

# AFGHANISTAN

**FULL NAME:** Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Afghanistan literally means Land of the Afghan.  
**CAPITAL:** Kabul (population about 700,000)  
**LOCATION:** Central Asia  
**BORDERING COUNTRIES:** Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Rajikistan, Uzbekistan, China  
**AREA:** 647,500 square miles. Landlocked with mostly rugged mountains and some plains in the north and southwest.  
**AREA SIZE:** Slightly smaller than the state of Texas.  
**POPULATION:** 26.8 million (July 2001 estimate)  
**CLIMATE:** Arid to semi-arid; cold winters and hot summers  
**RELIGION:** Sunnit and Shiit Muslims  
**LANGUAGE:** Pashtu, Dari, Turkic languages  
**LIFE EXPECTANCY:** Male: 46.97 years Female: 45.47 years  
**INDEPENDENCE:** Aug. 19, 1919, from the United Kingdom over Afghan foreign affairs  
**NATIONAL HOLIDAY:** Independence Day, Aug. 19  
**BACKGROUND:** The Soviet Union invaded and occupied Afghanistan in 1979, but was forced to withdraw 10 years later by anti-communist mujahedeen forces supplied and trained by the United States, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and others. The rebels quickly turned their guns on each other, causing the rise of the fundamentalist Islamic Taliban, which seized most of the country starting in 1994. In September 1996, the militant Taliban took the capital of Kabul. U.S.-led air strikes against Afghanistan were launched Oct. 7, 2001, for harboring Saudi exile Osama Bin Laden, the top suspect in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in the United States. With the support of U.S. bombs and Special Forces, a loose collection of warlords called the Northern Alliance took control and captured Kabul in November. In mid-December, the U.S. Embassy in Kabul reopened after 12 years. Today, Afghanistan is on a road to recovery. However, after decades of war, the economy is still in ruins, its environment is in a state of crisis. The country is riddled with landmines left from the war, which are still injuring and killing people on a daily basis.  
**POLITICAL SITUATION:** An interim administration, headed by Hamid Karzai, took power after December 22, 2001 after various delegates in Bonn, Germany signed an accord. The administration ruled for six months, and an emergency *loya jirga* (Traditional Grand Assembly) was convened to decide on a transitional authority to lead Afghanistan until the people can elect a permanent government. Karzai was elected president by the *loya jirga*, in June 2002 and appointed a cabinet. The transitional government represents the midpoint of the immediate plan for Afghanistan. The third phase is a permanent and elected government that is supposed to be in place no later than June 2004.

