

# When the Taliban Took Over Afghanistan

Sayed Shuaib Amanzad

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Share what you know about the Taliban and about the war in Afghanistan.

## The Day Everything Changed

I will never forget that day.

Just imagine on a beautiful morning you wake up, eat your breakfast, put on your clothes, and get ready to go for the first day of university. Then, right before leaving the house, your parents tell you not to go. Why? Because a group of militants has taken over the country, the president has fled, and the university is shut down—forever to many.

That day actually happened in my life. It was August 15, 2021. When the Taliban took over Afghanistan, all the progress that we had made in the past 20 years was reversed. Girls were not allowed to go to school anymore. People lost their jobs. Banks were closed or had limited money, and people could hardly find food. Many people



A U.S. Air Force plane transports Afghan refugees from Kabul on August 15, 2021. Photo from: <https://www.airforcemag.com/kabul-evacuation-flight-c-17-record/>.

## What Is the Taliban?

The Taliban is a conservative, fundamentalist Islamic group that held power in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. In August 2021, they regained power when the U.S. withdrew after its 20-year war in and occupation of Afghanistan. Taliban is a Pashto word meaning “students.” Pashto is the language spoken by the Pashtun people, which is the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan.

starved. Some people sold their children to buy food for the rest of the family.

## We Left Our Belongings and our Hearts Behind

Just like many other Afghans, my family decided to leave the country. It was not easy. We took a public bus to the northern province of Balkh. From there, we got into a chartered flight organized by American volunteers to Doha, Qatar. While leaving the country, we took only four backpacks containing clothes for seven members of our family. We left behind everything we had built. We did not only leave our belongings behind but our hearts as well.



Photo from Mina's List. Read more about how women have been affected by the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan at <https://www.minaslist.org/blog/six-months-on-how-afghan-womens-lives-have-changed-under-the-taliban>.

We spent over a month in the refugee camp in Doha and then another two months in a refugee camp in Virginia (in the U.S.). After that, we moved to Portland, Oregon, to restart our lives.

### I Remember the Challenges

As we are building our new lives in the U.S., I reflect on the journey that got us here. We fled injustice and cruelty. We are just like thousands, maybe millions, of other immigrants in the U.S. who fled injustice and cruelty in their country. As much as I feel lucky to be here, I still wish things didn't turn out as they did for Afghanistan. I wish that millions of other Afghans had the opportunity to go to school, have access to basic needs like food and healthcare.

Throughout our journey, I learned that challenges can make us stronger. I remember the challenges every day and consider them in my decisions. I am more determined, more hopeful, and more grateful for every tiny opportunity I receive. Today, I am determined to become the best law-

yer and to serve everyone, especially those coming from challenging places like Afghanistan.

#### AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, what happened on "the day that changed everything"?
2. Tell or write the story of what happened to Sayed and his family.
3. Do you agree with his statement that "challenges can make us stronger"? Describe how challenges in your life have affected you.

Sayed Shuaib Amanzad is a student at Portland Community College in Portland, OR. He works part time and pursues his dream of becoming a lawyer. He lives with his parents and three siblings.

