

WHERE THE U.S. AND TALIBAN STAND

STORIES BY COURTNEY STELZEL

Q&A: The Taliban and Osama bin Laden

What is the Taliban?

An Islamic fundamentalist group, mainly comprised of fighters, who are trained in religious schools in Pakistan along with former Islamic fighters. Their leader is Mullah Mohammad Omar, who supports Osama bin Laden and his militant followers known as the al-Qaeda. The Taliban supports bin Laden because he "gives their claim to be the vanguard of the new Sunni Islamic revolution greater credibility," according to a BBC News report.

What is the goal of the Taliban?

The world first noticed the Taliban when they seized the Afghan capital, Kabul, in September of 1996. It was their goal to stamp out corruption and restore peace in the region. However, their ultimate goal was to set up the world's most pure Islamic state, banning Western influences such as television, music and cinema. They have strictly enforced Islamic law, including public executions and amputations. They have received attention from the international press and women's rights groups by forcing girls and women from going to school and work.

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The scale of these attacks and the currents of world-wide attention that has occurred, obligates the United States to retaliate, said Dr. James Burk, a professor of sociology and a faculty member of the Military Studies Institute at Texas A&M.

He said the attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. were far more serious than the embassy bombings in Tanzania and Kenya. The loss of life and property is far greater, so they require a greater response.

Dr. Brian Linn, a professor of history and the head of the Military Studies Institute, said, "It's not like we didn't respond to the attacks in Africa; we just did it on a smaller, less-publicized scale."

"Now, this issue is a matter of perspective and scale," he said. "The issues were clear at Pearl Harbor, so warfare was an appropriate response. But it is difficult in this case because we are not living during a time of war."

Burk attributes the reason required for retaliation by the United States because this event has a symbolic importance.

"We're a superpower and if we are vulnerable to attack, then so are they [other democratic nations]," Burk said.

He added that retaliation is not really the issue, but the concept of securing our values is of utmost importance.

Despite the sentiment of many Americans to retaliate and a common misconception developing among many Middle Easterners, the United States is not targeting a specific group, Linn said.

"We are not at war with Afghanistan — we are not threatening a religion or any ethnic group," he said. Linn added, "We are just trying to punish those responsible for the attacks (in Washington, D.C. and New York)."

The position of the U.S. military is a precarious one because it is not at all clear if a country is being taken on, and yet rules of war are being applied to this situation, said Linn.

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Many Americans are still searching for answers following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C. The United States government is looking for those responsible, and the American people are also looking for someone to blame.

With this knowledge, it is the responsibility of U.S. citizens to understand why Osama bin Laden, a prime suspect in the attacks, and his Muslim militant group believe they have been called to fight a jihad against the United States.

Dr. Anthony Black, a professor of political science and policy at the University of Dundee, Scotland, is an expert on Islamic fundamentalism and the historical events that led up to this militant mind set today.

"If people, especially in the United States, want to make a rational, credible response to the events of two weeks ago, one has to know the causes," Black said. The only way to do that, Black said, is to understand the workings of the Islamic faith, and make a distinction between devout Muslim and those who believe the terrorist attacks were in the name of Allah.

A distinction must also be drawn between Islamic fundamentalists and those who are extremists, Black said.

"There is a distinction among fundamentalists who want to wipe everything clean and start again, and those who activate such an action against the U.S. two weeks ago," Black said.

An Afghanistan concept that gives insight into the actions of the militant Muslim group that carried out the terrorist actions is that Muslims are taught to command the good and condemn the evil.

Black added that during the 19th century, many Muslim intellectuals responded to the painful, but inescapable experience of European dominance.

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ADRIAN CALCANEO • THE BATTALION

SEPTEMBER 11

Terrorist attacks in New York and Washington D.C.

SEPTEMBER 12

Bush says terrorist attacks were "acts of war."

SEPTEMBER 13

Bush says that this is "the first war of the 21st century."

SEPTEMBER 14

Bush label bin Laden a prime suspect in the terrorist attacks.

SEPTEMBER 17

Bush pledges a "crusade" to "rid the world of evil-doers." 50,000 Hindu nationalists march in Muslim area of southern India to protest terrorism, decry Pakistan & Taliban

SEPTEMBER 18

Bush wants bin Laden "dead or alive."

SEPTEMBER 19

U.S. economy reels after a 671 point loss after opening on Monday, September 17.

SEPTEMBER 23

Osama bin Laden says, "I announce to you, our beloved brothers, that we are steadfast on the path of jihad with the heroic, faithful people under the leadership of Mullah Mohammed Omar." Calls on Pakistan's Muslims to fight "the American Crusade."

SEPTEMBER 24

Taliban says they are dispatching 300,000 fighters to defend Afghanistan's border. Attorney General John Ashcroft says 352 people have been arrested or detained in the investigation; another 392 people sought for questioning. Bush administration Sunday promised to present evidence linking bin Laden and his al-Qaeda terrorist network.

SEPTEMBER 25

Bush freezes out-going assets of 27 people and organizations with suspected links to terrorism.

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