

The Complexity of Afghanistan

Understanding the situation faced by ground troops in the War on Terror

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Last year's announcement by President Obama that an additional 30,000 US troops are being sent to Afghanistan to join the on-going "war on terror" has left many people wondering, why is it so difficult to end the conflict in Afghanistan?

To understand the hardships our troops face in Afghanistan, one needs to examine the country's turbulent history, complex ethnic make-up and rugged geography.

Afghanistan was officially founded by unified Pashtun tribes in 1747 and served as a buffer state between Great Britain and Russia, until it won its independence from Great Britain in 1919.

Over roughly the next 50 years, Afghanistan established a tremulous democratic government, which was overthrown by military coup in 1973. This coup was then again overthrown by the Soviet invasion in 1978.

Over the next 11 years, Afghan freedom fighters, known as the Mujahedin were armed and trained by the US military in a Cold-War effort to halt the spread of communism. The Mujahedin and the US saw this goal accomplished when the Soviets withdrew their forces in 1989.

After defeating the Soviets, the Mujahedin fighters were left with no funding to establish infrastructural stability and the common enemy that they united to fight against was now gone, leaving a large group of well-trained, well-armed,

uneducated young men, with nothing to occupy them anymore. This resulted in the weapons and training they received from the US being turned against one-another, resulting in a chaotic set civil wars that lasted until 1996.

In 1996, Mullah Mohammed Omar, disgusted with the atrocities of the on-going civil war within Afghanistan, established the Taliban (Pashto for "student" or "seeker of knowledge"), using 50 madrassah students as his soldiers in an effort to stop the brutal violence.

From 1996 to 2001, Omar and the increasing number of Talib soldiers traveled from region to region across Afghanistan, announcing their presence as they traveled, disarming the Mujahedin and establishing themselves as the de-facto government within Afghanistan.

Upon the launch of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001, Omar and the Taliban

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Below: A map of Afghanistan's provincial borders

