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The Fall of Kabul in 2021: Background, Effects, Resonance
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Timeline: Important events from the history of Afghanistan

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Timeline

Important events from the history of Afghanistan

Compiled by Mira Menzfeld

Around 1500-1600:

There is written evidence for the use of the term 'Afghanistan', but at this time the more common term for the areas corresponding to present-day Afghanistan is 'Khorasan' – though this also includes parts of what is now Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Iran and Turkmenistan

1722:

Ahmad Shah Durrani founds the (Pashtun-dominated) Durrani Empire – sometimes referred to today as the predecessor of the present-day state of Afghanistan

1839-1842:

First British invasion of the Afghan territory. However, the British are unable to conquer and hold the country

1878-1881:

Second Anglo-Afghan War; the British invaders gain influence. The British fail to achieve their goal of annexing Afghanistan to British India but help Abdur Rahman Khan to become ruler of the newly proclaimed kingdom of Afghanistan. During Khan's reign (but under Russian and British supervision), the borders of Afghanistan that we know today are established. Afghanistan is officially recognised in 1893 as fully separate from British India. As a result, Pashtuns suddenly become citizens of different states, with some living in British India (territory of modern-day Pakistan) and others on Afghan territory

1919:

Third Anglo-Afghan War, in which the British and Pashtuns jointly confront Hazara and Tajik fighters. At the end of the war, the British recognise Afghanistan's independence as a constitutional monarchy

1920-1939:

Afghanistan signs friendship treaties, first with Russia (1921) and then with the United States of America (USA) (1936). In the second half of the 1930s, treaties are also signed between the German Reich and Afghanistan, stipulating economic and military areas of activity for the Germans. The conse-

quence: the secret service, the police, the army, agricultural planning, and the education system are subjected to Nazi influence by officers of the Wehrmacht. Nonetheless, the Afghan kingdom declares neutrality in World War II

1961:

After a series of border incidents, Pakistan closes the border to Afghanistan to keep Pashtuns on the Afghan and Pakistani sides separate. This is because some Pashtuns, supported by the Soviet Union, want to create an independent Pashtunistan

1964:

Afghanistan's great council, the loya jirga, resolves to declare the country a constitutional monarchy once again. The first free elections take place in 1965; a woman becomes a minister

1973:

Coup in Afghanistan while the king is abroad. The king's cousin, Daoud Khan, takes over all important offices, making himself president, head of government, minister of defence and foreign minister. Afghanistan is declared a republic; in reality it is a dictatorship. In the following years Khan's regime provokes resistance from both leftist and Islamic groups, some of them operating from Pakistani territory. One section of the left-wing people's party, Khalq, plans to infiltrate the military to overthrow the dictatorship

1978:

Military coup, Khan is executed. Former Khalq leaders want to turn Afghanistan into a socialist state; the communist Democratic People's Party of Afghanistan assumes power. As a result, Afghanistan develops closer relations with the Eastern bloc and pursues land reforms at home. Local land owners, but also influential local religious figures, oppose the land reforms. To counter the communist regime, more and more militant mujahidin groups emerge in exile and in Afghanistan itself

1979-1989:

The Soviet Union invades to defend Afghanistan's communist rulers against their opponents. The conflict displaces millions of Afghans. The resistance of mujahidin groups against the occupation intensifies. In 1986 the USA delivers air defence missiles to mujahidin. In 1987 the former head of the secret service, Mohammad Najibullah, becomes president. In 1989 the Soviet troops withdraw. Najibullah, previously supported by the Soviets, continues to fight the mujahidin who are working against him. He is able to maintain his position in Kabul until 1992, even after a failed coup attempt by his defence minister in 1990

1992-1996:

Civil war. In 1992 mujahidin take control of Kabul but are unable to achieve stability. In the following years, rival mujahidin groups and actors engage in bloody fighting. Battles between the different factions do not spare civilians; 600,000 to 2 million people die. Around 1993/1994 the Taliban become a force to be reckoned with – initially in the south. Some hope they will bring peace and a new order, ending the perpetual battles between mujahidin groups

1996:

The Taliban conquer Kabul and proclaim the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. They seize former president Najibullah from the UN headquarters in Kabul, torture and murder him, and put his corpse on display. Several former enemies form the 'United Front', also known as the 'Northern Alliance', a coalition to resist the Taliban after their takeover. Hamid Karzai, later to become president, is part of this alliance

1998:

For the first time, the USA bombs targets associated with al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden, now living in Afghanistan with his supporters. The Taliban do not surrender bin Laden. Between 1999 and 2001 there are bloody conflicts between Taliban and Northern Alliance fighters, especially in northern and western Afghanistan, during which massacres of the civilian population take place

2001:

Ahmad Shah Massoud, military head of the Northern Alliance and important in the resistance against the Taliban, is murdered by al-Qaida fighters shortly after giving a public warning about al-Qaida on a visit to the EU and Russia. After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the USA and other countries bomb various targets in Afghanistan which are associated with Osama bin Laden and/or the Taliban. In November an international military alliance invades Afghanistan. In December the UN Security Council gives a mandate for the deployment of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to Afghanistan, initially in Kabul and the surrounding areas. Representatives of Afghan exile groups and the Northern Alliance meet in Bonn and sign the Bonn Agreement, which includes the prompt convocation of a loya jirga with participants from the whole country. Karzai is appointed as chair of the interim administration, other representatives of the Northern Alliance also assume important functions, and some positions go to remaining supporters of the former monarch

2002:

An extraordinary loya jirga appoints Karzai as interim president

2003:

Command of the ISAF is handed over to NATO. Karzai convenes a constituent loya jirga, and in 2004 a new constitution comes into force. Karzai is elected president in a general election, but accusations of election fraud overshadow this and the next elections

2006:

The ISAF mission is expanded further: ISAF troops under NATO command are intensively active in other parts of the country. Suicide attacks on international troops, especially in southern and south-eastern Afghanistan, increase fivefold compared to the previous year. Military actions by the Taliban seem increasingly efficient. In the following years, the security situation deteriorates, especially in southern and eastern Afghanistan which are now under international control

2010:

The Afghanistan Conference in Kabul initiates a reintegration programme for Taliban fighters. Following a jirga resolution, a peace council is founded, though its members are selected and appointed by Karzai. The peace council is to initiate or decide on processes of reconciliation, including – under certain conditions – an amnesty for former fighters and negotiations with Taliban leaders. In the province of Kunduz, where German troops are responsible for security, an Afghan couple is stoned to death by Taliban

2011:

Peace talks with certain Taliban representatives begin. The chairman of the High Peace Council is killed by suicide attackers. In the following years, hundreds of thousands of Afghans flee to different countries, many to Europe. Those who are deported back to Afghanistan face the complete loss of protective social networks, general hardship and poverty, and the threat of persecution by the Taliban

2021:

International troops withdraw from Afghanistan, the Taliban assume power once again

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Further reading

How the Research and Documentation Services of the German Bundestag summarise the military deployment in Afghanistan:

- Deutscher Bundestag – Wissenschaftliche Dienste (2022) *Der Afghanistan-Einsatz 2001-2021. Eine sicherheitspolitische Chronologie*. <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/881198/27fd4f597e1d-4ee43350aaffc6f9d8c/WD-2-062-21-pdf-data.pdf> [Accessed 23 June 2022].

Up-to-date reports and analyses from and about Afghanistan:

- Afghanistan Analysts Network <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/>
- Afghanistan Zhaghdablaï – Thomas Ruttig über Afghanistan <https://thrut-tig.wordpress.com/>

Mira Menzfeld is a cultural and social anthropologist and works as an advanced postdoctoral fellow in the University Research Priority Programme ‘Digital Religion(s)’, the Department of Religious Studies, University of Zurich. Her areas of specialisation include the anthropology of dying, the anthropology of religion with a focus on Islam and religious ‘digitability’, and the anthropology of emotions, especially in couple relationships. She has carried out fieldwork in Switzerland, Finland, South China, and Germany with terminally ill people, European Salafis, and transmigrants. As a former journalist, Mira is particularly concerned with the transfer of anthropological knowledge into public contexts.

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