

# The end of America's 20-year war

**Adya Praveen**  
CO-EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The war between the U.S. and Afghanistan has been referred to as the “nation’s longest war”. After nearly 20 years of bloodshed with 2,500 American troops killed within the war effort, the U.S. has officially declared its withdrawal of military troops, marking the end of a long-fought debate of U.S. intervention. The Biden administration has declared that complete military evacuation will take place in time for the country’s 20th anniversary of 9/11, in remembrance of the 2,977 lives lost in the tragic event.

The attack of 9/11 sparked the initial invasion of Afghanistan after the ruling government, the Taliban, provided a safe haven for terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, who was responsible for the four coordinated terrorist attacks that took place on September 11, 2001.

After refusing to cede the terrorists responsible, Afghanistan was invaded by the U.S. military with one goal in mind: overthrowing the Taliban regime by hunting down Al Qaeda leadership. Throughout the years, this focus has broadened into an effort of “nation-building”- a term used to describe the establishment of a Western-style government in the form of rebuilding. However, although the Taliban was removed from rule, the threat of the extremist Islamist group never truly went away. Elizabeth Stephenson, an A.P. Government and A.P. European History teacher at Madison Central High School(MCHS), said, “I’ve heard a former Obama White House official explain it this way: you can’t force democracy on a nation at gun point. Many have concluded that the war was essentially lost years ago, and there doesn’t appear to be a viable strategy to change that outcome.” While negotiations for withdrawal with the Afghanistan government and the Taliban began in Feb-

ruary 2020, President Biden declared the official drawdown of U.S. forces, signaling an end of the U.S.’ long-term affairs in the country.

However, this ending of U.S. intervention prompted the rise of the Taliban through expansion of territorial control through attacks on both the Afghan government and the people inhabiting the country. Sarah Leroux (12) said, “The rates of rape and murder have skyrocketed in the region and educated women and women in power seem to be especially vulnerable”. Many Afghans live in fear as the Taliban have “reportedly banned gay marriage, lowered LGBTQ flags, prohibited vaccine distribution, and eliminated multiple other rights from minority groups” (Leroux). With the heavy contrast between the organization’s promises and the actions of the Taliban fighters, many Afghans search for an escape, fearful of a future with Taliban rule.

With the people of Afghanistan left in a extremely vulnerable state, more than 18 million people are in need of humanitarian

aid (rescue.org). For those wanting to help Afghan refugees and those imprisoned in the country, there are several ways to contribute to the relief effort through both organizations and individual actions. Rafe Randall, an A.P. macroeconomics and Economics teacher at MCHS, said, “I think that being vocal is a starting point. Appealing to other nations in the region to pressure the leaders economically would be another means of attracting attention”. Lobbying local and state representatives to enact change is an effective way for student opinions to be heard and utilized in government actions. In terms of donations and materialistic aid, there are several organizations dedicated to help both the relief effort as a whole, as well as specific groups of individuals in need, such as women and journalists stationed in the country. Individuals can either donate money to established organizations such as The International Refugee Assistance Project or websites that will allocate money based on situational

need such as *savethechildren.org*. All forms of humanitarian efforts are significant and greatly appreciated, as it is abundantly clear that “Afghanistan needs our help more than ever”(Leroux).

Unfortunately, the future does not seem promising for Afghanistan. Many government officials fear a repeat of history, fearful of the country’s extremist ruling leading to terrorism towards the international community. Others fear for the future of the country and question the possibility of the removal of the Taliban with the present state of the country. Leroux said, “Without foreign military assistance, it will be very difficult for Afghan troops to be able to overthrow the Taliban, due in part to lack of training and difficult terrain”. Although military assistance has been withdrawn from Afghanistan, humanitarian efforts have been demonstrated as an influx of Afghan refugees escape to bordering countries and the United States by air. However, millions still remain tormented by Taliban rule as the future of the country and its people remain in the air.