

Author's Note

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Afghanistan is a small country that serves as a bridge between Central Asia and South Asia, having faced invasions from historical powers like Alexander the Great, the Mongol Empire, the British, and the Soviet Union. The Soviet invasion began in 1979, igniting a decade of severe brutality as American-backed fighters opposed the Soviet-supported government. Despite much military support from the West, these resistance groups showed little interest in championing basic human rights for the Afghan population. The conflict was marked by fierce and prolonged fighting.

After the Soviets withdrew in 1989, Afghanistan plunged into civil war, with various armed factions vying for control. This turmoil made millions of Afghans refugees, forcing them into overcrowded and impoverished camps in neighboring countries like Pakistan, Iran, and Russia. The war left countless casualties—killed, maimed, or orphaned—and many Afghans were driven to psychological despair due to grief and terror.

In September 1996, the Taliban militia, previously supported by the US and Pakistan, seized control of Kabul. They implemented harsh laws against girls and women, shutting down girls' schools, barring women from the workforce, and enforcing strict dress codes. Societal controls were imposed, including the destruction of books, televisions, and prohibitions on music.

The situation escalated in the fall of 2001 when al-Qaeda, which trained in Afghanistan, attacked the Pentagon and World Trade Center. In retaliation, the United States led a coalition to bomb Afghanistan, displacing the Taliban and establishing a new government and constitution, which reinstated schools for both boys and girls and allowed women to return to work.

Despite these changes, Afghanistan remains troubled by ongoing violence. The Taliban has resumed fighting a successful guerrilla war, and the country has become infamous for opium production. Corruption within the government persists, and Afghans are increasingly uneasy with the continued presence of foreign forces. Women's rights struggles continue as threats against girls' schools and women activists increase.

Understanding this complex and beautiful yet tragic country and its resilient people is essential to learning from past mistakes made by outsiders that have contributed to its ongoing strife.