

Operation Enduring Freedom – Afghanistan



At approximately 0845 hours Eastern Daylight Time on Tuesday, 11 September 2001, a commercial airplane crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center complex in New York City. At that time, the severity of the incident, the numbers of people involved, and the reason for the crash were all unknown. Shortly after 0900 hours, a second plane hit the south tower of the World Trade Center.

Around 1000 hours, reports came in that another commercial plane hit the Pentagon, in Washington, DC, and a fourth commercial plane was downed in Somerset County, PA, about 80 miles southeast of Pittsburgh. Shortly after 1000 hours the south tower of the World Trade Center collapsed. Within the next half-hour, the northern tower of the World Trade Center also collapsed. At approximately 1730 hours a third tower in the World Trade Center complex, Building #7, also collapsed. Wednesday evening, September 12, another building within the World Trade Center Complex collapsed.

After the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the United States military entered into a war against global terrorism. The President began the U.S. response in the War on Terrorism with the stroke of his pen to seize terrorists' financial assets and disrupt their fundraising [network](#). Unlike most previous conflicts, this war is being fought on both domestic and foreign soil. Deployment of American troops to Southwest Asia and countries surrounding Afghanistan in the days following the attacks.

The military response to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States was assigned the name Operation Enduring Freedom, but was previously planned to have been called Operation Infinite Justice (this name is believed to have been changed following concerns that this might offend the Muslim community as Islam teaches that Allah is the only one who can provide Infinite Justice).

OEF commenced on Oct. 7, 2001. Early combat operations included a mix of air strikes from land-based B-1, B-2 and B-52 bombers; carrier-based F-14 and F/A-18 fighters; and Tomahawk cruise missiles launched from both U.S. and British ships and submarines.

The initial military objectives of Operation Enduring Freedom, as articulated by President George W. Bush in his Sept 20th Address to a joint Session of Congress and his Oct 7th address to the country, include the destruction of terrorist training camps and infrastructure within Afghanistan, the capture of al Qaeda leaders, and the cessation of terrorist activities in Afghanistan.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated in an Oct 7th DoD News Briefing that US objectives were to make clear to Taliban leaders that the harboring of terrorists is unacceptable, to acquire intelligence on al Qaeda and Taliban resources, to develop relations with groups opposed to the Taliban, to prevent the use of Afghanistan as a safe haven for terrorists, and to destroy the Taliban military allowing opposition forces to succeed in their struggle. Finally, military force would help facilitate the delivering of humanitarian supplies to the Afghan people.

The British had also defined the goals of their involvement (termed Operation Veritas) in "Her Majesty's Government's Campaign Objectives" dated Oct. 16th. The short term goals of the military action included the capture of Osama bin Laden and other al Qaeda leaders, the prevention of further attacks by al Qaeda, the end of Afghanistan's harboring of terrorists, their training camps and infrastructure, and the removal of Mullah Omar and the Taliban Regime. Long term goals include the end of terrorism, the deterrence of state sponsorship of terrorism, and the reintegration of Afghanistan into the international community.

Planning and Implementing

On 11 September 2001, General Tommy Franks was enroute to Pakistan to meet with President Musharraf to discuss a number of issues, among them security cooperation and terrorism. The events of that day caused him to return immediately to Tampa, Florida, where his staff was already working along with Defense and other government agencies to ensure what is referred to in the military as "command and control survivability" while continuing to develop "situational awareness."

On 12 September the Secretary of Defense directed the preparation of "credible military options" to respond to international terrorism. For Central Command, that directive guided the preparation of the plan that unfolded in Afghanistan. The concept, which Franks briefed to the President on 21 September, proposed that "US Central Command, as a part of America's Global War on Terrorism . . . would destroy the Al Qaida network inside Afghanistan along with the illegitimate Taliban regime which was harboring and protecting the terrorists."

Planning involved not only an evaluation of the enemy situation, but also the history of military operations in Afghanistan and the political and military situation across the region. This "mission analysis" resulted in Franks' recommendation of a military course of action which was approved by Secretary Rumsfeld on 1 October. Franks briefed the concept to President Bush on 2 October, and Bush directed that combat operations should begin on 7 October -- 26 days after the attacks on New York and the Pentagon.

Operations would involve the full weight of America's national power, and would include significant contributions from the international community. By 2002 the coalition had grown to more than 68 nations, with 27 nations having representatives at CENTCOM headquarters.

With the cooperation and support of this coalition and the [integration](#) of virtually every agency of the US government, CENTCOM had executed multiple "Lines of Operation," attacking simultaneously on several fronts. The intention from the outset was to seize the initiative and reinforce success, while keeping in mind the lessons of previous campaigns in Afghanistan -- avoid "invading," and work with (rather than against) the people. A critical enabler of the strategy was the coordination of basing, staging, and over-flight rights. This political-military coordination set (and maintained) the conditions necessary to execute and support sustained combat.

Among the lines of operation which characterized the campaign had been "Direct Attack of the Leadership of Al Qaida and the Taliban," and the provision of "Humanitarian Aid" to the Afghan people. Another line had focused on "Destroying the Taliban Military," using unconventional warfare forces alongside Afghan opposition groups whose goals were consistent with US interests. And, "Operational Fires" directed by horse-mounted Special Forces troopers have also proven to be unique and successful.

Additionally, CENTCOM had employed Special Operations Forces in "Reconnaissance and Direct Action" roles while maintaining the capability to introduce "Operational Maneuver" (conventional forces) if required.

The success of these lines of operation, which have been applied simultaneously rather than sequentially, is a matter of record. On 7 October, the Taliban controlled more than 80% of Afghanistan, and Anti-Taliban forces were on the defensive. Al Qaida was entrenched in camps and safe houses throughout the country. Afghanistan was, in fact, a terrorist sponsored state.

By October 20, 2001 US and Coalition forces had destroyed virtually all Taliban air defenses and had conducted a highly successful direct action mission on the residence of Mullah Omar in the middle of the Taliban capital, Qandahar. During this time frame Special Forces detachments linked up with Anti-Taliban leaders and coordinated operational fires and logistics support on multiple fronts. Twenty days later, the provincial capital of Mazar-e Sharif fell. In rapid succession, Herat, Kabul, and Jalalabad followed. By mid-December, US Marines had secured Qandahar Airport and the Taliban capital was in the hands of Anti-Taliban forces. Within weeks the Taliban and Al Qaida were reduced to isolated pockets of fighters. On 22 December Franks traveled to Kabul to attend a ceremony marking the inauguration of the Afghan interim government -- 78 days after the beginning of combat operations.

By mid-March 2002, the Taliban had been removed from power and the Al Qaida network in Afghanistan had been destroyed. The US continued to exploit detainees and sensitive sites for their intelligence value in order to prevent future terrorist attacks and to further US understanding of Al Qaida -- their plans, membership, structure, and intentions. The US was investigating each site to confirm or deny the existence of research into, or production of, chemical, biological, or radiological weapons. Coalition forces continued to locate and destroy remaining pockets of Taliban and Al Qaida fighters and to search for surviving leadership.

In the 169 days since 11 September, US and Coalition forces had amassed a remarkable record of achievements. Following are but a few examples.

- All positioning and most of the resupply of forces in the theater has been accomplished by air as a result of a remarkable effort by US Transportation Command.
- In addition to providing the firepower and "staying power" of two carrier battlegroups, the Navy steamed USS KITTY HAWK 7,000 miles at flank speed to establish an afloat, forward operating base for Special Operations Forces.
- In terms of operational fires, Navy, Marine, and Air Force pilots have delivered in excess of 18,000 munitions, of which more than 10,000 were precision guided.
- During DESERT STORM the US averaged 10 aircraft per target; in ENDURING FREEDOM the US has averaged 2 targets per aircraft.
- US airmen have flown the longest combat fighter mission in US history (more than 15 hours), and conducted the longest surveillance mission (26 hours).
- The extensive use of unmanned aerial vehicles has permitted around- the-clock surveillance of critical sites, facilities, and troop concentrations.
- US psychological warfare operators had delivered more than 50 million leaflets, and transport crews had delivered 2.5 million humanitarian daily rations, 1,700 tons of wheat, and 328,200 blankets. More than 5,000 radios had been provided to the Afghan people, and the US broadcast capabilities continued to bring music to people for the first time in more than six years.
- The US had also made enormous improvements in its ability to bring firepower to bear rapidly. Through improved technology and training, the Tomahawk targeting cycle had been reduced from 101 minutes during ALLIED FORCE to 19 minutes during ENDURING FREEDOM, with half of the Tomahawks having been fired from submarines.