliban, an extremist militia group, captured Kabul and enforced a regime of excessive human rights abuses, particularly against women. By 2001, when plans for a new democratic government in Afghanistan were being drawn up to replace the Taliban, the country's economy was in shambles, most infrastructure destroyed, and many provinces were controlled by powerful independent warlords.

Afghanistan is considered to be very geo-politically strategic. It is bordered by seven countries, including Iran, Pakistan, India and China. For centuries, this small country has been fought over by factions, and the Afghan people have resisted invasions by external forces, including three attempted invasions by the British army in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In more recent years, it has contended with interference from other states for various reasons, including military, political, and for control over resources.

#### The Impact of War on Afghanistan

Afghans today live with the aftermath of a prolonged violent conflict. Mobility in most places is highly restricted and violent attacks frequent. Work and entrepreneurship opportunities are limited. The healthcare system is extremely weak, most Afghans can't afford basic medicines, and Afghanistan has the highest maternal mortality rate in the world. There is a housing shortage and a high number of land disputes.

Most people do not have access to clean water. Literacy rates are extremely low, particularly among women, and efforts to rebuild an education system have met with corruption, lack of schools in remote areas, and violent attacks (arson and murder) from insurgents against classrooms and educators. Afghanistan is among the most heavily mined countries in the world, and 50% of landmine victims die due to the lack of medical facilities. Many people have experienced trauma, yet counselling and rehabilitation services are almost non-existent.

The perpetual state of war has resulted in the proliferation of arms and in the prevalence of armed political factions. Illegal, violent factions include the Taliban, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami, and factions associated with certain warlords. Other groups have representatives in the parliament, in the government and some individuals are affiliated with both legal political parties as well as illegal factions. It is not uncommon for loyalties and alliances to change frequently.

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