

## **20 years later - The Afghan view of 9/11: 'This is the day the bad times started'**

Sunday 12 September 2021, by [GRAHAM-HARRISON Emma](#), [MAKOJI Akhtar Mohammad](#) (Date first published: 11 September 2021).

### **While the Taliban's opponents go back into exile, its footsoldiers celebrate victory over US 20 years on**

In Afghanistan 9/11 is remembered as a trigger for decades of war which this year have come full, grim circle. The Taliban who controlled the country and sheltered Osama bin Laden at the time of the attacks are once more in command of Kabul and most of the country.

"This is the day when the bad times started for Afghanistan and Afghans," said Haizbullah, a grocer in the southern city of Kandahar, the Taliban's heartland and original capital.

Like many in Afghanistan he is sceptical that America's vast investment in the war was solely a response to that day's tragedy. "Americans came here to show it to the world that they are the superpower and 9/11 was just an excuse they made to occupy Afghanistan," he said.

When the Taliban were toppled that autumn, millions of Afghans returned from exile. With them back, and the economy already collapsing, those who can have left again, or are trying to.

"We came back to our village when Americans came, started a new life and built everything from zero again. But now I'm trying to help members of my family to leave the country once more," said Bilal Nimati, a 32-year-old businessman who fled to India last month.

A generation of Afghan women brought up with the right to education and to work now fear losing even basic freedoms. Shakila, forced out of school when the Taliban barred girls from education the first time they swept to power, is in hiding after organising a women's protest.

"Twenty years ago, when I came back to start my studies again in 6<sup>th</sup> grade I could never have imagined that I would be hiding for doing such a simple thing," she told the Observer. "I went to school, university and then worked in several places, but now I'm just hiding. I feel suffocated."

Afghans who oppose the Taliban feel abandoned. "I'm sorry for those who were killed in the attack," a resident of Kabul said. "But I'm angry, they shouldn't have left us overnight. They didn't help us to build the country, they just rebuilt Afghanistan for the Taliban."

The Taliban leadership, seeking international recognition of their government, let the anniversary pass without comment. For their foot soldiers, it was a day of celebration.

"Americans invaded our country for what somebody else had done," said Gholam Yahya, a fighter in western Badghis province. "But we knew that we should fight back and kick them out of country. And we did it. We fought and died for what a foreigner (Bin Laden) had done."

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**P.S.**

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