

THE U.S. ARMY IN AFGHANISTAN

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

SEPTEMBER 2001–MARCH 2002



MARK R. FOLSE

*Front cover: Composite image of a B-52 strike on Takur Ghar and a U.S. soldier overlooking “the Whale” during Operation ANACONDA, March 2002
(Original images courtesy of Brandon Friedman, former member of the 101st Airborne Division)*

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by
Mark R. Folse



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INTRODUCTION

More than two decades have passed since the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 shocked the United States and the world. Nearly 3,000 people, mostly Americans but also including foreign nationals from some ninety countries, died that day at the hands of al-Qaeda. A united nation mourned its losses and vowed to punish the perpetrators. Afghanistan, a known training ground and safe haven for the terrorist group led by Osama bin Laden, became the initial focus of military efforts to strike back. That distant, land-locked, mountainous country presented great challenges to planners and operators. The U.S. Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Navy overcame those obstacles to project power halfway across the globe and conduct an offensive, in concert with Afghan allies, which drove al-Qaeda into retreat and quickly toppled the Taliban regime that supported the terrorists.

Having achieved that basic goal, national leaders remained concerned that the Taliban would reassert its influence in Afghanistan and al-Qaeda might emerge from the shadows yet again. That apprehension led to a deepening commitment to establish a stable democratic nation that would never again serve as a launching pad for global terrorism. That larger and open-ended strategic objective ran headlong into the additional complications of a nation cobbled together from disparate ethnic and tribal groupings with a long history of mutual discord and limited economic opportunities. The United States Army, which was trained and equipped primarily for conventional combat, had to reorient its forces and its thinking for a complex, irregular war—just as it would in Iraq after 2003. The conflict evolved into the longest-running war in our nation's history.

This new monograph, which replaces Richard W. Stewart's 2004 pamphlet of the same name, draws upon additional resources that were not available at that time. With this commemorative series, the U.S. Army Center of Military History aims to provide soldiers and civilians with an overview of operations in Afghanistan and to remember the hundreds of thousands of U.S. Army personnel who served there on behalf of their nation. These publications are dedicated to them.

Washington, D.C.
October 2022

JON T. HOFFMAN
Chief Historian

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

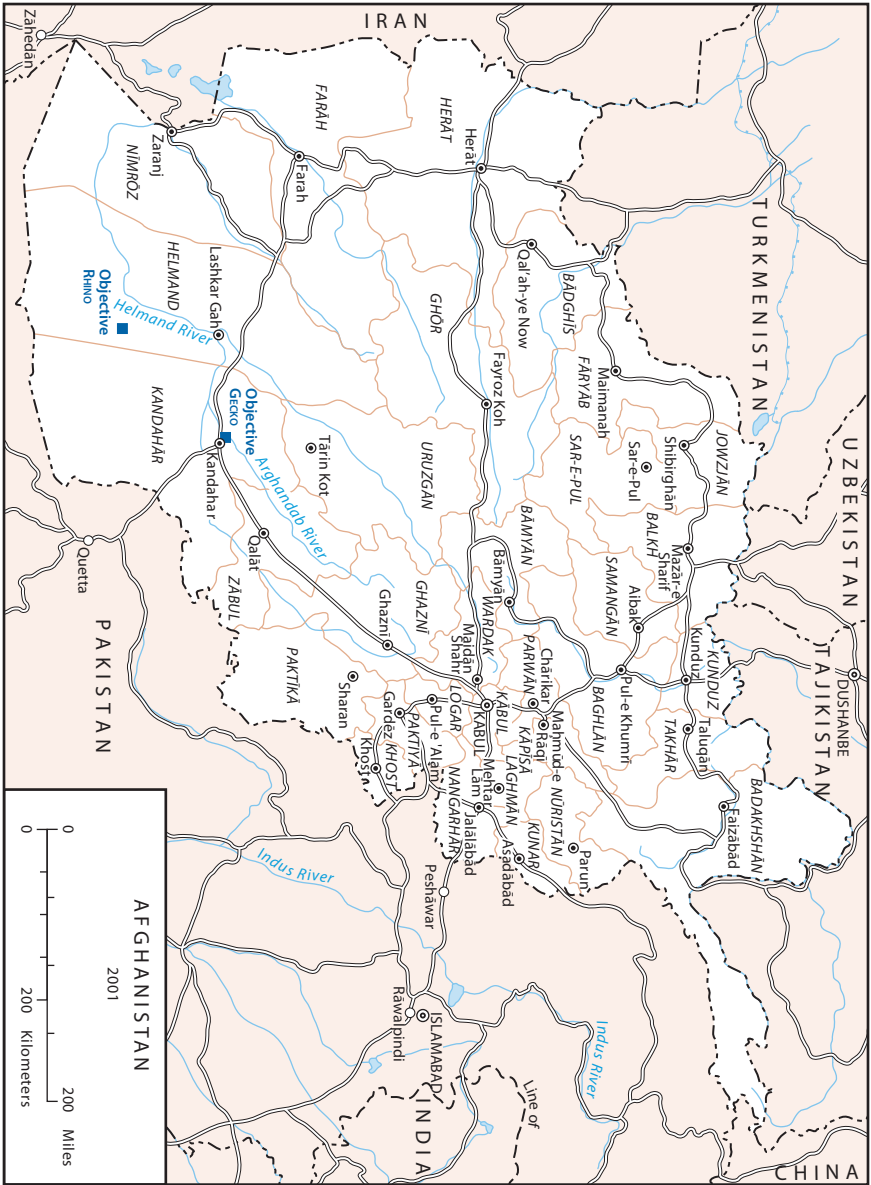
September 2001–March 2002

When Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network executed the deadly 11 September 2001 attacks, the United States responded with a global offensive against international terrorists and those who harbored them. War with al-Qaeda meant war with its hosts—the Taliban—who had gained control of most of Afghanistan in the 1990s. In October 2001, U.S. military forces began a campaign against both groups. With the help of various anti-Taliban militias, American troops fought to remove the Taliban from power, destroy al-Qaeda, find bin Laden, and preclude terrorists from using Afghanistan as a refuge. Afghanistan, therefore, would be the first conflict in the decades-long Global War on Terrorism.

STRATEGIC SETTING

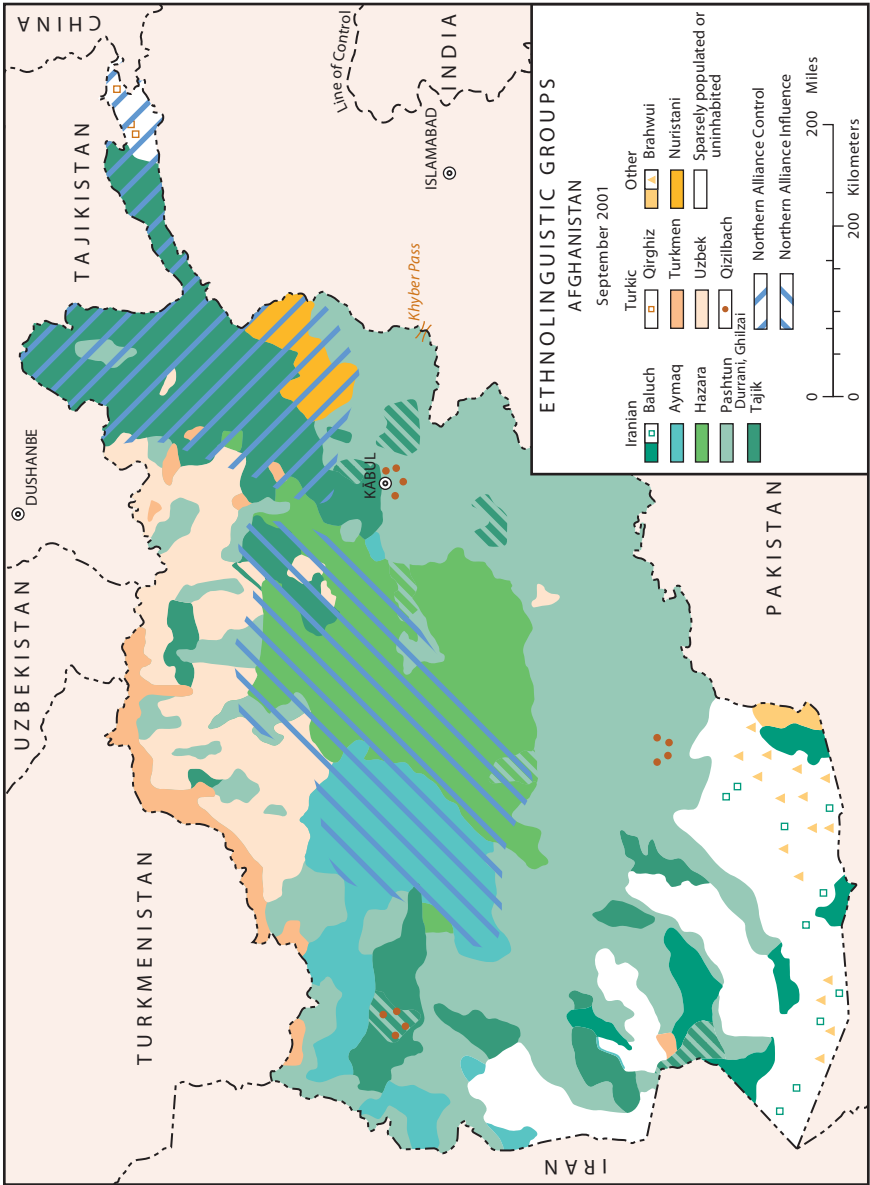
Many of the roots of this conflict reside in Afghanistan's geography, culture, and history. An impoverished and underdeveloped country, Afghanistan's mountainous terrain, desert climate, and bad roads make it difficult for the nation to move much beyond a subsistence economy. Because of these geographical challenges, Afghan governments rarely have been able to support public education, infrastructure, medical care, and security outside of the country's major cities without international aid. For these reasons, Afghans never have been able to maintain a robust centralized government. In 2001, between 70 and 80 percent of Afghanistan's 21 million people lived in remote rural areas and worked in agriculture. With the government's reach limited to the urban centers, tribal leaders and occasional warlords have filled the power vacuum in the countryside. As a result, most Afghans have lived under a fractured and decentralized political system throughout much of their nation's history (*Map 1*).¹

Four major ethnic groups live in Afghanistan. The Hindu Kush divides Afghans of Persian and Turkic descent in the north from the predominantly Pashtun population in the south. Tajiks make up 30 percent of the population and live mostly in northern and eastern Afghanistan. The Hazaras constitute 15 percent of the population and live primarily in the rugged central highlands of



MAP 1

the Hindu Kush Mountains. The Uzbeks inhabit the country's northern regions and number only about 10 percent of the population. Pashtuns occupy southern and eastern Afghanistan and are the largest ethnic group, accounting for roughly 13 million people or 40 percent of the population (*Map 2*).²



MAP 2

Most Afghans, no matter their ethnic background, consider Islam the most important and unifying aspect of their society, politics, and culture. Ninety-nine percent of the population identify as Muslims. Researchers estimate that between 10 and 20 percent identify as Shi'a, whereas the rest claim to be Sunni.³ Tajiks mostly

identify as Sunnis. The majority of Hazaras are Shi'a, and a significant minority are Sunni. Many Uzbeks identify as Muslims but not with either of the two main denominations. Most Pashtuns claim to be Sunni and they have been the traditional rulers of the country dating back to Ahmad Shah Durrani, who, in 1747, founded the state of Afghanistan.

Outside of religion, Afghans hold tribal affiliation as one of their primary markers for political and social identity. Pashtuns have several major tribes that include the Durrani, Ghilzai, and Eastern Pashtuns. The Durrani inhabit south central Afghanistan, while the Ghilzais live mostly in the southeast. The Eastern Pashtuns live near Afghanistan's eastern border, and significant populations of them reside in Pakistan. Each tribe includes various subtribes, which make up Pashtuns' primary political identity within the larger tribal structure.⁴ Through the tribal code known as *Pashtunwali*, many Pashtuns hold honor, revenge, hospitality, and protection as important guiding principles.⁵ Although these tribes often feud with each other, they also provide—in the absence of a strong central government—a degree of local stability for much of Afghan society.

THE TALIBAN

Afghanistan has a long history of resistance to foreign occupation, dating back to the three Anglo-Afghan Wars (1839–1842, 1878–1880, and 1919). By September 2001, Afghans had endured another twenty-three years of continuous conflict that began with the Soviet-Afghan War (1979–1989). The Taliban's origin stems from this period, during which Afghans from all occupations and from various tribes and ethnicities waged a jihad (struggle) against both the Soviet invaders and Afghan communist forces. Hundreds of thousands of mujahideen (those engaged in struggle), fought tenaciously for a decade. The mujahideen accepted billions of dollars in military and financial aid from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, China, Great Britain, and the United States.⁶ With this foreign aid, the mujahideen coalition drove out the Soviets by 1989 and toppled the communist government in Kabul after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991.

Afghans paid a terrible price for this victory. As many as one million Afghans died, and four million more fled to Pakistan.⁷ With the Soviet threat gone, the United States stopped all aid and funding to Afghanistan. To make ends meet, Afghan farmers increased poppy production for the international opium and

heroin markets. The country spiraled into anarchy. Rival warlords used drug money and leftover weapons to spread ethnic and tribal conflict. Civil war erupted as armed bands fought for control of the cities of Kabul and Kandahar. Warring groups set up checkpoints on roads to harass travelers and demand payment for “safe” passage. These former mujahideen kidnapped, raped, and murdered travelers at will.⁸

The Taliban (the Arabic word for “students”) grew out of this chaotic environment. In the fall of 1994, a group of Pashtun mullahs (religious clerics) met in a mosque in Sangisar, outside of Kandahar. With the creation of the Taliban, they pledged to rid Afghanistan of the marauding bands of highwaymen, bring order to the country through their interpretation of Shari‘a law, and establish a unified emirate in Afghanistan based on the Quran.⁹ Within two years, the group appointed a one-eyed Pashtun warrior cleric, Mullah Mohammed Omar, as the Taliban’s overall leader and military commander.

Ultrareligious conservatism became the Taliban’s primary motivation and justification for violent conquest. Members of the group believed that their Salafist and Deobandi form of Sunni Islam was the only true religion and the only thing that would bring lasting peace and prosperity to Afghanistan. As Salafists, they entwined religion and law to cleanse Islam of Western or modern influences so that they could live as they believed the Prophet Muhammad had lived in the seventh century. Deobandism provided strict rules of conduct that dictated everything from how to bathe to the length of one’s beard.¹⁰ Everywhere the Taliban went, its leadership outlawed music, dancing, colorful clothes, kite flying, all forms of gambling, and many forms of art.¹¹

Bolstered by this religious zeal, the Taliban achieved early success in both recruiting and fighting. Thousands of young Pashtun men from southern Afghanistan and returning refugees from southwestern Pakistan flocked to the Taliban’s banner. The Taliban also attracted many native Pakistani Pashtuns from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of western Pakistan. For many of the Afghan recruits who had grown up in Pakistan, largely bereft of the traditional tribal loyalties of their forebears, the Taliban offered a way to advance socially and a sense of purpose and belonging.¹² What these new recruits lacked in combat experience they made up for in loyalty. Those with sufficient religious passion and combat prowess gained respect among their peers and advanced through the ranks.¹³ Taliban mullahs indoctrinated these recruits with staunch religious

fervor and imbued them with nearly unshakeable morale. They learned to interpret every victory as a sign of God's favor and their own deaths as acts of righteous martyrdom.¹⁴ Animated by this zealotry, they first rid the areas surrounding Kandahar of armed gangs and their checkpoints. Mullah Omar then took Uruzgan and Helmand Provinces by December 1994, and the Taliban marched north and east gathering more followers, including many former mujahideen.

Pakistan's government and military aided the Taliban's rise in Afghanistan. They provided funds, training, military advisers, and even helped young Pakistani men matriculate to Taliban madrassas (religious schools) for indoctrination. Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency and its military supported the Taliban for several reasons. First, many of Pakistan's military and government officials were both Sunnis and Eastern Pashtuns who sympathized with the Taliban on ethnic and religious grounds. Second, by supporting the Taliban, they helped ensure that a friendly power would govern Afghanistan, which would help offset threats they faced from India, their primary enemy. By 2001, India and Pakistan had endured a long history of conflict, marked by four wars since 1947, and were engaged in an ongoing border dispute in the Kashmir region. Finally, Pakistan hoped to use the Taliban to diminish Iran's influence among non-Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan. The United States had worked with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to impose sanctions and isolate Iran, a nation of predominantly Shi'a Muslims. Seeking to overcome this isolation, Iran established ties with Pakistan's and the Taliban's enemies in Afghanistan.¹⁵ Throughout the 1990s, Afghanistan's civil war became a proxy war between Iran and Pakistan: the former supporting the northern Uzbek, Hazara, and Tajik forces, and the latter the Taliban.¹⁶

The Taliban's real test came against the battle-hardened Tajik and Uzbek warlords in the north. Tajik commander Ahmad Shah Massoud and Uzbek leader Abdul Rashid Dostum controlled much of northern Afghanistan. Massoud, known as the Lion of Panjshir, controlled Kabul with 20,000 seasoned Tajik fighters, halting the Taliban's first attempts to take the city. Taking advantage of their enemies' initial failure to present a united front, however, the Taliban fighters eventually took Herat in 1995, Kabul and Jalalabad in 1996, and Mazar-e Sharif in 1998.

By most international standards, members of the Taliban treated women and girls with exceptional harshness. They believed that Islamic law confined women indoors for their own dignity and protection. Therefore, Taliban forces

banned women and girls from attending school, being seen by male doctors, and going in public without being completely veiled and escorted by a male relative. Women who broke these rules, and males whom the Taliban accused of aiding and abetting them, faced corporal and capital punishment. After the Taliban captured Kabul in 1996, it shuttered sixty-three schools, including Kabul University, sending thousands of women and girls indoors.¹⁷

The Taliban's treatment of women had international consequences. When the European Union and the United Nations protested the Taliban's gender policies, the Taliban doubled down, consequently losing all potential aid and diplomatic recognition from most of the outside world.¹⁸ To fund itself, the Taliban encouraged farmers to grow more poppies. In the late 1990s, drug production brought in the equivalent of \$20 million.¹⁹ Other organizations, which shared the Taliban's religious proclivities, also stepped in to help financially.

AL-QAEDA

Arabs opposed to secular nationalism created al-Qaeda within a larger Islamist movement that developed in the Middle East during the early and mid-twentieth century. Islamists intertwined politics and law with Islam, viewing the three as inseparable. They favored governments and leaders who adhered to strict interpretations of the Quran.²⁰ They drew their motivations from the larger political and religious conflicts that engulfed the Middle East after World War II and the creation of Israel. Islamists saw the Arab governments of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and even Saudi Arabia as too secular, progressive, and corrupt. They railed against secular nationalism and proclaimed Islam to be the answer for all major political, social, and cultural issues of their day. After the 1967 Six-Day War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood gained more sympathy and followers and eventually launched an Islamic "awakening" in the late 1970s.²¹ This movement unleashed violence and civil unrest throughout the Arab world; the 1979 Grand Mosque seizure in Mecca orchestrated by Wahhabi extremists is the most prominent example.

Osama bin Laden, the future founder of al-Qaeda, grew up in this political environment. A wealthy and connected son of a Saudi construction magnate, bin Laden developed a significant predilection for Islamism during his youth. As a young man, he committed himself fully to Sunni Islam and harbored strong

resentments toward Israel and its moral, material, and financial backer, the United States. He started down the path of international terrorism in 1979, when the Soviet Army invaded Afghanistan. That year, at the age of 22, bin Laden traveled to Afghanistan with many other Arabs to fight with the mujahideen against the Soviets. During the 1980s, he helped to direct money, supplies, and fighters from the Arab world into Afghanistan. While there, he established networks and ties with Pashtun leaders and gained recognition and respect among the mujahideen for his skill at fighting and leading troops in combat.

Bin Laden founded al-Qaeda in 1988 around a central cadre of Arab mujahideen that he led against the Soviets. He envisioned al-Qaeda (Arabic for “the base”) as the vanguard of Islamists who sought to overthrow infidel and apostate governments. From this base, he reasoned, Muslims could build an ideal Islamic society that encompassed North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia.²² Al-Qaeda expanded its operations to other countries after the Soviet-Afghan War. After cutting ties with the Saudi Arabian government over its hosting the United States to repel Saddam Hussein’s Iraqi Army from Kuwait, bin Laden began operating out of Sudan. Al-Qaeda fighters opposed the U.S. humanitarian mission in Somalia in 1992 and fought in the Bosnian civil war against the Serbs the following year. Al-Qaeda affiliates bombed New York City’s World Trade Center in 1993. In 1995, they attempted to assassinate Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak while he visited Ethiopia. In 1996, under threat of extradition by the Sudanese government, bin Laden returned to Afghanistan for safe haven.

Although Mullah Omar and the Taliban welcomed him as a guest initially, bin Laden’s global ambitions began to clash with Omar’s more local and immediate goals for Afghanistan.²³ Soon after his arrival, bin Laden issued a public fatwa (edict) for Muslims to wage a holy war on the United States and Israel. Omar did not appreciate the potential hostile international attention that bin Laden risked bringing to Afghanistan. At a face-to-face conference, Omar advised his guest to refrain from making public threats against the United States. Omar continued to follow Pashtunwali codes of hospitality and honor, however, and allowed bin Laden to remain under the Taliban’s protection. Omar and bin Laden shared Sunni, Salafist, and Islamist beliefs. Bin Laden funneled money, arms, and supplies into Taliban hands, and, in return, Omar granted him permission to stay in Afghanistan. Additionally, al-Qaeda’s troops bolstered the Taliban’s ranks in the latter’s ongoing war against what would become known as the Northern Alliance.

Despite Omar's request to halt public jihadist threats, bin Laden remained enraged over the American presence in the Middle East after the Gulf War and the United States' continued support of Israel, a nation he wanted to wipe from the earth. In 1998, bin Laden issued another fatwa calling on all Muslims worldwide to kill Americans and Jews.²⁴ That year, al-Qaeda cells in Africa attacked U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. President William J. Clinton's administration responded with cruise missile strikes against al-Qaeda targets in Afghanistan.²⁵ After these bombings, the Taliban and al-Qaeda drew closer together, as Saudi Arabia and the United States demanded that the Taliban hand over bin Laden.²⁶ Taliban *shuras* (councils) advised Omar to banish bin Laden, but he refused, claiming that to do so was against both Islam and Pashtunwali codes of hospitality.²⁷

Bin Laden continued down his global jihadist path. In 2000, al-Qaeda bombed the USS *Cole* (DDG-67), killing seventeen sailors.²⁸ From Afghanistan, bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network planned and set in motion the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City and the Pentagon. He wanted to draw the United States into a protracted and unwinnable war in Afghanistan, much as the Soviets had been.²⁹ According to available sources, bin Laden and al-Qaeda deliberately hid the operation from Omar. Therefore, the Taliban likely did not know of these plans.³⁰

On the eve of a new war, the Taliban's government and military had developed a somewhat hierarchical structure with Mullah Mohammed Omar at the top. The Supreme Shura in Kandahar was the Taliban's main governing body.³¹ Omar, who served as the top military commander, consulted with but did not answer to the Supreme Shura. Under Omar's direct command, the Taliban's armed forces operated throughout approximately 80 percent of the country. The troops, composed of 45,000 armed Taliban soldiers and nearly 2,700 al-Qaeda and foreign fighters, favored mobility over heavy firepower. They communicated with radios, drove small Toyota pickup trucks and motorcycles, and rode horseback when the terrain demanded it. Most of them carried variants of the AK47 or the AK74 and Soviet rocket-propelled grenades, such as the RPG7. The Taliban generally lacked crew-served weapons, heavy artillery, armored vehicles, and any significant air assets.³²

Omar dispersed his forces in *mahazes* (fronts) across the country to maintain local security, enforce Shari'a law, and fight recalcitrant warlords. These groups numbered anywhere between ten and a few hundred personnel depending on the area and local population.³³ Each group answered to local senior Taliban leaders who themselves took orders from Omar. While he deployed numerous mahazes

throughout the south, Omar kept larger groups in the north to battle Ahmad Shah Massoud, who, by then, had helped create the united anti-Taliban front called the Northern Alliance.³⁴ The Lion of Panjshir's days were numbered, however. Perhaps as a favor to his host, bin Laden sent two al-Qaeda agents disguised as Saudi reporters to assassinate Massoud. They succeeded on 9 September 2001 by concealing an improvised explosive device in a video camera. Two days later, al-Qaeda operatives hijacked four U.S. commercial jets and flew two of them into the World Trade Center and one into the Pentagon. The fourth crashed near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, bringing the combined death toll to 2,977 people with 25,000 more injured.

U.S. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Since the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the first Gulf War, the United States had enjoyed an unrivaled position in diplomacy, trade, and military and naval power. Its military bases around the globe, together with its fleets on the seas, protected an international system of trade that had been in place since the end of World War II. With the Soviet threat gone, the Clinton administration (1993–2001) shifted from containing Soviet influence to regional peacekeeping missions. In his 1994 national security strategy, President Clinton made regional contingencies, counterterrorism, and deterrence of the spread and use of weapons of mass destruction the cornerstones of U.S. defense policy.³⁵

Clinton's strategy kept the U.S. military busy throughout the 1990s. His administration continued to deploy U.S. troops to Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1993 for Operation RESTORE HOPE, a mission it had inherited from the previous administration. U.S. and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) forces responded to instability in the Balkans on multiple occasions, including in Bosnia in 1995 and in Kosovo in 1998. Despite the presence of U.S. ground troops for reserve and security purposes during these campaigns, theater commanders used airpower and precision-guided munitions to achieve their objectives. In an air campaign over Kosovo lasting from March to June 1999, U.S. pilots flew 38,000 sorties and dropped 31,000 bombs. Because of the speed and relatively low risk of friendly casualties involved with air strikes, some leaders in the Army and Air Force developed a preference for high technology to accomplish strategic aims.³⁶

Under the strain of these "peacetime" operations, the all-volunteer U.S. Army worked to remain a capable and lethal fighting organization, focused on combat

readiness. During the Clinton administration, the Army received less funding, yet it launched more expeditionary operations—requiring fast deployments around the world—than it had in previous years.³⁷ The Army of the 1990s, therefore, found itself pulled in many directions. U.S. soldiers, however, often lacked the time, resources, and training to prepare for both combat and peacekeeping operations.

Army leadership labored to “transform” the service to exploit the new technologies of the burgeoning information age. Businesses and institutions revolutionized daily life with the increased use of computer processors, satellites, and internet communication. These hallmarks of the information age altered commerce, politics, and the military. Out of this environment, several Army chiefs of staff pushed the concept of *Army Transformation* in the Pentagon and around the force. They planned to equip the Army with the latest in telecommunications, weapons, and intelligence-gathering technologies, which, in theory, would allow soldiers to meet any challenge, whether it was in full-scale combat or during humanitarian operations.³⁸

Army Transformation, in part, meant shifting from deploying division-size formations designed to defeat the Russians in Europe to smaller, more flexible, and highly mobile units to meet the various challenges of the day.³⁹ Traditionally, Army divisions contained up to 20,000 soldiers and included all the capabilities required to execute and support combined arms operations. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, however, the Army had begun switching to “interim” brigade combat teams. These units had only about 3,500 troops, but they were well-suited to quick deployments and rotations and better able to respond to an array of missions.⁴⁰ Army leadership designed the brigade combat teams to deploy anywhere in the world in ninety-six hours. By 2001, however, the Army had not yet completed this transition, and no fully formed interim brigade combat teams participated in the initial deployment to Afghanistan.

While the Army worked to modernize its forces, George W. Bush based part of his 2000 presidential campaign on forging a new direction for U.S. strategy and the military. Bush cited the interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo as evidence of Clinton’s alleged underfunding and mishandling of the military. He vowed to increase defense spending and never to deploy troops on peacekeeping missions that were of dubious necessity to national security.⁴¹ After winning the election by the narrowest margin in decades, however, President Bush succumbed to the practical realities of working with NATO allies and agreed to keep troops in the

Balkans. Nevertheless, the Bush administration sought to continue transforming the military, particularly the U.S. Army, from an overextended peacekeeping force to a technologically advanced one that focused on winning wars.

President Bush's defense secretary, Donald H. Rumsfeld, set in motion the new administration's transformation agenda in the Department of Defense. Rumsfeld and his service secretaries had a penchant for intelligence technologies, cruise missiles, and precision strike capabilities.⁴² With the aid of high-tech instruments, Rumsfeld and many in the department wanted the military to become capable of "Rapid Decisive Operations," a concept coined by the U.S. Joint Forces Command staff. Both the command staff and Rumsfeld pictured a technologically advanced military with service branches that would train, organize, and outfit units capable of conducting rapid deployments and quick, decisive, combat operations. They intended to achieve American security goals with speed, and with the least amount of logistical infrastructure, friendly casualties, and collateral damage as possible.⁴³

In September 2001, Army Chief of Staff General Eric K. Shinseki oversaw a large, professional, all-volunteer force positioned around the globe. This Army had ten regular divisions, two National Guard divisions, and numerous reserve units, support components, and commands.⁴⁴ Of the 1,038,258 soldiers in uniform, 480,801 of them served on active duty. The National Guard numbered 351,829, and reservists totaled 205,628. To meet the security needs of the nation, the Department of Defense had 125,000 soldiers stationed overseas throughout the various combatant commands, mostly in the Pacific and European regions.⁴⁵ Under U.S. Central Command, the Army had deployed one infantry and one support battalion to help a multinational force keep the peace between Egypt and Israel on the Sinai Peninsula. The Army also had committed 3,000 troops to Camp Doha, Kuwait, to aid and train with Kuwaiti troops.⁴⁶ The terrorist attacks that thrust the United States into war would put the service, along with its leaders' efforts at transformation and readiness, to the ultimate test.

THE UNITED STATES GOES TO WAR

The 11 September terrorist attacks altered U.S. strategic and security concerns at home and abroad. Within hours after the World Trade Center's twin towers fell in New York City, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reported that al-Qaeda

and Osama bin Laden had planned and orchestrated the attacks from their sanctuary in Afghanistan.⁴⁷ Bush and his cabinet then learned that the Taliban was hosting and protecting bin Laden. Going to war with al-Qaeda would require fighting the Taliban.

Americans overwhelmingly supported overthrowing the Taliban in Afghanistan. In a Gallup poll taken in November 2001, 89 percent of the respondents supported a U.S. invasion of the country.⁴⁸ President Bush's approval rating soared to 90 percent.⁴⁹ By a vote of 98–0 in the Senate and 420–1 in the House of Representatives, the 107th Congress passed Public Law 107–40, a joint resolution that authorized “the use of the United States Armed Forces against those responsible for the recent attacks launched against the United States.”⁵⁰ With this support, the Bush administration pursued an ambitious war aim: to rid the world of international terrorist organizations. The president and his advisers established four objectives in this new war on terrorism: find and prosecute the terrorists responsible for the 11 September attacks, eradicate al-Qaeda, root out any other terrorist organizations that sought to harm the United States, and destroy terrorist support networks and safe havens.⁵¹

While rescue and emergency crews still worked in the wreckage of the World Trade Center and the western corridors of the Pentagon, the Bush administration promulgated a new policy known later, unofficially, as the Bush Doctrine. This strategy had two salient characteristics. First, the president would make no distinctions between terrorists and the entities that harbored them. Second, to prevent another terrorist attack, the United States would attack preemptively and unilaterally any individual or entity that posed a threat.⁵² Channeling the rage many Americans felt after the 11 September attacks, Bush portrayed the world in black and white: nations would side with either the United States or the terrorists.⁵³ The White House would need the help of sympathetic nations to help destroy al-Qaeda, an enemy with no state affiliation, no standing military to fight with conventional methods, no economy to embargo, and no diplomats to contact.

In preparation for striking al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, the Bush administration set about making necessary diplomatic arrangements. The European Union denounced the attacks, and NATO invoked its charter's Article 5, which stipulated that an attack on one member country equated

to an attack on the rest. The Bush administration set up a coalition system whereby the United States would lead combat operations in Afghanistan. U.S. forces could then rely on NATO to aid in humanitarian and nation-building missions.⁵⁴ Secretary of State Colin L. Powell also worked to build a coalition comprised of nontraditional partners from Southeast Asia and the Middle East. His and the State Department's efforts reflected the understanding that the fight would be a truly global war on terrorism, and winning it would require the help of many nations.⁵⁵

The Bush administration needed Pakistan's cooperation most of all. Pakistan's history of supporting the Taliban made gaining their cooperation the State Department's first significant test of the Bush Doctrine. Secretary Powell and Deputy Secretary of State Richard L. Armitage sent a list of demands to Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf. They wanted Pakistan to end all logistical and monetary support to Osama bin Laden and halt all al-Qaeda traffic across the border into Afghanistan. They also required Pakistan to give the U.S. military landing and overflight rights, territorial access as needed, and intelligence on al-Qaeda's movements and locations. Furthermore, Pakistan had to halt support of the Taliban if it continued to harbor bin Laden.⁵⁶ Fearing international backlash and the prospect of the United States working with India instead, President Musharraf agreed to cooperate.⁵⁷

Military preparations for Afghanistan fell to the Army's General Tommy R. Franks, commander of U.S. Central Command. General Franks presented President Bush three options for a military strike against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. With option one, Franks offered cruise missile strikes from U.S. aircraft carriers and submarines off the coast of Pakistan. This plan involved a fast response with little risk to U.S. personnel. His second option mirrored the first one but added B-52 Stratofortresses and B-1 bombers. General Franks and President Bush, however, favored option three, which combined options one and two with a small force of U.S. ground troops.⁵⁸

The CIA also preferred option three. Before 11 September, the agency already had developed a contingency plan for attacking al-Qaeda and the Taliban. The CIA aimed to provide money and firepower to Afghan warlords who continued to fight the Taliban in the northern and western parts of the country. George J. Tenet, head of the CIA, and J. Cofer Black, director of the CIA's Counter Terrorism Center, submitted to President Bush a plan to insert

small teams of CIA operatives and special operations forces (SOF) to make contact with the Northern Alliance warlords. From there, SOF teams and Northern Alliance troops would work together, the former coordinating close air support while the latter did the bulk of the fighting and maneuvering.⁵⁹

Bush and his team liked the unconventional warfare approach for several reasons. The plan enabled the United States to strike quickly, which would please the large group of Americans who had been clamoring for swift action. Both CIA and SOF operators working with Northern Alliance troops on the ground would provide intelligence on the political situation in country and could help identify potential bombing opportunities. Additionally, these forces needed less logistical support at first than larger conventional units. Ultimately, Bush and the planners at the CIA worried about the effect a sudden influx of thousands of ground troops would have on the Pashtuns. They believed taking the unconventional approach would mitigate the risk of inciting large swaths of the Pashtun population to revolt against U.S. forces. The Bush administration sought to fight al-Qaeda and the Taliban, not the people of Afghanistan.⁶⁰

In late September, President Bush approved the basic contours of Central Command's plan entitled Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Air and naval forces would begin a three-to-five-day bombing mission to destroy as many identifiable Taliban and al-Qaeda assets as possible. Inserted CIA and SOF teams would then link up with the Northern Alliance and other friendly militia forces to oust the Taliban from Afghanistan's major cities—such as Mazar-e Sharif, Kunduz, Kabul, and Kandahar—utilizing close air support along the way. General Franks had three objectives: destroy al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, dismantle the Taliban's control over the country, and provide humanitarian aid to the population.⁶¹ He anticipated beginning the campaign in the first week of October and pursuing it until the spring of 2002 to achieve the primary military objectives.⁶² As of late September and early October, however, Central Command had yet to work out important details such as logistics, command and control arrangements, prisoner handling, and what to do after defeating the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

The joint chiefs of staff then began assigning units from their respective services. They placed the Army's XVIII Airborne Corps, which included the 10th Mountain Division, the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), and the 82d Airborne Division, at Central Command's disposal. The Ninth Air Force,



Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld and General Tommy R. Franks during a press conference at the Pentagon soon after the 11 September terrorist attacks
(Department of Defense)

with its various air expeditionary wings, was the subordinate U.S. Air Force component. U.S. Special Operations Command, commanded by Air Force General Charles R. Holland, provided Army, Navy, and Air Force special operations troops to Central Command, including the Army's 75th Ranger Regiment and the 160th Aviation (Special Operations), commonly known as the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR).⁶³ Commandant of the Marine Corps General James L. Jones offered two expeditionary units, and Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Vernon E. Clark supplied elements of Fifth Fleet including six aircraft carrier battle groups and four amphibious ready groups.⁶⁴

American forces began to move by early October. Four carrier groups and two seaborne marine expeditionary units sailed into the Arabian Sea. These vessels transported U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force special operations forces, which were set to deploy in theater once combat operations began.⁶⁵ With some concessions, the State Department convinced Uzbekistan's President Islam A. Karimov to allow the U.S. military the use of Karshi Khanabad Air Base. Col. John F. Mulholland's 5th Special Forces Group deployed there, followed by elements of the 3d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment; the 160th SOAR; and the 10th Mountain Division's 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry.⁶⁶ With naval forces in the Arabian Sea, military forces building up in Uzbekistan,

and overflight rights in Pakistan secured, Central Command stood ready to begin combat operations in Afghanistan.⁶⁷

THE ULTIMATUM

In a speech to Congress on 20 September, President Bush demanded that Taliban leadership turn over bin Laden and his lieutenants to U.S. authorities, divulge all information about al-Qaeda's plans, locations, and assets, and expel all terrorists from the country. If they failed to meet these demands, U.S. forces would destroy both the Taliban and al-Qaeda.⁶⁸ Taliban religious leaders met in Kabul and advised Mullah Omar to expel bin Laden. Omar refused because he doubted both bin Laden's involvement with the events of 11 September and American resolve. He also believed that submission to U.S. demands contradicted Islam and Pashtunwali and would convey weakness to his followers.⁶⁹ "No, we cannot do that," he reportedly said. "If we did, it means we are not Muslims: that Islam is finished."⁷⁰ Mullah Omar, therefore, gave the Bush administration the final justification it needed to attack. After seventeen days, President Bush decided he had waited long enough, and, on 7 October, U.S. military forces launched Operation ENDURING FREEDOM.

On the night of 7 October, U.S. air and naval forces began the air campaign against the Taliban. U.S. Air Force B-52 and B-1B bombers flew from Diego Garcia, an atoll in the Indian Ocean, while U.S. Navy F-14s and F/A-18s launched from the carriers USS *Enterprise* (CVN-65) and USS *Carl Vinson* (CVN-70), off the coast of Pakistan. These aircraft bombed Taliban military and government targets in and around Kabul, Herat, Shindand, Shibirghan, and Mazar-e Sharif. B-2 Stealth bombers from Whiteman Air Force Base, Missouri, struck targets around Kandahar, including Mullah Mohammed Omar's residence. Additionally, U.S. Navy and Royal Navy ships launched fifty Tomahawk missiles against communication and radar stations.⁷¹ This bombing campaign lasted until the initial deployment of special forces ground troops on 19 October.

Operation ENDURING FREEDOM began without General Franks's staff having a set campaign plan. One staff officer described the initial planning simply as "it's how fast you can get to Afghanistan and start doing something."⁷² The staff wanted dual offensives, one in the north to wrest control of Mazar-e Sharif, Kunduz, and Kabul from the Taliban, and one in the south targeting Kandahar. For the first few months, however, Central Command depended heavily on input from special operations forces on the ground for the formulation of its own short-term planning guidance. As a result, Central Command usually did not extend its daily plans beyond the next twenty-four hours.⁷³ General Franks's planning process during the initial weeks of the campaign gave SOF commanders flexibility to conduct the war as they saw fit, but "there was no master plan."⁷⁴

By late November, Central Command's planners superimposed a four-phased campaign plan over an already unfolding course of events. Phase I (Preparing for Operations) and Phase II (Initial Combat Operations) had been underway since 7 October, and neither phase's implementation altered preexisting ground campaigns. Once U.S. and anti-Taliban forces had captured the major cities, they would begin Phase III (Decisive Operations), aimed at finding and destroying any remaining Taliban and al-Qaeda forces in country. The U.S.-led coalition would then move to the final phase, Phase IV (Sustainment and Prevention), which

involved humanitarian assistance and counterterrorist operations meant to deny the return of terrorist organizations to Afghanistan.⁷⁵

Events on the ground soon outpaced Central Command's ability to establish a theater command structure. On paper, General Franks had naval, air, land, and special operations component commands to help coordinate forces engaged in theater. The speed of the campaign, however, required operating without much of this framework. The opening operations, therefore, fell to special forces units, who essentially answered directly to General Franks, not Central Command's special operations component command, and not U.S. Special Operations Command. (*See Diagram 1, Appendix B.*)

Three major special forces commands spearheaded the ground campaign. In late September, Maj. Gen. Dell L. Dailey, the head of a counterterrorism command within U.S. Special Operations Command at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, formed Task Force SWORD. Elements of Army, Air Force, and Navy special forces units and the CIA made up this joint unit whose mission would be to neutralize weapons of mass destruction and capture or kill terrorist leaders.⁷⁶ In early October, Colonel Mulholland's 5th Special Forces Group established Joint Special Operations Task Force–North, code-named Task Force DAGGER, at Karshi Khanabad Air Base in Uzbekistan. Mulholland's mission was to deploy teams to support anti-Taliban militias throughout Afghanistan. Later in the campaign, Capt. Robert S. Harward's Navy Special Warfare Group One formed Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–South, code-named Task Force K-BAR, on Jazirat Masirah, just off the coast of Oman. Harward's mission was to launch special reconnaissance and direct action missions against al-Qaeda and the Taliban.⁷⁷

Although complex and ad hoc in nature, this evolving campaign and theater framework served General Franks's plan to rely mostly on small, unconventional forces in conjunction with anti-Taliban militia. Small detachments of special operators did not need robust command and control structures or substantial logistical support in the early weeks of the campaign. As the campaign evolved, however, Colonel Mulholland inserted more teams into northern and southern Afghanistan, which required more troops to provide quick reaction forces and logistical support. Central Command also needed a robust tactical headquarters to provide command and control, organize operations, and arrange for support on the ground in Afghanistan.

Consequently, General Franks expanded his command and control framework as the campaign progressed. In mid-November, General Franks deployed Lt. Gen. Paul T Mikolashek's Third U.S. Army headquarters to Kuwait to serve as the Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC), which assumed responsibility for ground operations in Central Command's area of operations, including Afghanistan. General Mikolashek had already deployed his headquarters to Egypt in early October to participate in the annual Operation BRIGHT STAR multinational training exercise. On 7 December, Maj. Gen. Franklin L. Hagenbeck moved his 10th Mountain Division's headquarters to Karshi Khanabad, where it would operate as CFLCC-Forward and command all conventional operations in country. Meanwhile, CFLCC would focus on regional security concerns. By early December, the chain of command for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM ran from Central Command to CFLCC to CFLCC-Forward, although Task Forces DAGGER and K-BAR still reported directly to General Franks. (See *Diagram 2, Appendix B.*)

WAR IN THE NORTH

Colonel Mulholland's Task Force DAGGER oversaw the first operational detachments alpha (also known as alpha teams) to land in northern Afghanistan. Each alpha team generally consisted of twelve highly trained and specialized soldiers: a commander, usually a captain; an assistant commander, usually a warrant officer; an operations sergeant who was a master sergeant; an assistant operations sergeant who was often a sergeant first class; and two staff noncommissioned officers per specialty in the engineering, medical, and communications fields. Each team usually had two U.S. Air Force enlisted terminal attack controllers who were responsible for close air support.⁷⁸

Logistical support for Task Force DAGGER came from fixed-wing elements out of Special Operations Command Europe and from the 528th Support Battalion (Special Operations), which deployed to Karshi Khanabad in early October. Capt. Christopher O. Mohan's Company A arrived first and quickly established a warehouse to store supplies, a dining facility, and food and refueling points.⁷⁹ Conventional Army divisions have up to 3,300 support personnel per 15,000 soldiers. The 528th had only 400 soldiers to support the entire U.S. war effort in Afghanistan. While Special Operations Command Europe flew supplies from

Germany and Turkey to Karshi Khanabad, the 528th unloaded, organized, and reloaded everything onto Air Force C-17s to resupply the alpha teams.⁸⁰ In this way, over the course of a two-month span, the 528th allocated millions of meals for humanitarian relief and thousands of pounds of equipment and supplies for U.S. and coalition forces.⁸¹

Task Force DAGGER's mission was clear. Its teams would link up with anti-Taliban forces and then advise and support combat operations against al-Qaeda and the Taliban. The objective was twofold: to drive the Taliban from power and to destroy al-Qaeda or force its members to flee Afghanistan. General Franks allowed Colonel Mulholland's teams substantial latitude in determining exactly what "advise and support" looked like on the ground.⁸² It would be different for every team, considering the needs of each warlord and his militia varied according to ethnicity, culture, and personality. Additionally, no one was sure how well the alpha teams and the anti-Taliban forces would work together. Because of these variances and unknowns, Central Command was not certain how effective the Uzbek and Tajik warlords would be against the Taliban, even with direct U.S. military support.

Four major anti-Taliban groups formed the United Front, a rather loose confederation of Northern Alliance forces and smaller regional militias. In the Panjshayr River Valley, General Mohammed Qasim Fahim, the de facto leader of the United Front, led a large contingent of armed Tajiks, many of them former followers of the recently slain Ahmad Shah Massoud. General Abdul Rashid Dostum commanded a force of mostly Uzbeks who sought to reclaim their traditional stronghold of Mazar-e Sharif from the Taliban. Out west, near Herat, an additional force of Tajiks under General Mohammed Ismail Khan fought the Taliban for control of the western provinces that bordered Iran. Karim Khalili's Hazara fighters, known as the Hezb-e Wahdat (Unity Party), made up the fourth group, which sought to oust the Taliban from central Afghanistan.⁸³ This combined force totaled 12,000 to 15,000 fighters with about a dozen artillery pieces and 200 barely operable tanks and armored vehicles.⁸⁴

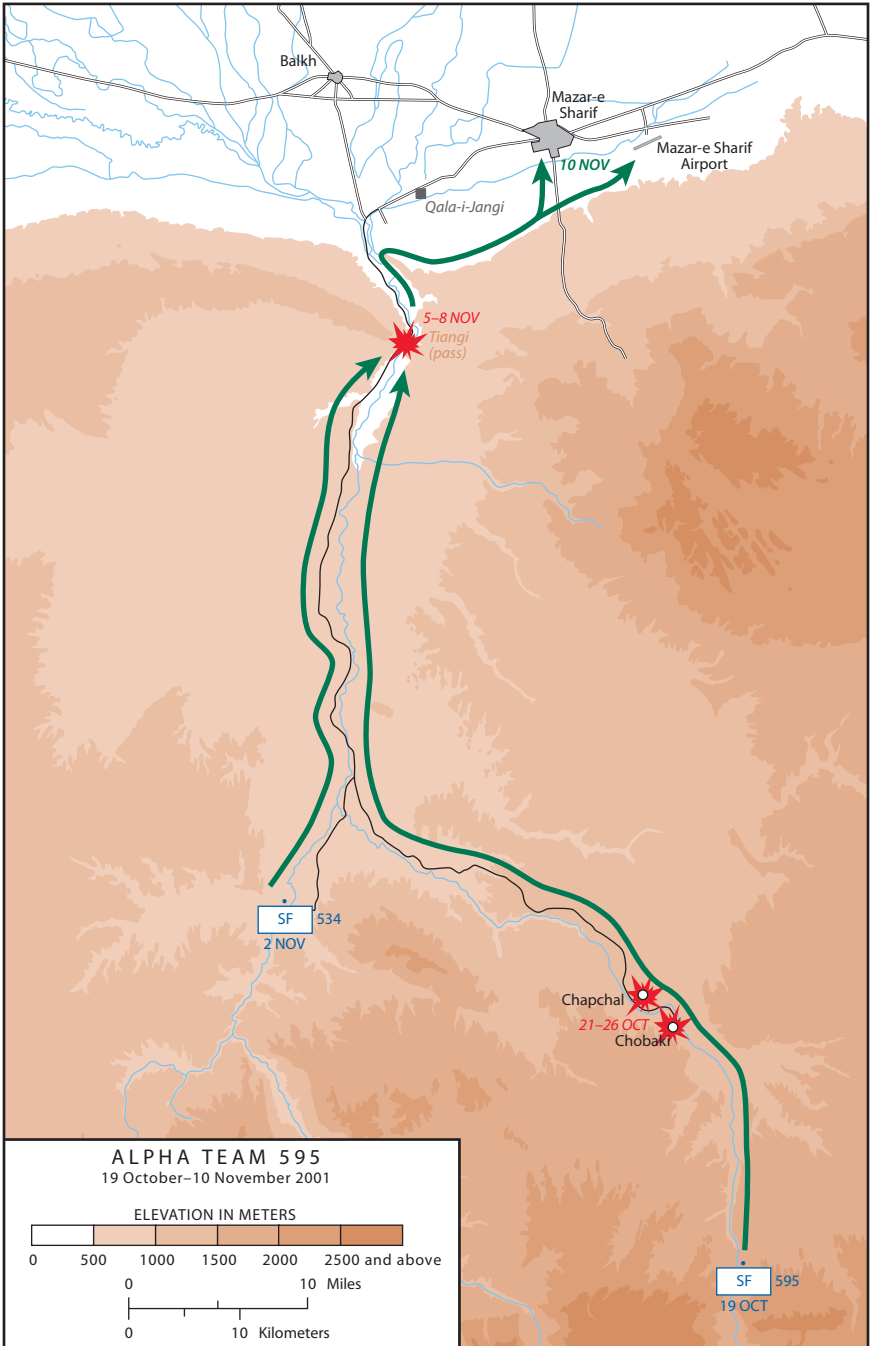
Like the Taliban, these groups had a stockpile of assorted weapons, including Kalashnikov (AK47) assault rifles, machine guns (PKMs), rocket-propelled grenade launchers, and some mortars. They also drove an eclectic array of armed vehicles, although many of them operated on foot or horseback.⁸⁵ Most of the United Front troops employed guerrilla tactics, relying on high mobility to

attack scattered and isolated pockets of Taliban fighters whenever they could. When outnumbered or outgunned, they would trade space for time and flee the area.⁸⁶ The U.S. Special Forces' alpha teams, replete with funds and technology, including air support, night vision capabilities, and satellite communication equipment, triggered an immediate change in the United Front's fortunes in its war against the Taliban.

On 19 October, pilots and aircrews from the 2d Battalion, 160th SOAR, flew in the dead of night through a 3.2-kilometer-high dust storm to insert Capt. Mark D. Nutsch's Operational Detachment Alpha (Alpha Team) 595 in the Suf River Valley, some 80 kilometers south of Mazar-e Sharif. The next morning, twenty heavily armed horsemen met the team and led them to a compound. Thirty more horsemen arrived soon after with General Dostum, a stocky, bearded, middle-aged man, who hopped off his horse, quickly shook their hands, and thanked them for coming.⁸⁷ Dostum then loaned them horses to ride the rest of the way to the front lines against the Taliban.⁸⁸ Along the way, Captain Nutsch requested and received Western-style saddles and horse feed from the 528th Support Battalion at Karshi Khanabad.⁸⁹ From 21 to 26 October, Nutsch's team and Dostum's troops moved north and defeated the Taliban at Bishqab, Chobaki, and Chapchal.⁹⁰ In each engagement, the alpha team called in air strikes from B-52s and AC-130s to destroy the Taliban's small arsenal of tanks and armored vehicles and obliterate its defensive positions. Dostum's soldiers then pushed forward, often charging on horseback, to seize the positions (*Map 3*).

As General Dostum and Alpha Team 595 battled their way toward Mazar-e Sharif, Franks and Mulholland met with General Mohammed Qasim Fahim in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, to discuss war plans. Khan wanted to take Kabul as soon as possible, but Mulholland persuaded him to focus on liberating Mazar-e Sharif and Kunduz before Kabul. Franks prioritized Mazar-e Sharif because he felt it would be an ideal location for an airstrip and, potentially, a logistics hub. After securing the city, U.S. forces could use it as a staging point for further operations against the Taliban at Taluqan, Kunduz, and eventually Kabul. Mazar-e Sharif could also serve as a crucial supply base for humanitarian assistance, which Franks anticipated would be necessary with the onset of winter.⁹¹

Franks and Mulholland soon realized the difficulties of working with warlords who had their own aims and agendas. Task Force DAGGER had to distribute special



MAP 3

forces teams and resources so that no militia commander felt that the Americans treated a rival ethnic faction more favorably.⁹² Therefore, Mulholland inserted more alpha teams, not just for military purposes, but also to improve relations between the United States and the United Front. He deployed Alpha Team 585 to operate with one of General Fahim's allies, General Bariullah Khan, near the Tajikistan border. Then, Alpha Team 534 landed 48 kilometers to the southwest of Mazar-e Sharif to link up with another of Fahim's confederates, the Tajik chieftain Ustad Mohammed Atta Nur. Atta Nur and Rashid Dostum had a long history of intermittent conflicts with each other, so U.S. forces had to proceed carefully.⁹³

Army special forces teams and their respective United Front allies spent the first week of November moving into position to seize Mazar-e Sharif. On 2 November, the 160th SOAR landed Alpha Team 553 near the village of Naylor in Bamyan Province, about 193 kilometers south of Mazar-e Sharif, to work with a small CIA team and Hazara fighters commanded by Karim Khalili. This group planned to block any Taliban movements that might threaten Dostum's rear during the upcoming attack on Mazar-e Sharif.⁹⁴ During this period, Alpha Teams 595 and 534 often split into smaller teams of three or four people, with smaller United Front units to direct and coordinate air strikes over more ground. To implement better command and control over these units, Colonel Mulholland deployed Operational Detachment Charlie 53, under the command of Lt. Col. Max A. Bowers, to oversee Alpha Teams 595 and 534 and to coordinate with United Front troops.⁹⁵

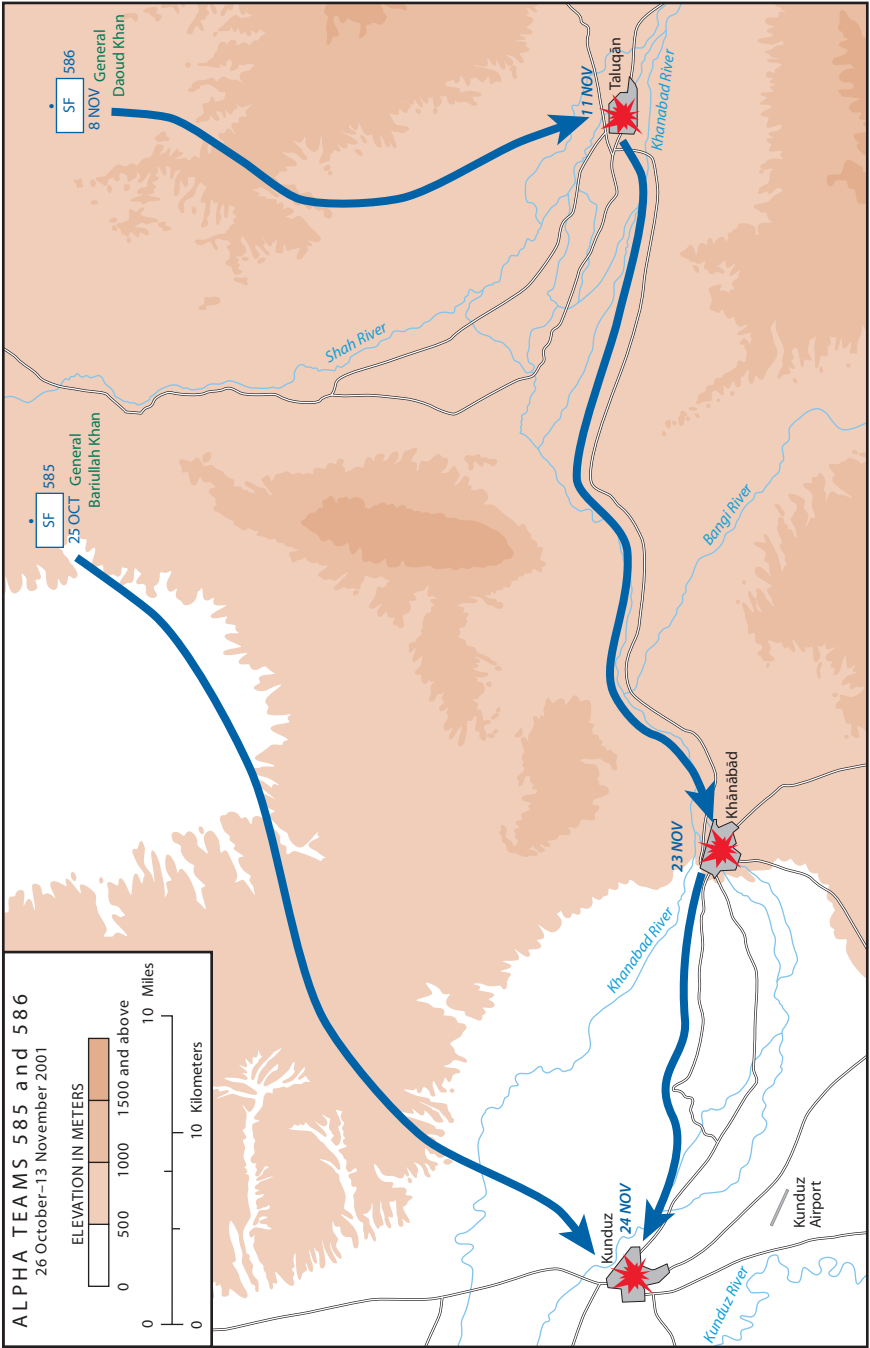
The fight for Mazar-e Sharif took place largely outside the city. Dostum, Atta Nur, and Alpha Teams 595 and 534 planned to force the estimated 2,000 Taliban fighters from the Tiangi, a fortified gap in the mountains 40 kilometers south of the city. While Atta Nur's 1,000 troops attacked Taliban positions from the west, Dostum's 2,300 horsemen would assault from the east. Simultaneously, a force of Hazaras, commanded by Mohammed Mohaqiq, would attack on Dostum's right flank. With the Tiangi cleared, the road to Mazar-e Sharif would be open.

This combined force launched its assault on 5 November. After the alpha team directed aerial bombardments on the Taliban, Atta Nur and Dostum attacked, forcing the defenders to abandon the pass on 8 November. Most of the Taliban retreated to Mazar-e Sharif or fled east toward Kunduz. However, 300 Pakistani Taliban fighters barricaded themselves inside a former girls' school. Alpha Team 595 eliminated them with direct air strikes. Atta Nur's troops took the airport on the eastern side while Dostum's

soldiers took the fortress of Qala-i-Jangi, a formidable nineteenth-century fortification replete with a moat, ramparts, parapets, and walls 10.7 meters high and 13.7 meters thick, located on Mazar-e Sharif's western outskirts. Three thousand Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters surrendered to the United Front forces, who imprisoned them in the Qala-i-Jangi fortress.⁹⁶ On 10 November, Mazar-e Sharif became the first city the Taliban lost.

From 25 October to 23 November, two alpha teams worked with United Front troops to secure the northern towns of Kunduz and Taluqan. M. Sgt. Armand J. Bolduc's Alpha Team 585 linked up with General Bariullah Khan, and together they began fighting their way toward Kunduz on 25 October. The campaign made steady progress thanks to American close air support. In one instance in early November, however, Bariullah launched a disastrous attack on Taliban positions without Sergeant Bolduc's knowledge. In the absence of U.S. air cover, the Taliban cut down hundreds of United Front troops.⁹⁷ Bariullah never again attacked the enemy without U.S. air support. Alpha Team 586, commanded by Capt. Patrick O'Hara, embedded itself with General Daoud Khan and, by 13 November, had forced the Taliban out of Taluqan. General Daoud and Alpha Team 586 then took Khanabad, destroying large enemy ammunition caches, scores of vehicles, and killing an estimated 2,000 Taliban fighters. Along the way, Daoud attracted the support of thousands of local Afghans—including some former Taliban members—who simply switched sides. By the time the coalition reached Kunduz, its ranks had had swelled from 4,000 to nearly 16,000. Captain O'Hara claimed that "if you showed that you were stronger than the other guy, they would align with you, and that was how they [the coalition] got a lot of Taliban troops to go to their side as well." Khan then laid siege to Kunduz, where several thousand Taliban defenders surrendered on 23 November (*Map 4*).⁹⁸

Farther south, CWO2 David W. Diaz's Alpha Team 555 landed 40 kilometers north of Kabul, near Bagram, to join forces with Generals Qasim Fahim and Bismillah Khan late on 19 October. After linking up with the United Front, the combined force used direct air strikes to eliminate a group of Taliban fighters defending the Bagram airstrip on 22 October.⁹⁹ The alpha team then sought to clear the Shomali Plain between Bagram and Kabul. Using similar bombing and offensive tactics as its fellow special forces teams to the west, Diaz's Alpha Team 555, along with Generals



MAP 4

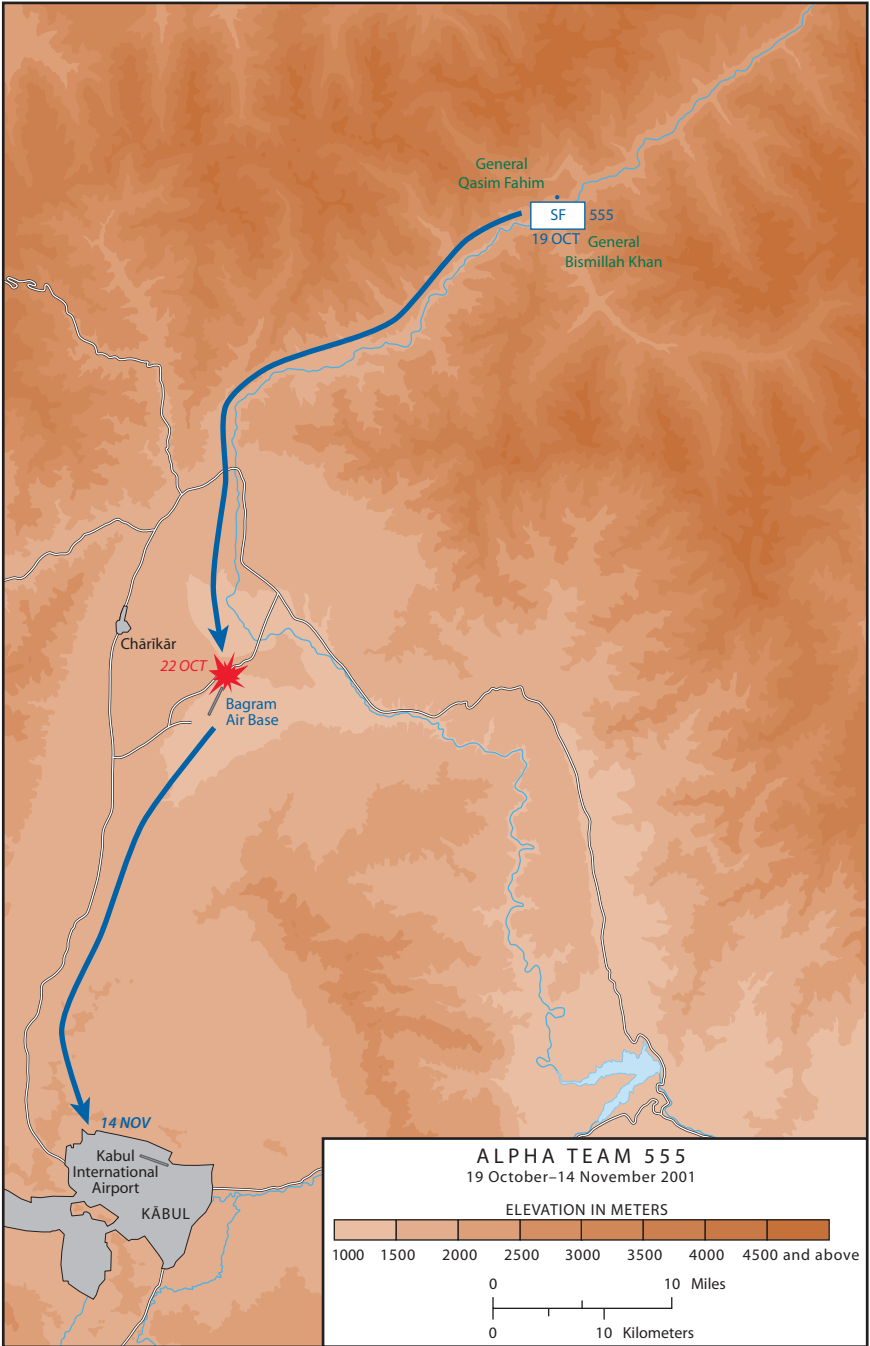
Bismillah and Fahim, opened the way to Kabul. United Front forces entered the capital on 14 November, the same day the Taliban fled the city (*Map 5*).¹⁰⁰

By 26 November, al-Qaeda and the Taliban had abandoned nearly all of their positions in the north. Precision air strikes overwhelmed them both tactically and psychologically. A Taliban commander in Mazar-e Sharif, named Akhundzada, recalled, “The bombs cut down our men like a reaper harvesting wheat.” He remembered “dazed fighters . . . bleeding from the ears and nose from the bomb’s concussions.”¹⁰¹ Another Taliban leader, Mullah Cable, also witnessed the devastating power of U.S. aerial bombardments: “My teeth shook, my bones shook, everything inside me shook.”¹⁰² Some Taliban fighters fled to Pakistan as soon as the U.S. launched the attack. One fighter confessed that when the bombing started “everyone began trying to save themselves and their families . . . I changed out of my usual white mullah’s garb . . . and headed for Pakistan.”¹⁰³

Although coalition units had deposed the Taliban in the north, intense fighting at Mazar-e Sharif continued. General Dostum’s troops collected around 1,000 captured enemy fighters, including Pakistani Taliban members and both Chechen and Arab al-Qaeda fighters from Mazar-e Sharif, Kunduz, and Taluqan. Dostum and his officers detained the prisoners at the Qala-i-Jangi fortress. Situated 9.7 kilometers west of Mazar-e Sharif, Qala-i-Jangi also served as Dostum’s headquarters and as the location where CIA intelligence officers interrogated al-Qaeda prisoners.

Dostum and his men made three critical security errors at the fortress: they detailed only about one hundred fighters to guard the prisoners, they failed to search each prisoner thoroughly for concealed weapons, and they did not consider fully the risks of making a fortress—stocked with weapons and ammunition—a prison.¹⁰⁴ Although the fortress had changed hands over the years, from the Soviets to Dostum in the 1980s and from Dostum to the Taliban in the late 1990s, the site remained stocked with Soviet-era submachine guns, modern rocket-propelled grenade launchers, and ammunition for both.¹⁰⁵ This combination of oversights would lead to significant bloodshed.

Dostum also erred in thinking his prisoners had given up resistance. According to traditional Afghan fighting customs, the victors could trust the word of the defeated to lay down their arms and behave peacefully. When Dostum’s soldiers took on these prisoners, however, they did not anticipate that the hundreds of foreign fighters under their supervision would follow no such local customs.



MAP 5

On 24 November, a prisoner killed himself and two United Front commanders with a concealed grenade.¹⁰⁶ The following day, another prisoner took the same action, killing three guards.¹⁰⁷ Dostum's troops grew wary of their prisoners, but they still felt they had the situation under control. Assured by their captors that United Nations authorities, not Americans, would interrogate them, the bulk of the captive population allowed Dostum's men to lead them to their cells.

A bloody, five-day battle began on 25 November when the prisoners learned of the arrival of CIA officers Johnny Michael "Mike" Spann and David Tyson. The Americans' presence infuriated the prisoners because it contradicted the promises that the guards had made. In revolt, the prisoners took control of the southern portion of the fortress, killing several of Dostum's guards and Spann. Tyson and the rest of the Dostum's men escaped to the northern end of the fortress, behind a 6-meter-high wall that separated the fortress into two sections. As the militia frantically set up defensive positions, Tyson called for help through CIA channels. American special forces troops and British Special Air Service troops arrived that afternoon. Colonel Mulholland also immediately sent a quick reaction force, the 1st Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, from the 10th Mountain Division, to Mazar-e Sharif.

It took American, British, and United Front forces several days to retake the fortress. British and American special forces troops positioned themselves on the northern wall and parapets. While the Americans called F-18s and AC-130 gunships to pummel the prisoners from the air, United Front soldiers launched attacks against them on the ground. The prisoners killed 50 United Front soldiers and wounded another 250 in the process.¹⁰⁸ One errant 2,000-pound bomb landed on the northern wall, destroying a United Front tank that had been positioned there for support, killing several of Dostum's men, and wounding five American and two British soldiers. On 27 November, additional alpha team elements, soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division, and troops from Atta Nur and Mohaqiq arrived. By 28 November, United Front troops were fighting yard by yard, room by room, often in very close quarters. Approximately one hundred prisoners had retreated and barricaded themselves in the basement of a fortified building within the fortress. The Afghan militias used grenades and burning fuel to try to force them out, but to no avail.¹⁰⁹

In the end, water, not fire, brought the battle to its conclusion. The United Front troops flooded the basement with cold well water. Facing the risks of hypothermia and drowning, the remaining prisoners surrendered on 29 November, including

John Walker Lindh, an American member of the Taliban. Task Force DAGGER flew Lindh to the USS *Peleliu* (LHA-5) in the Arabian Sea, and sent the rest of the prisoners across the globe to Camp X-Ray, Guantanamo, Cuba.¹¹⁰

WAR IN THE SOUTH

Central Command began the southern campaign for Kandahar simultaneously with the operations in the north. On 19 October, the 160th SOAR and aircraft based aboard the USS *Kitty Hawk* (CV-63) flew soldiers from the 3d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, to Objective RHINO, a remote, airfield 160 kilometers southwest of Kandahar. After parachuting, Rangers from Companies A and B quickly seized the airfield and established a defensive perimeter. A second group of special forces troops and Rangers from Task Force SWORD attacked Mullah Omar's compound, designated Objective GECKO, a few kilometers north of Kandahar. After landing, Rangers from the 3d Battalion's Company B cordoned off GECKO while special forces soldiers entered Mullah Omar's compound without resistance. Realizing Omar had fled, Task Force SWORD troops gathered what intelligence they could find and flew back to Oman. General Franks knew that acquiring an airfield for refueling and logistical purposes was important, but he also hoped that these operations—so close to Kandahar, the Taliban's religious and cultural center—would deal a significant psychological blow to the enemy.¹¹¹ (*See Map 1.*)

Colonel Mullholland faced a political and military landscape in southern Afghanistan that differed from the situation in the north, where Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Hazaras quickly welcomed U.S. assistance in their ongoing war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. No such readily available anti-Taliban forces existed in the south. Despite U.S. efforts to persuade regional warlords in the north to help with the war in the south, the northern warlords generally had no interest in fighting the Taliban south of the Hindu Kush.¹¹² Sunni Pashtuns, the dominant population of southern Afghanistan, also made up the majority of the Taliban in the south, where the Taliban's political and cultural roots ran deep. U.S. forces had to find a regional leader who understood the political situation, wanted to overthrow the Taliban, and could gain the trust of Pashtuns in the region.

The CIA recommended Hamid Karzai. American analysts believed Karzai was a good prospect to lead not only a southern revolt against the Taliban and al-Qaeda, but also a nationwide uprising that could potentially unify the country afterward.

Karzai, a Sunni Pashtun, came from a long line of Popalzai tribal leaders with a history of resisting foreign invaders. His grandfather fought in Afghanistan's war for independence in 1919. Abdul Karzai, Hamid's father, served in the Afghanistan parliament before the Soviet invasion. After completing a master's degree in international relations in India, Karzai himself joined the ranks of the mujahideen to repel the Soviets. After the war against the Soviet Union ended in 1989, Karzai became a member of the interim government and tried to broker a peace agreement to end the subsequent Afghan civil war. The Karzais opposed the rise of the Taliban, and, in 1999, the Islamist group assassinated Abdul. Hamid, who left Afghanistan after his father's death, became a sworn enemy of the Taliban.¹¹³

The CIA also recommended that Task Force DAGGER recruit the aid of Gul Agha Sharzai, a leading member of the Barakzai tribe, an offshoot of the Durrani Pashtuns. Sharzai had fought against the Soviets with the mujahideen and eventually became the governor of Kandahar Province. When the Taliban deposed him in the late 1990s, he fled to Pakistan. Throughout much of their history, the Barakzai and Popalzai tribes competed for political power, but Sharzai and Karzai would work together with the United States to defeat the Taliban and al-Qaeda.¹¹⁴

With both Pashtun leaders on board, Central Command and Task Force DAGGER developed a plan for ousting the Taliban from Kandahar. Colonel Mulholland would send Alpha Team 574, under the command of Capt. Jason L. Amerine, and a CIA paramilitary team, to link up with Hamid Karzai in Uruzgan Province, north of Kandahar, where they would gather local support.¹¹⁵ Around the same time, Alpha Team 583, led by Capt. Hank E. Smith, would partner with another CIA team and deploy to Pakistan to work with Sharzai. These two teams would advance on Kandahar from different directions: Karzai and Alpha Team 574 from the north, and Sharzai and Alpha Team 583 from the southeast.

Captain Amerine's team began its mission first. In the early morning hours of 14 November, the team landed deep in Uruzgan Province, where it met up with Hamid Karzai. The Americans quickly realized that Karzai's charisma and his knowledge of Afghan and Pashtun tribal culture would prove invaluable. Karzai, who spoke perfect English, convinced the alpha team to secure Tarin Kot first because of its cultural and psychological importance to the Taliban. Liberating the town, he argued, would attract local Pashtuns to the coalition's cause and give the



Alpha Team 574 with Hamid Karzai, November 2001
(U.S. Army)

team an opportunity to lure a Taliban force into the open, where U.S. aircraft could destroy it. To Karzai and the Americans' pleasant surprise, their arrival triggered an uprising of the town's people against the Taliban. Despite being Pashtuns and former supporters of the Taliban, the town's people had grown weary of its harsh and extreme interpretation of Shari'a law and its dependence upon Pakistani and al-Qaeda support.¹¹⁶

Amerine's alpha team and Karzai's troops achieved remarkable success in the battle that followed. As expected, on 18 November, several dozen vehicles carrying hundreds of Taliban fighters approached Tarin Kot from the southeast. Amerine's team called in jets from the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN-71) to destroy the vehicles as they approached. A small Taliban force, unnoticed by Amerine's team, made it to the town, but armed citizens chased the intruders off. Now convinced that they had a fighting chance against the Taliban, the mullahs in Tarin Kot pledged their support to Karzai, and the team acquired reinforcements.¹¹⁷

Meanwhile, Sharzai and Captain Smith's Alpha Team 583 began its advance toward Kandahar on 18 November. They linked up at a remote village southeast of the city and began assembling a force to challenge the local Taliban. Captain Smith counted 650–800 Afghans who were loyal to Sharzai, but they were unevenly equipped. The resistance force traveled with a smorgasbord of small Toyota pickup trucks and sedans. Some had weapons but no ammunition; some had neither. Smith convinced Sharzai to take the town of Takhtah Pul in the Shin Naray Valley in order to cut off Taliban supply lines coming up Highway 4

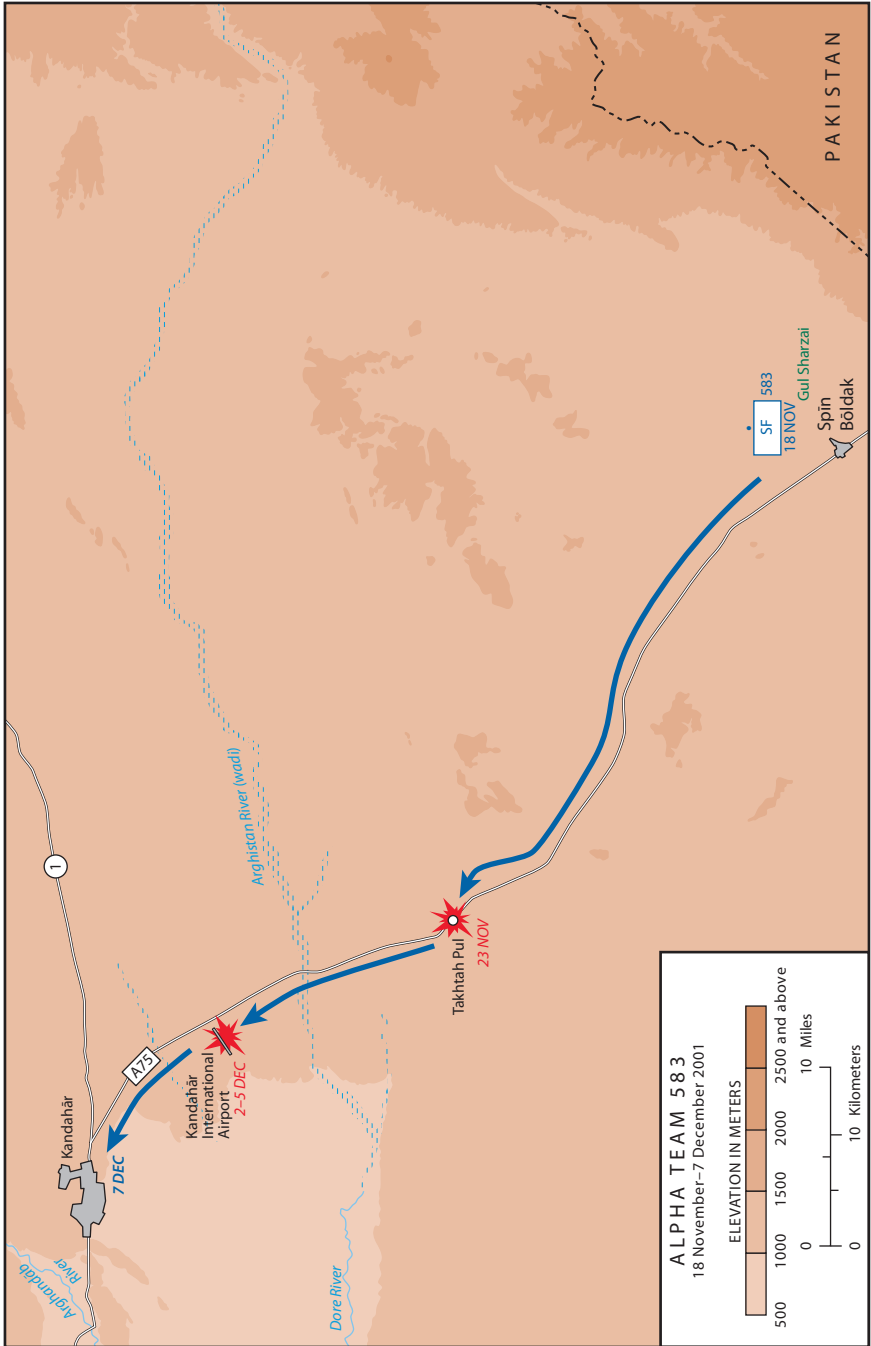
from Pakistan. A religious scholar and veteran of the Soviet-Afghan War, Taliban commander Hafiz Abdur Rahim led the Taliban and al-Qaeda resistance to Sharzai's advance. As Sharzai approached Takhtah Pul on 23 November, he tried to convince the Taliban defenders to surrender. Rahim, however, used the parlay as an opportunity to ambush Sharzai and his men. A daylong firefight ensued, before U.S. close air support forced the defenders to retreat north on Highway 4.¹¹⁸

To continue on to Kandahar, Sharzai and Alpha Team 583 needed to seize the bridge that spanned the Arghistan wadi, a major crossing along Highway 4 and the last obstacle between them and the airport south of the city. They succeeded on 25 November, but Abdur Rahim's defenders repulsed Sharzai's attempt to take the airport. In response, Sharzai pulled his militia back to Takhtah Pul to regroup, while Smith's tactical air control party spent a week calling in air strikes against Taliban and al-Qaeda troops that moved along the highway and near the airport (*Map 6*).¹¹⁹

Meanwhile, Karzai and Alpha Team 574 began moving south toward Kandahar. All the while, Karzai made and received many calls on his U.S.-provided satellite phone. He talked to allied militia commanders, received information on Taliban movements, and conversed with press organizations.¹²⁰ As word of Karzai's force spread, young Pashtun men showed up in droves to join him—so many, in fact, that he had to turn many of them away. Karzai's convoy of vehicles encountered no Taliban resistance for kilometers. A large Taliban force, however, had dug in at the Arghandab bridge outside the village of Sayyid 'Alim Kelay, just 17 kilometers north of Kandahar.¹²¹ On 3 and 4 December, Karzai's militia engaged the Taliban defenders there with small arms fire while Amerine's soldiers called in repeated air strikes. At one point during the fight, a portion of Karzai's men retreated, fearing that the Taliban was approaching from a different direction to flank them. This intelligence turned out to be false, and U.S. aerial bombing kept the Taliban at bay across the river. When Karzai's men returned on 4 December, the recombined force went back on the offensive and took the bridge by the end of the day. (*See Map 7*)


THE BONN CONFERENCE

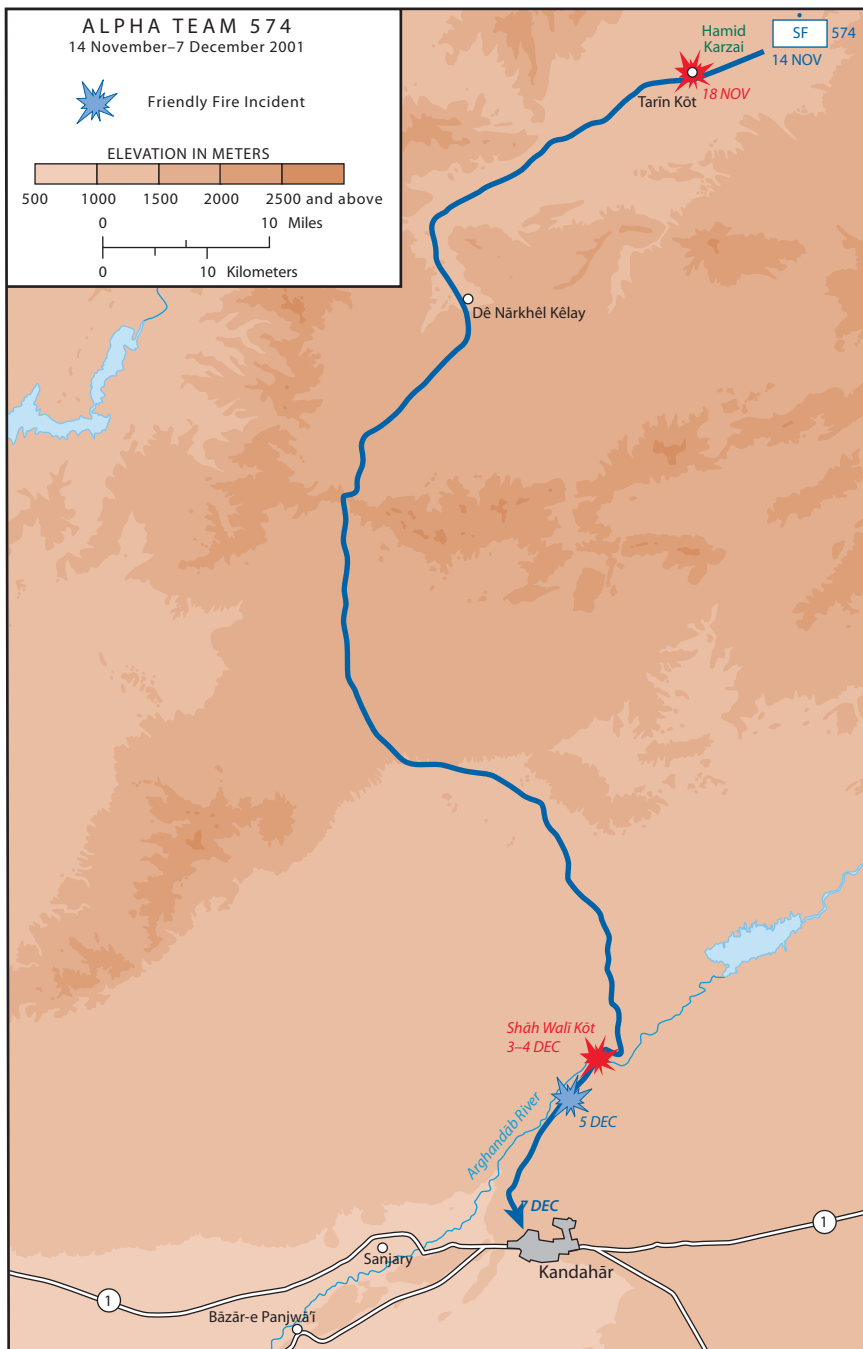
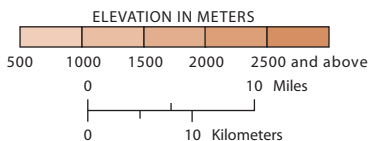
As this battle raged, events 5,000 kilometers away suddenly put Karzai in position to govern Afghanistan. A special meeting of the United Nations convened in Bonn, Germany, to decide the political future of the country. Delegates attended



MAP 6

ALPHA TEAM 574
14 November–7 December 2001

 Friendly Fire Incident



MAP 7

from the United States, India, Pakistan, Iran, Russia, and several European countries. Although four Afghan delegations representing the United Front factions and several other groups of prominent Afghan exiles came to the conference, the United Nations did not invite any Taliban representatives. The conference began on 28 November, and the delegates discussed Afghanistan's postwar government, cabinet positions within said government, and selection of an interim leader. On 5 December, the delegates reached an initial series of accords known collectively as the Bonn Agreement. They nominated Hamid Karzai to chair the Afghan Interim Authority, an entity that would rebuild Afghanistan's government and economy from the ground up once the U.S. military and its allies defeated the Taliban. Delegates also created an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to oversee and train Afghan security forces and provide a police presence in Kabul. The United Kingdom agreed to be the lead nation for ISAF, responsible for its leadership, headquarters staff, and many of its troops. ISAF would work closely with Central Command, but would answer, initially, to the British government.¹²²

Given Karzai's political significance, the CIA advised Central Command to enhance security around him. In response, Colonel Mulholland sent several small elements to join Karzai and Alpha Team 574 on 28 November. These included Lt. Col. David G. Fox, commander of the 2d Special Forces Battalion, 5th Special Forces Group, and Maj. Donald C. Bolduc, the commander of the Special Operations Command and Control Element 52, who would oversee Alpha Teams 574 and 583 as they approached Kandahar.¹²³ For Captain Amerine, protecting Karzai from potential assassins became a top priority.¹²⁴

Tragedy struck the Americans and their Afghan allies on the morning of 5 December. Alpha Team 574 called in an air strike on a Taliban position. In doing so, it mistakenly transmitted its own coordinates as the target to the B-52 bomber crew, who then dropped a 2,000-pound bomb on the team's position, killing two Americans and twenty Afghans, and wounding fifty more.¹²⁵ The entire team immediately evacuated to Karshi Khanabad. Colonel Mulholland sent two other alpha teams to replace them.¹²⁶ Karzai, dazed and bleeding from a minor shrapnel wound on his face, received a satellite phone call from the United Nations delegates at Bonn, officially informing him that they had selected him to lead the Afghan Interim Authority.¹²⁷ Just minutes later, Karzai received another

call, this time from Taliban leaders in Kandahar, who were ready to negotiate the city's surrender.

THE FALL OF KANDAHAR

By late November, Mullah Omar had been under tremendous pressure to abandon Kandahar. To defend the city, he only had 3,000 of his own troops bolstered by around 300 al-Qaeda fighters. He kept a close eye on the dual enemy columns approaching from the north and south. Realizing his troops could not hold out against Sharzai, Karzai, and U.S. air support, he transferred his authority over the Taliban to Mullah Obaidullah, his minister of defense, allowed Mullah Naqib and his deputies to do what they wished regarding the city, and departed.¹²⁸

It was Mullah Naqib, a senior Taliban deputy and leader of the Pashtun Alikozai tribe, who contacted Karzai on 5 December. He offered to give up the city and step down from power in exchange for immunity for himself and his deputies. Karzai agreed to this and added that Naqib could stay in Kandahar as governor if he renounced his allegiance to the Taliban. Naqib complied. His easy switch in allegiance reflected the long history of friendship between Karzai's own Popalzai and Naqib's Alikozai tribes.¹²⁹ Confusion remained, however, among the Taliban members in Kandahar and among Karzai's group, as to the full meaning and implications of this deal. Karzai and at least some of the Taliban leadership saw it as a deal that would end the conflict peacefully. Karzai viewed al-Qaeda as the primary enemy in Afghanistan, while he considered the Taliban native Afghans who deserved amnesty. Donald Rumsfeld, however, directed in a 6 December press conference that the United States military would not negotiate with the Taliban. He told Karzai that his attempts to broker a deal with the Taliban might put U.S. military support for his cause at risk. The Bush administration was not interested in a peace agreement with the Taliban, seeing both it and al-Qaeda as terrorist organizations.¹³⁰ Stripped of its potential for a general peace, the deal only transferred control of the city to the United States' Afghan allies.¹³¹

As Sharzai and Alpha Team 583 pushed on toward Kandahar, they did not know that the Taliban had already surrendered the city to Karzai. The old rivalries between the two tribal leaders erupted when Sharzai's forces entered Kandahar on 7 December. Although the city had surrendered to Karzai on the phone, Sharzai entered the city first and took control of the government buildings.

Sharzai expected to be restored as governor of Kandahar, but Karzai already had promised the post to Mullah Naqib. Although Karzai and Sharzai considered military action against one another, they reached a peaceful agreement that involved the latter assuming governorship of the city. They offered Naqib the position of vice governor.¹³²

Kandahar remained a dangerous place. On 8 December, security personnel at the governor's palace found and defused an enormous improvised explosive device on the roof. On the same day, nine wounded al-Qaeda fighters receiving medical care at Mirwais Hospital precipitated a nearly two-month-long siege when they took control of a portion of the second floor in the southern wing of the medical complex. In response, Sharzai's forces surrounded the building while Alpha Team 524 provided advice and support. Unbeknownst to Sharzai and the Americans, a few members of the hospital staff prolonged the siege by smuggling food and water to the holdouts. A couple of weeks into the standoff, two al-Qaeda fighters feigned surrender only to commit suicide with concealed grenades. Finally, after five weeks of trying to smoke and blast the al-Qaeda defenders out of their position, Alpha Team 524 led a select group of Sharzai's men into the hospital to clear out the remaining al-Qaeda fighters in close-quarters combat.¹³³ The Taliban and al-Qaeda may have relinquished control of Kandahar, but they remained a threat wherever U.S. troops and their allies went within the city.

Early that December, just before the Mirwais siege, U.S. Special Forces and their Afghan partners had greatly weakened al-Qaeda and wrested control of Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, Kunduz, Kabul, Tarin Kot, and Kandahar from the Taliban. They had accomplished this feat with relatively few friendly casualties and without triggering an ethnic uprising among the Pashtuns. Having lost control of most of the country, some among the Taliban blamed al-Qaeda for their defeat. "We gave those camels [Arab al-Qaeda] free run of our country, and they brought us face to face with disaster," one Taliban fighter claimed.¹³⁴ He and many other Taliban members gathered their families and fled to Pakistan. Those still willing to fight fled to the eastern ranges of Afghanistan along the Pakistan border, concentrating in Tora Bora and the Shahi Kot Valley.

During this same time, the handling of prisoners also had become a significant issue. The revolt at the Qala-i-Jangi fortress and the killing of Taliban prisoners by coalition militias helped convince Central Command to devote more resources and troops to the care and control of detainees. The United States did not have

enough troops on the ground to guard the growing number of Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters who had surrendered. In a press conference in Washington, D.C., Secretary Rumsfeld told reporters that much of that responsibility fell to Afghan allies, not to U.S. personnel.¹³⁵ Meanwhile, Colonel Mulholland had advised his soldiers to make sure their indigenous partners did not commit war crimes against prisoners. However, many of Central Command's allies proved difficult to control. General Dostum killed hundreds of Taliban detainees via asphyxiation when he packed them into sealed shipping containers for transport south. After the battle of Takhtah Pul, Sharzai's men executed 160 Taliban prisoners, some of whom were Pakistani.¹³⁶

When General Mikolashek had established CFLCC at Camp Doha, Kuwait, just after the fall of Kunduz in mid-November, he began taking more responsibility for prisoner care and base security. Forces aligned with the United Front, Karzai, and Sharzai placed prisoners in makeshift detention centers in Shibirghan, Kabul, Bagram, and Kandahar. NATO and special forces personnel separated all al-Qaeda and high-ranking Taliban members from the rest of the prisoners, and began processing them for interrogation and transport. After the fall of Kunduz on 23 November, General Mikolashek decided to provide food, water, and medical supplies to captives held by the United Front. He also deployed troops from the 10th Mountain Division, stationed at Karshi Khanabad, to Kunduz to help guard detainees.¹³⁷ It would not be until mid-December, however, before CFLCC successfully allocated these resources. Central Command offered little guidance about prisoner interrogation or criteria for identifying and separating key al-Qaeda members.¹³⁸ Like so much else in the early stages of the war, commanders on the ground adjusted plans and operations to fit the situation, often without official direction from higher echelons of command.

The growing number of prisoners and the installation of runways at forward operating bases—such as those at RHINO, Bagram, and Kandahar—required the deployment of more conventional ground and support troops in theater. Elements of the 10th Mountain Division's 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, arrived at Bagram Air Base in early December. General Hagenbeck's CFLCC-Forward deployed to Karshi Khanabad in early December and detailed a platoon from Company C, 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, to Shibirghan to help the 65th Military Police Company (Airborne) process prisoners. Task Force 58, under the command of Marine Corps Brig. Gen. James N. Mattis, sent marines from the 15th and 26th Marine Expeditionary Units

to Forward Operating Base RHINO on 25 November and then to Kandahar Airfield on 14 December.¹³⁹ In both places, marines secured the airstrips while engineers and contractors improved the runways. Soon after arriving at Kandahar, General Mattis received orders from CFLCC to build a 500-person detention facility. As the coalition became responsible for more than 4,000 prisoners, guarding, processing, and investigating them became top concerns. The Bush administration could not mitigate this problem until January 2002 when it began shipping detainees to Guantanamo, Cuba.¹⁴⁰

By December, the U.S. military's footprint in country had outgrown its initial supply chain. More troops required more rations, ammunition, clothing, medical supplies, water, and fuel. Commercial and military planes had to fly all of this material into Afghanistan, where support personnel would store and distribute it as needed. To alleviate the situation, Logistical Task Force 530, commanded by Lt. Col. Edward F. Dorman, relieved the 528th Support Battalion (Special Operations) at Karshi Khanabad in December. Composed of elements from the 530th Supply and Services Battalion, the 507th Support Group, and the 58th Maintenance Company from the 7th Transportation Battalion, Dorman's group had the capacity to provide Task Force DAGGER and CFLCC-Forward with a more robust logistical system to support their ongoing operations.¹⁴¹

TORA BORA

Despite the campaign's many successes against al-Qaeda and the Taliban, Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden evaded capture. Omar disappeared after 5 December, and U.S. and coalition authorities never found him. Official sources claim that he fled to Pakistan, but contemporary reports indicate he never left the country and died of illness in 2013.¹⁴² The CIA started hunting bin Laden on 11 September 2001, but the agents could not pinpoint his exact location during the campaign. By late November and early December, the CIA had enough intelligence to place him—and potentially hundreds of al-Qaeda members—at Tora Bora, a cave complex in the Spin Ghar range, about 40 kilometers south of Jalalabad and only 12 kilometers north of the Pakistani border.¹⁴³

When bin Laden launched the 11 September attacks, he imagined he could lure American ground forces into a trap and defeat them at Tora Bora, just as he had beaten the Soviets in 1987 in the Battle of Jaji. He believed Tora Bora's terrain would

mitigate much of the United States' technological advantage. Over the years, al-Qaeda had carved out substantial cave complexes in the area and stocked them with weapons and supplies. The 3,000-meter elevation, coupled with deep caves dug into steep slopes, made the position easy to defend against ground attacks and hard to destroy from the air. Although the rough terrain would make it nearly impossible to resupply his fighters under attack, bin Laden chose to have them make a stand there anyway because of its proximity to Pakistan. If necessary, he could avoid detection and slip across the border with relative ease.¹⁴⁴

Eager to capture or kill bin Laden, Central Command and Task Force DAGGER made Tora Bora its next objective, commencing air strikes against the mountain complex in the last week of November. The upcoming fight would be similar to coalition expeditions in the north and south: an alpha team would direct air support while allied militias conducted ground assaults. Four eastern militia commanders agreed to join the attack. Only two of them, Mohammed Zaman Ghun Shareef and Hazarat Ali, had enough troops to field against al-Qaeda. Together, the two militias totaled 2,500 troops armed with Kalashnikov rifles, machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenades. Mulholland sent Alpha Team 572 to link up with this friendly militia on 2 December at Jalalabad.¹⁴⁵

The coalition had to overcome significant friction before starting the operation. Ali's ethnic Pashay troops and Zaman's Pashtuns feuded so often that the alpha team thought the two forces would likely start shooting at each other instead of al-Qaeda. Additionally, Ali disagreed with what Alpha Team 572 claimed its role would be in the upcoming campaign. Ali wanted the alpha team to fight directly alongside his men, but the Americans had standing orders to provide only advice and air support. They were to avoid leading in direct combat whenever possible. The situation got so tense that Mulholland ordered Alpha Team 572 back to Jalalabad until Ali abandoned his demands. The coalition reached an understanding on 6 December and began moving toward al-Qaeda positions at Tora Bora soon after. On 8 December, the special forces team split into two groups. One set up an observation post on the eastern ridgeline overlooking Tora Bora from which to call in air support. The other went with the Afghan militia to support its assault from the northwest.¹⁴⁶

That same day, General Franks initiated some last minute command and control changes that would alter how coalition forces fought al-Qaeda at Tora Bora. He shifted control of the operation from Task Force DAGGER to Task Force 11, a newly formed contingent of American and British special forces

troops whose mission involved direct combat, not just advice and support. Alpha Team 572 would still operate with and support Ali and Zaman's fighters, but Task Force 11 troops now had permission to fight alongside them.¹⁴⁷

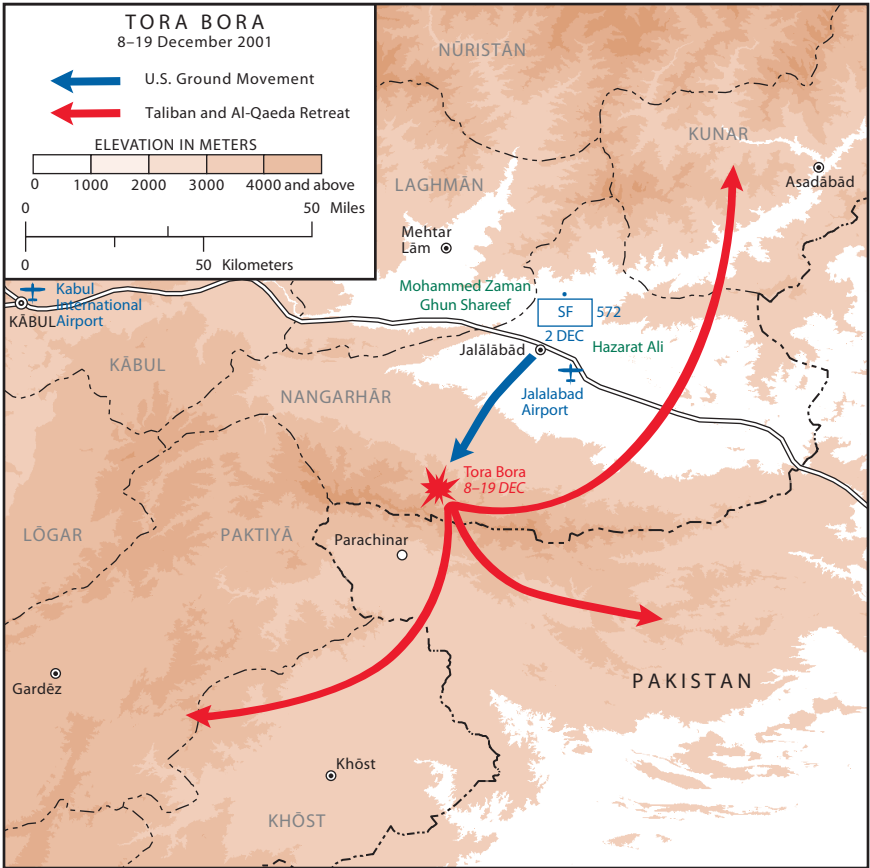
U.S. and Afghan militia forces encountered substantial challenges at Tora Bora. First, the battle took place during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, when Muslims around the globe, including Ali and Zaman's militia, fasted all day until the evening.¹⁴⁸ Utilizing air support, coalition forces gained ground against al-Qaeda during the day, but they abandoned their positions at night to eat farther back behind the lines. In their absence, al-Qaeda retook these positions. It was not until 14 December that Alpha Team 572 convinced Ali to keep his troops in place over night. Additionally, poor relations between Zaman and Ali's commands meant that they often acted unilaterally, enhancing the difficulty of coordinating efforts between the two.¹⁴⁹

Another problem involved enemy fighters who surrendered. On the night of 11–12 December, for example, several Taliban and al-Qaeda commanders began talks with Ali's troops to negotiate a surrender under the pretense that they could adhere to the old Afghan custom of laying down their arms and departing in peace. Alpha Team 572 and Task Force 11 canceled the ceasefire because they feared that Ali and Zaman's peace talks might permit the escape of Osama bin Laden, whom they believed still hid somewhere in the valley. Some al-Qaeda fighters did take advantage of the lull in fighting to make their escape toward Pakistan.¹⁵⁰ Those that stayed behind fought to the death, in part to buy time for their leaders and comrades fleeing south (*Map 8*).

Coalition forces effectively ended all enemy resistance at Tora Bora by 19 December. After newly arrived Alpha Team 561 searched the valley's many cave complexes for dead or wounded al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders, Central Command and Task Force 11 concluded that bin Laden and much of his retinue probably escaped during the battle. One of bin Laden's associates claimed later that he had fled Tora Bora the first week of December, around the time Kandahar surrendered, and before combat in the valley had begun.¹⁵¹

OPERATION ANACONDA

Conventional U.S. forces began arriving in Afghanistan in larger numbers in early January. These forces included Col. Francis J. Wiercinski's 3d Brigade,



MAP 8

101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), which took over responsibility of Kandahar Airfield from General Mattis's Task Force 58. The 3d Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Regiment, accompanied Wiercinski's force at Kandahar. More rotary-wing units deployed to Afghanistan as well, including helicopter companies attached to the 7th Battalion, 101st Aviation.

The first contingents of ISAF arrived in Kabul in early January. Working with the United Nations Security Council, Britain appointed Maj. Gen. John C. McColl, commander of the 3d United Kingdom Mechanized Division, to be the ISAF commander. McColl's mission was to provide security to Hamid Karzai's newly formed government in Kabul. McColl signed an agreement with the Afghan Interim Authority to cap the force at 4,500 troops, no more than 1,000 of which

could be combat troops. General Mikolashek quickly sent a liaison staff, under the command of Col. Wayland E. Parker, to Kabul to work with General McColl to keep communication channels open and secure between ISAF and CFLCC.¹⁵²

While ISAF secured Kabul, General Hagenbeck at CFLCC-Forward at Karshi Khanabad began preparing conventional forces for combat operations. In early February, Afghan militia reconnaissance teams reported a concentration of al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters in the Shahi Kot Valley, located in Paktiya Province, 72 kilometers west of Khost and 24 kilometers south of Gardez. Captain Harward's Task Force K-BAR sent a few additional Afghan scouts to the valley. Ominously, they never returned. Colonel Mulholland of Task Force DAGGER had several teams training indigenous militias in the area. One such team, Alpha Team 594, reported to Mulholland that several of their Afghan allies had warned the team not to go near the Shahi Kot Valley.

After diverting more reconnaissance efforts toward the valley, Mulholland learned that at least 150–200 hostile fighters were concentrated there. He realized that, without conventional troops, Task Force DAGGER did not have a strong enough force to destroy the Taliban and al-Qaeda forces in the valley. In an early February meeting with General Hagenbeck and Captain Harward, Colonel Mulholland requested that CFLCC-Forward take over the preparation, planning, and execution of a major offensive into the area.¹⁵³ General Hagenbeck agreed and on 13 February moved his CFLCC-Forward headquarters to Bagram Air Base, where he would command the upcoming operation. Hagenbeck redesignated his headquarters Combined Joint Task Force MOUNTAIN (CJTTF-MOUNTAIN) and began planning for what would become the largest coalition offensive of the war to date. (*See Diagram 3, Appendix B.*)

The valley held strategic value for both sides. For the Taliban and al-Qaeda, the Shahi Kot (which means royal fortress) concealed the last large concentration of their forces in the country. From there, groups of Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters could launch future attacks against coalition forces or hide before fleeing to Pakistan. For CJTTF-MOUNTAIN, the very presence of this enemy force made the valley strategically significant. Left alone, the force there could grow and become harder to destroy later. Additionally, clearing the valley fit with the goals of Phase III of Central Command's overarching campaign plan. During this phase of the operation, Central Command wanted to locate and destroy any remaining pockets of enemy resistance.

Planners found the Shahi Kot a difficult place to conduct a large-scale military operation. Sitting approximately 2,500 meters above sea level, the valley held a collection of remote villages and compounds, flanked by towering mountains immediately to the east and a smaller but still considerably large hill to the west, known locally as Tergul Ghar. U.S. soldiers called this 5000-meter-long and 300-meter-high ridge “the Whale,” after a similar hill at Fort Irwin, California. Several tall mountains formed peaks along the eastern ridge of the valley, the tallest of which was Takur Ghar, at approximately 3,160-meters high. The valley had two vehicle-accessible entry and exit points, in its northern and southern ends, respectively. Planners concluded that helicopters would provide the best way to move enough U.S. soldiers into the objective area.

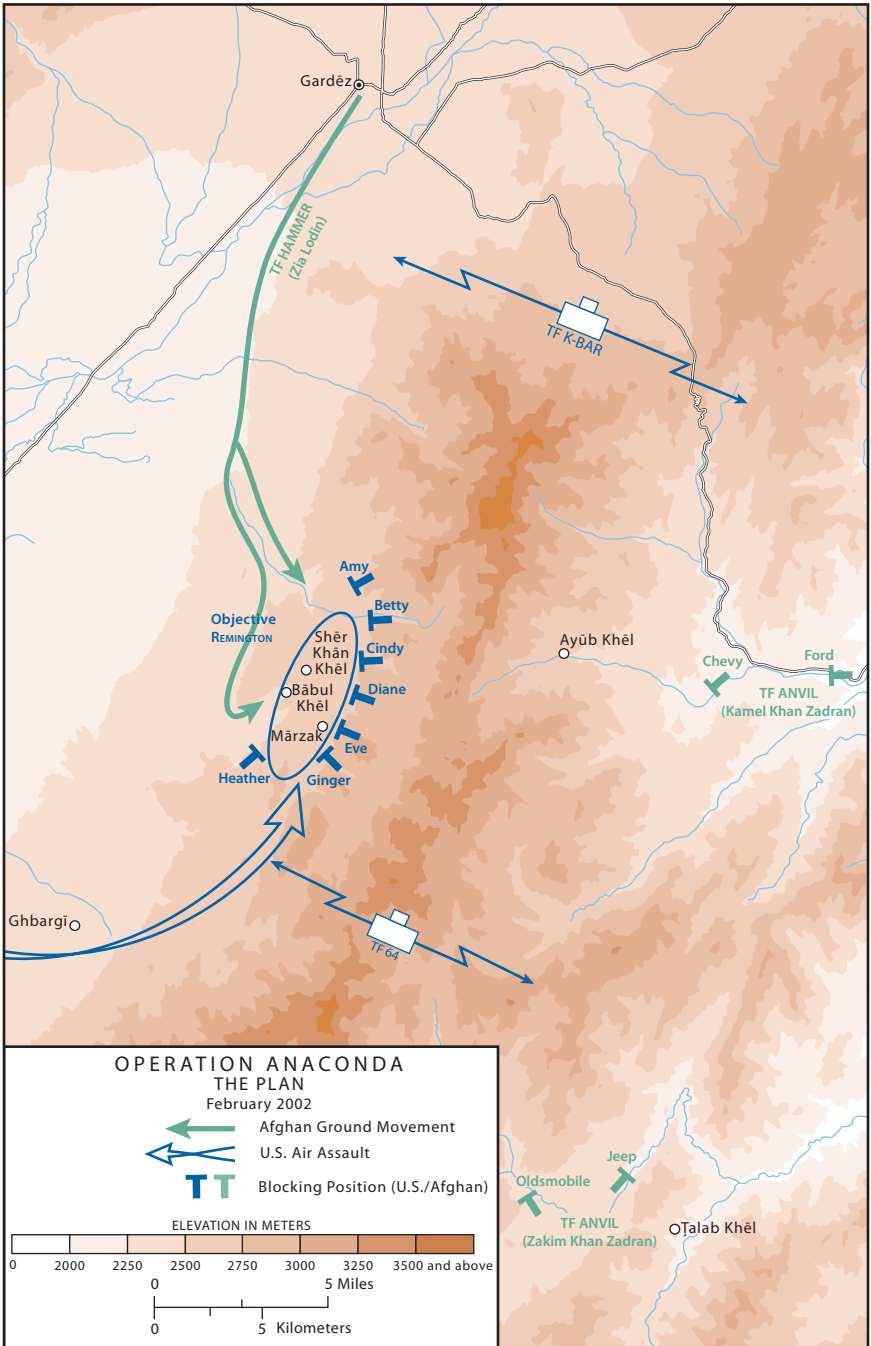
Nevertheless, airlifting troops into the valley would be a challenge. The long distance between the Shahi Kot and both Bagram Air Base and Kandahar Airfield, coupled with the high elevations of the objective, would force pilots to carry fewer troops with lighter combat loads. Additionally, the rocky terrain and steep slopes on the eastern ridge and on the Whale made landing in much of the area impractical. Only down in the valley itself or up on the peaks would pilots be able to maneuver the tails of their aircraft into a position from which they could offload troops and supplies. Finally, any al-Qaeda or Taliban lookouts located on the Whale or anywhere on the eastern ridge would be able to spot enemy troops approaching via air quite easily. It became imperative, therefore, for CJTF-MOUNTAIN to plan for night insertions. Despite having night flight training, experience, and night-vision capabilities, the helicopter pilots found that the treacherous terrain made landing after sundown even more hazardous.¹⁵⁴

Such details shaped CJTF-MOUNTAIN’s planning for Operation ANACONDA, the objective of which was to kill or capture all remaining al-Qaeda fighters in the Khost-Gardez region. Hagenbeck believed the enemy had concentrated its forces in three small villages in the valley: Sher Khan Khel, Babul Khel, and Marzak. His planners drew a circle around these locations and called it Objective REMINGTON. They assumed that once the assault began, al-Qaeda would react as it had at Tora Bora: leaving some fighters in place while the rest of the force escaped. CJTF-MOUNTAIN, therefore, planned to encircle and destroy them within the Shahi Kot Valley. The plan depended on the capabilities of special forces troops, Afghan militia, and conventional units at General Hagenbeck’s disposal.

Hagenbeck designated Colonel Wiercinski's 3d Brigade headquarters, 101st Airborne Division, code-named Task Force RAKKASAN, as the principal unit to carry out ANACONDA. The task force consisted of three infantry battalions: the 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry, commanded by Lt. Col. Ronald E. Corkran; Lt. Col. Charles A. Preysler's 2d Battalion, 187th Infantry; and the 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, led by Lt. Col. Paul J. LaCamera. CJTF-MOUNTAIN also would have tactical control over the 3d Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Regiment.¹⁵⁵ These troops would have to operate without any artillery—all fire support would come from coalition aircraft. For the main effort, General Hagenbeck had tactical control over ten alpha teams that would support three Pashtun militias.¹⁵⁶ Commander Zia Lodin's force of 600 fighters, advised by Capt. Glenn R. Thomas's Alpha Team 594, and Capt. Matthew M. McHale's Alpha Team 372, constituted Task Force HAMMER. Task Force ANVIL consisted of about 900 militiamen under Zakim Khan Zadran and Kamel Khan Zadran, along with four additional alpha teams.¹⁵⁷




CJTF-MOUNTAIN's final plan involved many moving pieces. On 25 February, Task Force K-BAR reconnaissance teams would insert into the area to observe and report any enemy movements. On the evening of 27 February, Task Force ANVIL would travel via trucks, heading westward from Khost and setting up blocking positions at locations east of the valley. The task force had orders to capture or kill any enemy combatants that attempted to flee the area once the assault began. Task Force HAMMER planned to depart on 27 February and travel via trucks south from Gardez. This force would split into two columns, one to enter the valley from the northern entrance while the other came in from the south. Both would then pause until after the U.S. Air Force bombed targets in the valley. The northern column would set up a blocking position while the southern element pushed any fleeing al-Qaeda or Taliban fighters into the northern force's positions (*Map 9*).¹⁵⁸

U.S. Army conventional units aimed to land in the predawn hours of D-day, tentatively set for 28 February. While Zakim and Kamel Khan Zadran's militias formed an outer cordon, Colonel Wiercinski's 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, would set an inner cordon along the eastern ridge overlooking the valley. Colonel Preysler's 2d Battalion, 187th Infantry, would establish four northern blocking positions, while Colonel LaCamera's 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, planned to insert and set up three more to the south. Colonel Corkran's 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry, remained in reserve.

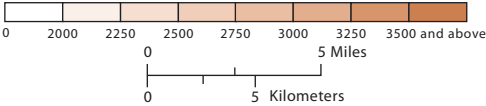


**OPERATION ANACONDA
THE PLAN**

February 2002

-  Afghan Ground Movement
-  U.S. Air Assault
-  Blocking Position (U.S./Afghan)

ELEVATION IN METERS



MAP 9

The operation immediately fell behind schedule. A two-day blizzard prevented Task Forces HAMMER and ANVIL from leaving Gardez and Khost on time, delaying D-day by several days. Because of the precipitation and poor visibility, Task Force K-BAR's reconnaissance units could not get into position to observe the valley 72 hours before the beginning of the operation. As a result, these teams could not get a sufficient up-to-date assessment of the enemy situation. Fortunately, MAKO-31, a Task Force K-BAR unit, discovered an enemy anti-aircraft position near the southern portion of the valley on the morning of 1 March. In the early morning hours of 2 March, the team killed three al-Qaeda fighters at the position while an AC-130 gunship eliminated two more who were trying to flee.¹⁵⁹

Based on the location of the anti-aircraft emplacement and incoming intelligence provided by all three reconnaissance teams, planners at Bagram realized two disturbing facts. First, al-Qaeda occupied the high ground in the valley, not the villages below. Second, most of the defenders probably intended to stand and fight rather than flee, contrary to what planners had assumed. Special operations liaison personnel at Bagram did not piece this information together until the morning of 2 March, the new launch day for ANACONDA. General Hagenbeck, however, did not consider this last-minute assessment serious enough to call off or alter the plan.¹⁶⁰



Senior U.S. military leaders oversee early moves of Operation ANACONDA. *Left to right:* Col. Francis J. Wiercinski, Maj. Gen. Franklin L. Hagenbeck, Capt. Hank E. Smith, Brig. Gen. Gary L. Harrell, and Col. John F. Mulholland
(*Department of Defense*)

CJTF-MOUNTAIN's misjudgment of the situation stemmed from incomplete intelligence reports during the planning phase of ANACONDA, an overreliance on the experience at Tora Bora to gauge enemy behavior, and a serious underestimation of al-Qaeda's willingness to stand and fight in the Shahi Kot.

Task Force HAMMER's mission got off to a rocky start. Zia Lodin's troops, accompanied by Alpha Teams 594 and 372, suffered several mishaps along the road from Gardez. Several days of rain and snow made the road almost impassable for the convoy of thirty-nine trucks and buses. Numerous vehicles got stuck in the mud, and one bus tipped over, injuring several fighters who had to be evacuated. Task Force HAMMER eventually split, with CWO2 Stanley L. Harriman's Alpha Team 372 traveling to the northern entrance of the valley with a contingent of Zia's militia, and the rest heading to the southern entrance. When Harriman's column entered the northern part of the valley, a U.S. AC-130 mistook it for al-Qaeda and opened fire, killing Harriman and two of Zia's men. The gunship crew wounded two more soldiers and thirteen militia fighters before ceasing fire. This incident halted the entire operation, and the alpha team called in medevacs for the killed and wounded.¹⁶¹

Setbacks plagued Task Force HAMMER's southern column as well. Zia fully expected U.S. air support to cover his movements along the western side of the Whale. American pilots, however, only dropped seven bombs on the ridgeline, which alerted the defenders of the oncoming assault. Al-Qaeda mortar and machine gun crews on the Whale, and artillery from somewhere in the valley, then pinned down Zia's troops near the southern entrance, effectively halting Task Force HAMMER. The initial plan of Operation ANACONDA thus did not survive the first morning. With Task Force HAMMER stalled, Hagenbeck made the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, the main effort as it flew into position along the eastern side of the valley.¹⁶²

For Colonel Wiercinski's brigade, the first day of ANACONDA involved intense combat. On 2 March, infantry companies from the 2d Battalion, 187th Infantry, secured four northern blocking positions, while encountering sporadic resistance from small, isolated groups of defenders.¹⁶³ Soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, however, met stiffer resistance to the south as they fought to secure three other positions. An estimated 500-600 al-Qaeda fighters, many of them Uzbek Islamists, fought from the mountain peaks and ridgelines to cover their escape routes at the southern end of the valley. They had 120-mm. and 82-mm. mortars, and nine 122-mm. howitzers, all of which played a key role in halting Zia's entrance into the valley.¹⁶⁴

Upon reaching its landing zone, the 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, withstood intense machine gun and rocket-propelled grenade fire from concealed al-Qaeda combatants. In their efforts to establish a blocking position, Colonel LaCamera's soldiers moved into what became known as the Bowl and subsequently fended off al-Qaeda attacks from the west, east, and north. Al-Qaeda mortar teams on and around Takur Ghar dropped explosive rounds on the battalion's Company C, wounding ten soldiers. Army medic Spc. Eddie A. Rivera remembered how terrifying their position in the Bowl was: "All you could do is put your head down and pray . . . we were all crammed . . . like sitting ducks in one little area the whole night."¹⁶⁵ Just to their northwest, Wiercinski and Corkran established a tactical command post overlooking the Bowl. They, too, had to fend off enemy fighters that approached their position.¹⁶⁶

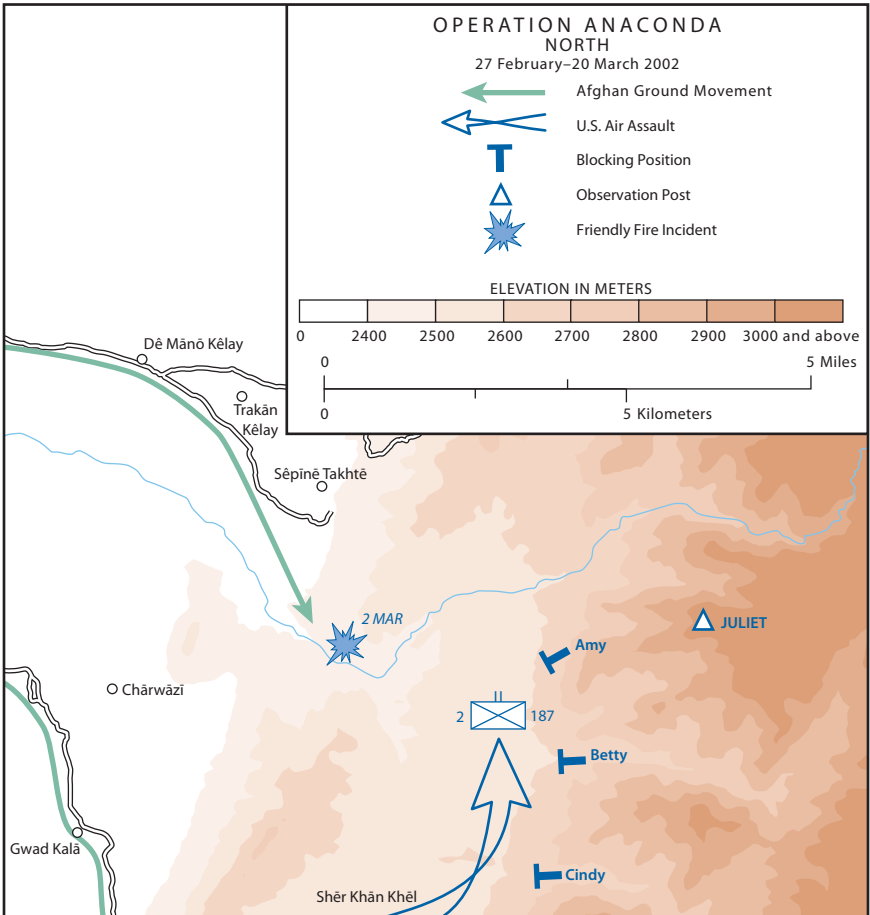
Air support played an important role on the first day. Apache helicopter pilots from the 3d Battalion, 101st Aviation, provided as much fire support as they could, expending most of their rounds in support of LaCamera's battalion in the Shahi Kot's southern reaches. To evade fire from concealed and scattered enemy positions, these pilots flew up and down the length of the eastern ridge in running attacks. They could not operate long on the first day, however, because the valley's defenders scored too many crippling hits on the aircraft. On the night of 2 March, an AC-130 gunship provided critical fire support for the 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry soldiers in the Bowl, allowing Blackhawk helicopters to arrive and evacuate twenty-six wounded soldiers.¹⁶⁷

General Hagenbeck and Colonel Wiercinski made some adjustments for day two. Hagenbeck ordered Wiercinski to evacuate two of Colonel LaCamera's 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry's southernmost blocking positions because of excessive casualties. Hagenbeck had decided to pull forces out of the southern end of the valley and reposition them in the north to conduct a north-south sweep along the eastern ridge. Wiercinski and his staff flew to Bagram, and he ordered the battered elements of LaCamera's battalion to fly back as well to refit for future operations. Wiercinski sent his reserve battalion, Colonel Corkran's 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry, to the northern end of the valley to work its way south, clearing the valley along the way. Wiercinski and his headquarters group would join the battalion later on the second day.¹⁶⁸

Colonel Corkran's battalion arrived at 2000 on 3 March and cautiously began its sweep south, encountering no resistance. The defenders had largely abandoned the valley floor. By the evening of 4 March, the 1st Battalion, 187th

Infantry, had cleared the way to the base of Takur Ghar. The 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, had swept most of the northern valley floor and acquired a much better feel for the opposition (*Map 10*).

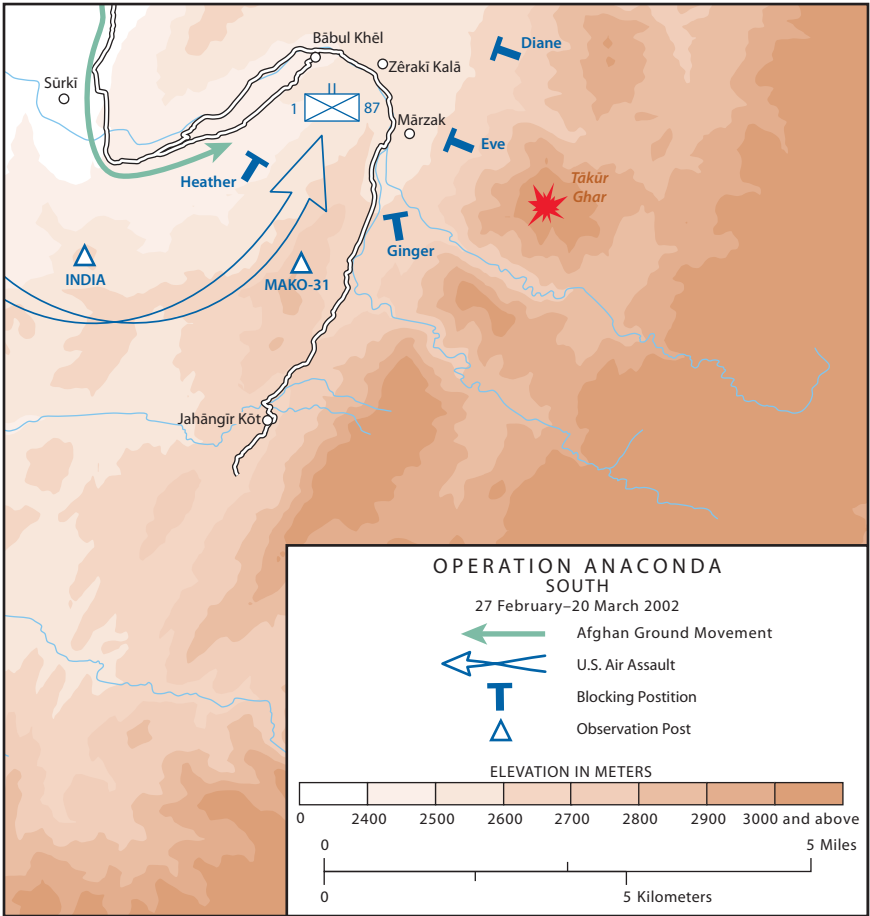
While the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, secured the northern end of the valley, General Hagenbeck decided to address two significant problems. First, close air support had not met expectations. The Apaches had taken a beating on day one, and AC-130s were too vulnerable to ground fire to operate in daylight in the presence of hostile troops. Additionally, there were not enough Air Force tactical controllers to meet the demand for precision-guided strikes against al-Qaeda positions. It sometimes took Air Force pilots up to four hours to deliver



MAP 10

bombs on target, a delay Hagenbeck deemed “totally unacceptable.”¹⁶⁹ In response, Central Command added five A-10 Thunderbolt IIs. Much less vulnerable to ground fire than other aircraft, the hardy A-10s could loiter over the battlefield in broad daylight and deliver precision strikes without the assistance of Air Force tactical air controllers.¹⁷⁰

Hagenbeck also had to figure out how to secure the southern end of the Shahi Kot. Aerial surveillance detected enemy movements both in and out of the southern part of the valley where Colonel LaCamera’s battalion initially had landed. To address this critical gap in coverage, CJTF-MOUNTAIN decided to insert special operations troops on the summit of Takur Ghar. From there, they



MAP 11

could observe the southern approaches to the valley and use air support to harass enemy movements. CJTF-MOUNTAIN picked SEAL (sea-air-land) Team MAKO-30 for the mission.¹⁷¹ This unit soon would experience the most dramatic and deadly event of the entire battle, one defined by equal parts tragedy and heroism (*Map 11*).

ROBERTS RIDGE

Seeing the military value of Takur Ghar's peak, dozens of al-Qaeda's Chechen and Uzbek fighters had dug in on the summit. Positioned in well-concealed bunkers and trenches, these fighters had an unobstructed view of the Shahi Kot Valley. From there, they could report coalition movements to their comrades below and harass American troops with mortar and antiaircraft fire. They stood ready to defend the mountaintop with AK47 rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, PKM and DShK machine guns, and hand grenades. By the evening of 3 March, almost a meter of snow had accumulated on their position, further concealing them from American reconnaissance aircraft. In the early morning hours of 4 March, a U.S. SEAL team attempted to land right in their laps.

Disaster struck as soon as the first MH-47 heavy lift helicopter from the 160th SOAR approached Takur Ghar's summit at 0245. Just then, the crewmembers saw a donkey tied to a tree and what looked like footpaths in the snow. The crew lowered the rear ramp as the SEAL team prepared to debark the aircraft. Before the team could exit, an al-Qaeda fighter arose, unseen, from his position and fired a rocket-propelled grenade into the helicopter, piercing the left side fuselage and severely damaging the helicopter's electrical and hydraulic systems. The rear ramp jammed in place as hydraulic fluid leaked out all over the floor. As the pilot aborted the landing and attempted to climb, one of the MH-47's crewmembers and PO1 Neil C. Roberts tumbled toward the back of the aircraft. The crewmember had tethered himself to the inside of the craft and thereby escaped injury. Roberts, however, fell into the snow below. The pilot and crew attempted to turn around and go back for Roberts once they realized what had happened, but their aircraft could not safely make the landing.¹⁷²

Determined to rescue their fallen comrade, MAKO-30 and its team leader, SCPO Britt K. Slabinski, returned to the summit aboard another MH-47. As the helicopter landed at 0457 to insert the team, enemy forces immediately opened fire. Slabinski,



Drone image of early morning fight atop Takur Ghar, 4 March 2002. SCPO Britt K. Slabinski's team is at the bottom of the image, assaulting up toward a clump of trees concealing two al-Qaeda fighters. The green circle indicates T. Sgt. John A. Chapman's location.

("Air Force Tech. Sgt. John Chapman – ISR Feed Highlights," courtesy video, U.S. Air Force)

his SEALs, and their Air Force combat controller, T. Sgt. John A. Chapman, bolted into the withering enemy fire in knee-deep snow. Chapman, who had come off the ramp second, moved to his left up the slope, toward two enemy bunkers. Charging the bunker alone, Chapman killed two al-Qaeda fighters. As the rest of his team entered the bunker to use it as a fighting position against a second bunker, they discovered the body of Neil Roberts, slain by al-Qaeda fighters.

Slabinski's team members could not stay long on the summit because al-Qaeda outnumbered and outgunned them. A PKM machine gunner had shot Chapman twice, incapacitating him, and other team members took shrapnel wounds from incoming grenades. Slabinski ordered the team to abandon the bunker and reposition farther down the slope. Thinking Chapman dead, the team slid down the mountain, suffered two more wounded casualties in the process, and called for close air support. A circling AC-130 then pounded the summit with 105-mm. howitzer rounds. Drone footage later revealed that Chapman eventually recovered in the bunker at around 0520, after his team had left. He had continued to engage al-Qaeda combatants on his own, including in hand-to-hand combat. He fought for nearly forty-five minutes before succumbing to his wounds.¹⁷³

For Slabinski's team, the rescue mission on Takur Ghar turned into a fight for survival. Task Force SWORD sent two more MH-47s, this time loaded with thirty-five troops from the 75th Ranger Regiment, led by Capt. Nathan E. Self. As one of the MH-47s landed at 0605, al-Qaeda fighters poured machine gun and small arms fire into the helicopter, wounding the copilot and killing one of the door gunners. A direct hit from a rocket-propelled grenade forced the helicopter into a controlled crash landing. Al-Qaeda fighters mortally wounded three of the Rangers as the team exited the aircraft. Another MH-47 landed a team of thirteen Rangers, led by S. Sgt. Arin K. Canon, 600 meters down the slope. They would have to climb their way to the top as al-Qaeda fired 82-mm. mortars to thwart the American rescue attempt.

The battle for the peak raged throughout the day. Captain Self's Rangers and the survivors of MAKO-30 realized that to get off the peak, they would have to destroy all of the al-Qaeda defenders. Utilizing dangerously close air support from F-16s and Predator drones armed with AGM-114 Hellfire missiles, U.S. troops disabled the enemy bunkers and cleared the peak by 1130. The Rangers and the SEALs, using air support and small arms fire, then repulsed several



The MH-47 from the 160th Aviation (Special Operations) that attempted to insert MAKO-30 at the summit of Takur Ghar shows damage from a rocket-propelled grenade.
(Courtesy of Duncan Sharp, former member of the Royal Air Force)

attempts by al-Qaeda troops to retake the summit. The battle for what would become known as Roberts Ridge ended with the helicopter extraction of all remaining U.S. troops, including their dead and wounded, after nightfall.

The fight for Roberts Ridge proved to be the deadliest battle for American forces during the first year of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Seven Americans died, including one Navy SEAL, two Air Force personnel, and four Army soldiers. Al-Qaeda wounded twelve others that day.¹⁷⁴ John Chapman posthumously received an Air Force Cross for his actions on Takur Ghar. In 2018, President Donald J. Trump's administration upgraded Chapman's award to a Medal of Honor. The administration awarded the same medal to Britt Slabinski for leading the valiant rescue attempt.¹⁷⁵

CLEARING THE VALLEY

By 5 March, the fourth day of ANACONDA, CJTF-MOUNTAIN still had much to accomplish in the Shahi Kot. First, it needed to secure the southern entrance to the valley, and then find and destroy al-Qaeda positions on the Whale. The final task was to sweep the rest of Takur Ghar, clearing it of any lingering enemy fighters. To do this, General Hagenbeck received air and ground reinforcements: AH-1T Cobras and CH-53E heavy helicopters from the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit; sixteen AH-64 Apache helicopters from the 3d Battalion, 101st Aviation; and additional personnel in the form of the 3d Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Regiment, and Col. Kevin V. Wilkerson's 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division.

Hagenbeck ordered Colonel Wiercinski to redeploy the 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, from Bagram to the Shahi Kot Valley, to secure Takur Ghar. Wiercinski reinforced LaCamera's battalion with a company from the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry, and a reserve company from the 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry. This force landed on the northwestern base of Takur Ghar on the afternoon of 4 March while the battle for the summit still raged. These soldiers soon found and demolished six hastily abandoned 122-mm. artillery pieces. Hagenbeck then ordered the battalion to ascend and secure Takur Ghar.

Cold weather and altitude sickness plagued LaCamera's soldiers during the operation. In addition to carrying ammunition, water, and food, soldiers carried their cold weather gear during the day, knowing they would need it to cope



Troops from the 101st Airborne Division land in the Shahi Kot Valley, 5 March 2002.
(U.S. Army)

with the high altitude's freezing temperatures at night.¹⁷⁶ Carrying full combat loads in the thin air at high elevations compounded fatigue and affected their ability to function, mentally and physically. The unit made it about half way up the western slopes before halting. "It feels like you're drunk," 1st Lt. Anthony Passero recalled. "I was trying to tell my body what to do, and it wouldn't do it." The next day, 5 March, Hagenbeck ordered the soldiers from the 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, to secure a reported downed helicopter on the northern side of the mountain instead of continuing their ascent. The report proved to be false, and the search only added to the unit's fatigue. Despite these challenges, LaCamera's troops captured several Taliban fighters and killed another eight to ten with the assistance of an AC-130.¹⁷⁷

The 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, helped reverse the situation in the valley. Instead of al-Qaeda occupying most of the high ground and firing down on U.S. and coalition troops, the opposite was now true. LaCamera's reinforced battalion observed enemy vehicle activity near the villages of Sher Khan Khel and Marzak and put its 81-mm. and 120-mm. mortar crews to work lobbing high explosive shells down into the valley. Colonel LaCamera's observers discerned that al-Qaeda fighters had begun abandoning their positions and moving into the villages to fight from there.

Elements of the 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry, finally sealed off the southern reaches of the valley when they secured and established a new blocking position on 9 March.¹⁷⁸

Hagenbeck used Afghan militias to clear the valley floor once and for all in Operation GLOCK. He redeployed Zia Lodin's Pashtun fighters along with three alpha teams to assault from the south.¹⁷⁹ Hagenbeck also deployed a new Afghan force to the field, Tajik General Gul Haidar's mechanized militia, to attack from the north. Haidar had four T54 tanks, six BMP armored personnel carriers, and 600 fighters. CJTF-MOUNTAIN expected Haidar to clear the Whale with dismounted troops. Zia's Pashtuns and Haidar's Tajiks hated each other, but special forces personnel finally got them to cooperate after two days of negotiations. Determining that no civilians remained in the villages, CJTF-MOUNTAIN declared the valley floor a free-fire zone, and from 6 to 9 March, coalition aircraft bombed the valley continuously in preparation for Zia and Haidar's assault.¹⁸⁰

The Afghan militia cleared the valley during GLOCK, but not without serious setbacks, most of which stemmed from Haidar's men. Zia and Haidar had agreed to wait until the U.S. Air Force dropped a 15,000-pound BLU-82 "Daisy Cutter" bomb on the Whale at 0500 before beginning the operation. Haidar's dismounted force, however, ascended the mountain early and lit a large bonfire on the northern end, precipitating CJTF-MOUNTAIN's canceling of the BLU-82 strike. When the assault kicked off on the morning of 10 March, Haidar's mounted column mistook U.S. soldiers from the 2d Battalion, 187th Infantry, for the enemy and fired on them. These soldiers signaled to the Tajiks to cease fire before incurring any serious casualties. Meanwhile, Zia's troops entered the valley from the south and swept northward to Sher Khan Khel, where they found Haidar's men—who were supposed to be clearing the Whale—looting the village instead. The militias finally cleared Operation ANACONDA's primary objective, but the Whale would need a more thorough sweep.¹⁸¹

To finish the job in the valley, General Hagenbeck gradually replaced the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division units with soldiers from the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division. All of Colonel Wiercinski's brigade had returned to Bagram by 12 March. Colonel Wilkerson then took on the responsibility of clearing the Whale and Takur Ghar. He assigned the Canadian 3d Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Regiment, and Company A, 4th Battalion, 31st

Infantry, to secure the Whale. Beginning on 13 March, these forces methodically swept the entire ridge from north to south. Over the next five days, they destroyed a three-person enemy bunker and discovered numerous caches of weapons and supplies. They completed the mission on 18 March and flew out of the valley onboard helicopters from Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 165.¹⁸²

Colonel Wilkerson directed Lt. Col. Stephen J. Townsend's 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry, to clear Takur Ghar. Townsend inserted two infantry companies, one to search Takur Ghar's summit, and the other to sweep the valley immediately east of the mountain. Both units arrived at their designated landing zones via CH-47s on the morning of 18 March. Capt. Glenn E. Kozelka's Company C ascended the mountain. Finding the top deserted, the soldiers began their search for any weapons caches and bunkers. They found not only trenches, bunkers, and fully functional crew-served machine guns, but also American equipment left behind during the battle of 4 March.

Capt. Jonathan A. Steven's Company A, searching the terrain below and to the east of Company C, found and destroyed several large al-Qaeda weapons caches. Steven's soldiers also encountered and killed a lone al-Qaeda fighter armed with an American M249 squad automatic weapon. They then uncovered a cache of American equipment, most likely deposited there by al-Qaeda fighters fleeing the top of Takur Ghar a couple of weeks before. Both companies set up security bases that night at their respective locations and flew back to Bagram the next day. As of 19 March, Operation ANACONDA was over.

Coalition and Afghan militia forces spent eighteen days fighting in and around the Shahi Kot Valley. CJTF-MOUNTAIN reported killing approximately 800 mostly foreign al-Qaeda fighters and some Taliban combatants, although estimates range as low as 200 enemy deaths. In the process of clearing five compounds, sixty-two buildings, and forty-one caves, the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, and the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, captured twenty-six mortars, eleven artillery pieces, and fifteen DShK machine guns. Al-Qaeda and the Taliban killed seven Americans and wounded sixty-one others. The overall success of the operation cannot be judged in numbers alone. U.S. troops and their allies had cleared the valley of al-Qaeda and the Taliban for the time being. The terrain, weather, and early difficulties of securing the southern end of the valley, however, undoubtedly aided many al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters in their escape eastward toward Pakistan.¹⁸³

In the weeks after ANACONDA, General Hagenbeck's CJTF-MOUNTAIN continued to search for pockets of Taliban and al-Qaeda resistance. While U.S. troops and al-Qaeda clashed in the Shahi Kot Valley, the Afghan Interim Authority prepared to convene a *loya jirga* (grand council) to formalize a working post-Taliban government that would set the stage for democratic elections. Signatories of the Bonn Agreement decided to have the *loya jirga* meet in June 2002 so that Afghans could hold elections two years afterward. In the meantime, General Hagenbeck worked to thwart any potential enemy activity aimed at derailing the ongoing political process in Kabul.

In many ways, it looked like United States forces and their Afghan allies had finally brought peace to Afghanistan after decades of war. They removed the Taliban from authority and expelled most of al-Qaeda from Afghanistan in only eight weeks—much faster than Central Command planners had anticipated. By the end of March 2002, coalition forces cleared the last major strongholds of resistance and established significant military bases at Kandahar and Bagram. Their victory ended not only the Taliban regime but also the long and bloody Afghan civil war that had begun in the early 1990s. These accomplishments made it possible for Hamid Karzai and the Afghan Interim Authority in Kabul to prepare for a Constitutional Loya Jirga, at which tribal representatives from across the country would adopt a new constitution. The jirga would not meet until December 2003, but Afghanistan appeared to be on its way, peacefully, toward a government that could be free of religious extremism and accepted by the global community.

THE TALIBAN

The Taliban had suffered its worst and most thorough defeat since its inception. The faction had designed its tactics and formations to defeat regional warlords like Rashid Dostum and Ismail Khan. The Taliban had been successful because of its morale, lightning quick tactics, and ability to outmaneuver and outnumber its foes on a more or less symmetrical battlefield. Once the United Front and various other regional militias sided with the United States and began using close air support, however, the Taliban lost its tactical advantages.

In nearly every engagement leading up to Tora Bora in December, the Taliban succumbed to the combined power of anti-Taliban militias and U.S. alpha teams. The Taliban could not concentrate its forces against the militia because doing so incurred a greater risk of U.S. air strikes; and the more the Taliban fighters dispersed, the more vulnerable they became to ground assaults. In the words of Colonel Mulholland, “They really were in a dilemma, and that is exactly what you

want to be able to do . . . put the other guys into a position where they can't win."¹⁸⁴ Air strikes and ground campaigns killed an estimated 8,000 to 12,000 Taliban fighters from October 2001 to March 2002.¹⁸⁵

Additionally, the Taliban's control over much of Afghanistan did not equate to popularity. The CIA and alpha teams recruited militia forces across major ethnic lines including Pashtuns, the population from which the Taliban drew most of its support. The Taliban received little to no help resisting the coalition's onslaught from Afghans living in Mazar-e Sharif, Kabul, Tarin Kot, and Kandahar. Instead, many of them urged the Taliban to surrender to stop the bombing.¹⁸⁶ This lack of popular support is a significant reason why the U.S. invasion of the country, though relatively small, did not trigger a large uprising. Small special forces and CIA teams working with local and regional militias exploited a fractious political situation to their advantage.

By early 2002, the Taliban lost much of its ability to function militarily and politically. Leadership from the highest levels down to the regional fronts either had died or fled east. Command and control systems collapsed, local support dried up, foreign donations stopped, and it became too dangerous to operate in the open. Many of the Taliban traveled to Pakistan, particularly to cities like Karachi, Peshawar, and Quetta and to the rural areas of Balochistan and North and South Waziristan Provinces, to escape the U.S. military. That did not mean they were safe, however. Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence handed Abdul Zaef, the Taliban's ambassador to Pakistan, over to U.S. authorities.¹⁸⁷ Even in Pakistan, therefore, the Taliban had to lay low at first.¹⁸⁸

AL-QAEDA

Al-Qaeda reeled from the loss as well. Many of its survivors also escaped to Pakistan to regroup and fight another day. They remained undeterred, however, partly because they interpreted their defeat in Afghanistan differently than the Taliban. One Taliban member recalled that although "the Afghans were much more devastated—they had lost their country," al-Qaeda only "felt they had lost a battle."¹⁸⁹ Within a year, donors across the Middle East began funneling money to al-Qaeda operatives, who set up secret training camps in western Pakistan for new Taliban recruits. Al-Qaeda actively encouraged the remnants of the Taliban in Pakistan to regroup and fight to repel the Americans from Afghanistan.

THE UNITED STATES

The United States, its international partners, and the Afghan Interim Authority could not rest on their laurels. They had to fill the political vacuum left by the Taliban and secure the country against any possible enemy reemergence. The creation of a stable Afghanistan with a lasting constitutional government hostile to terrorist organizations would require more focus, planning, personnel, resources, and time than what the United States and its partners had already committed. Despite its success, by March 2002, the United States already had encountered many problems that would continue to hinder efforts for years to come. These issues included vague war aims, low troop levels, complex and confusing command and control, terrain challenges, Afghan tribal culture, enemy sanctuaries in Pakistan, and the war with Iraq.

WAR AIMS

Unclear war aims caused problems from the start. The White House and U.S. Central Command first wanted to eliminate al-Qaeda, destroy the Taliban, and provide enough security and humanitarian aid to keep them from returning. Secretary Rumsfeld gave no clear guidance on how to achieve these aims, stating only that al-Qaeda and the Taliban “must be destroyed.”¹⁹⁰ Central Command’s plans evolved on a day-to-day basis, which allowed for flexibility but prevented long-term planning. Throughout September and October, General Franks and his staff developed a four-phased campaign plan that they did not implement until November. Phase IV (Sustainment and Prevention) was arguably the most important for the long-term success of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. By April 2002, however, most U.S. combat troops remained focused on counterterrorism operations, which were Phase III imperatives.

The Global War on Terrorism changed President Bush’s mind regarding nation building. Although he campaigned against it in 2000, by 2002 he believed that the United States “had liberated the country [Afghanistan] from a primitive dictatorship,” and that “we had a moral obligation to leave behind something better.”¹⁹¹ He came to believe that building a stable, secure, and democratic Afghanistan would preclude terrorists from using the country as a refuge. With the Taliban government dismantled, the Bush administration, along with allies

such as Great Britain, Germany, and Japan, planned to funnel billions of dollars into Afghan infrastructure, schools, and security forces.¹⁹²

President Bush had not changed his mind yet on what he believed was the appropriate use of U.S. military forces, however. Early in the campaign, Department of Defense plans for a post-Taliban Afghanistan stated simply that the military would “take steps to contribute to a more stable Afghanistan.”¹⁹³ By 2002, the U.S. military in country remained small and focused on counterterrorism—destroying any remaining Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters—not stabilizing the country through civil programs or support operations. President Bush ceded the responsibility of stabilization to Afghan militias and willing international partners through ISAF.

LOW TROOP LEVELS

Low troop levels severely hindered what the U.S. military could accomplish. General Franks began the campaign with enough troops to remove the Taliban and al-Qaeda, not stabilize the country afterward. Franks never envisioned needing more than 10,000 troops, in part because neither he nor the White House gave much thought to what would happen after expelling the Taliban.¹⁹⁴ Therefore, Central Command operated under strict force caps throughout the first six months of the conflict to ensure that troop levels remained as low as possible going forward.¹⁹⁵ Waging a campaign as complex as ENDURING FREEDOM with downsized headquarters staffs, limited logistical and support personnel, and minimal combat units meant that they all had to find ways to get by with less.

Despite these difficulties, proponents of Army Transformation believed that the light military footprint enabled quick tactical successes in Afghanistan and reflected a successful transformation from a Cold War Army to a more modern, smaller, flexible, and lethal fighting force. The predominance of special forces teams and aerial strikes and limited use of conventional troops also fit well with President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld’s ideas of how joint forces should fight: with low troop numbers and high technology.¹⁹⁶ The forces that the Bush administration and Central Command deployed to Afghanistan, however, did not have enough troops nor the resources to conduct long-term stability operations. Army doctrine as of June 2001 considered it essential that combat units deploy ready for offensive, defensive, stability, and support operations. Situations

would dictate the amount of emphasis placed on each type of operation.¹⁹⁷ Bush and Rumsfeld's predilection for a transformed force resulted in their military commanders placing little to no emphasis on stability and support.

Although the speed and success of the campaign seemed to justify the White House and General Franks's plan to make unconventional forces the main effort, Task Force DAGGER encountered the limits of what special forces units could do. The 5th Special Forces Group and its Afghan allies quickly defeated the Taliban and weakened al-Qaeda, but the small size and often unpredictable nature of these friendly militia forces precluded coalition groups from cordoning off Kandahar, Mazar-e Sharif, Tarin Kot, Tora Bora, and the Shahi Kot effectively enough to prevent the enemy's escape. At each location, unknown numbers of Taliban and al-Qaeda slipped away to become a problem for coalition forces later.

The real test for the Army's transformed force came at the Shahi Kot Valley during Operation ANACONDA. Intelligence on enemy size, position, and capabilities in the valley proved insufficient. Because of the force caps, troops landed with relatively sparse organic fire support, provided mainly by light mortars. Relying on air support instead of fire support created a slew of problems. Response time varied, AC-130s could provide cover only at night, and there were not enough Air Force tactical controllers to meet demand. The Apache pilots who valiantly fought to provide cover the first day could not operate the day after because of excessive damage from ground fire. Al-Qaeda, by comparison, with what little organic fire support it had, successfully broke up Zia Lodin's initial assault into the valley, and made the southern end of battlefield untenable for U.S. troops, particularly at the Bowl.¹⁹⁸ Additionally, advances in communication allowed Central Command and CFLCC real-time access to commanders on the ground, but this came at the cost of creating an overabundance of information and guidance, which led to confusion and additional friction—often in the heat of battle.¹⁹⁹

Regardless of these problems, the Pentagon made sure that transformation accelerated in the wake of the initial successes in Afghanistan. The Army worked to improve its digitized communication apparatus that would link command and control centers with operating forces. Believing the Army could continue to rely on jets and helicopters for fire support, Secretary Rumsfeld canceled the development of the Crusader 155-mm. howitzer.²⁰⁰ General Franks began to believe that Afghanistan would provide the Army with a tested model of how to

conduct operations with smaller, more flexible forces, the liberal employment of special forces teams, and precision-guided air support.²⁰¹

COMMAND AND CONTROL

General Franks implemented command and control structures on an ad hoc basis. Going into Afghanistan without a complex chain of command allowed Franks, Secretary Rumsfeld, and President Bush to have a direct line of communication with Colonel Mulholland's Task Force DAGGER, and gave them access to almost real-time updates on the alpha teams' progress on the ground. General Franks began the campaign without any unity of command below Central Command. As more conventional and support troops deployed to the region, Franks employed General Mikolashek's CFLCC and General Hagenbeck's CFLCC-Forward as additional layers of command, but both headquarters arrived understaffed relative to their mission and responsibilities.²⁰² They often had unclear command relationships with Task Forces DAGGER, K-BAR, and SWORD, which often conducted operations independently of CFLCC. Central Command and special operations forces planned and executed Tora Bora, for example, completely outside of Mikolashek's and Hagenbeck's headquarters.

This "ad-hocracy," as some staff officers referred to it, had significant consequences for the campaign. The broad array of units and commands in Afghanistan included special forces, conventional infantry, logistics units, helicopter squadrons, CIA teams, Task Force 58 from Fifth Fleet, and Afghan militias. This variety ensured that the command and control situation remained complicated, fluid, and difficult to sort out for any one particular operation.²⁰³ During ANACONDA, Central Command granted General Hagenbeck control of conventional units, special forces, and Afghan militias, but no command over Air Force assets.²⁰⁴ Additionally, U.S. commanders found it challenging, to say the least, to exercise any "control" over anti-Taliban militias, which caused friction and casualties at Kandahar, Tora Bora, and ANACONDA.

TERRAIN

U.S. forces also found the physical geography of the country to be a major obstacle. Arid climate and high mountains dominate much of the country's terrain, most of

which is accessible only by air, dirt roads, and footpaths. Afghanistan's landlocked position posed significant logistical challenges. The United States had to rely on long and complicated lines of communications and supplies from Europe, Kuwait, and naval forces in the Indian Ocean. To sustain the campaign, commanders had to fly in everything their troops needed, often to remote areas across great distances. Additionally, the 8,000 U.S. and 5,000 allied troops committed to Operation ENDURING FREEDOM were too small a force and too ill-equipped to secure a country that, if superimposed across a map of the United States, would stretch from Louisiana to Washington, D.C.²⁰⁵ As a result, U.S. commanders depended a great deal on local warlords and their militias to secure the country outside of Kabul.

WARLORDS AND TRIBAL CULTURE

Conflict between the various warlords who helped defeat the Taliban soon created an additional set of problems. Afghanistan's future depended upon Karzai's ability to persuade disparate factions to work together. In February, an angry mob of Kabulis killed Abdul Rahman, Karzai's new aviation and tourism minister. Karzai learned that his own head of intelligence, General Abdullah Jan Tawhidi, and General Qalandar Beg, one of his senior military officers, were responsible. All three men had been prominent members of the Northern Alliance under Ahmad Shah Massoud in the 1990s, and the murder apparently stemmed from an old personal feud.²⁰⁶

Somehow, Karzai had to exert control over rival militias who, because they worked directly with U.S. Special Forces, believed they did not answer to him at all. For example, a warlord near Gardez named Pacha Khan Zadran challenged Karzai's authority over Paktiya Province soon after ANACONDA.²⁰⁷ Karzai also had to ameliorate tensions between Rashid Dostum's Uzbeks and Atta Nur's Tajik forces in the north before armed conflict broke out. Hoping to foster unity, he gave cabinet-level positions to prominent Tajiks and Pashtuns. Warlords, like Dostum, who came from other ethnic groups, became high-ranking generals in the newly established Afghan military that had been formed around preexisting militias.²⁰⁸

Once the Taliban was gone, however, many of these warlords reverted to their old ways of feuding, accepting bribes, fostering corruption, and increasing opium production for the international drug market.²⁰⁹ Going into the summer of 2002,

many northern militia forces still refused to operate within Pashtun areas. More problematic was the fact that U.S. forces also relied on warlords for intelligence about enemy whereabouts and movements. Soon after most of the Taliban fled, American-backed warlords such as Jan Mohammed in Uruzgan Province and Sharzai in Kandahar used their influence to dispose of their rivals by accusing them of being active Taliban insurgents. Some of these false accusations led to civilian casualties and U.S. forces killing or capturing Afghan leaders who had cut ties with the Taliban and wanted to work with the new government.²¹⁰ Therefore, while Karzai and ISAF managed to exert some control over Kabul, factionalism undermined any efforts aimed at stabilizing the rest of the country from 2002 onward. The United States found itself in a situation in which it, like the United Kingdom and the USSR in the past, tried to secure a rugged, fractious, and diverse country—but with considerably fewer troops and resources.

Another significant issue arose when U.S. plans and intentions ran up against Afghan tribal culture. Afghans' notions of tribe and honor often transcended missions and political affiliations. U.S. forces failed to appreciate how the Pashtunwali principle of *hamsaya*, or protection, applied to both their Afghan allies *and* many of the Taliban. This widely shared notion makes it acceptable for clans and tribes to switch allegiances from a weak tribe, such as the Taliban in this context, to a stronger one, such as the United States and its Afghan militia.²¹¹ Al-Qaeda forces did not follow this principle, however, as made evident by their repeated willingness to fight to the death.²¹² The Taliban forces that tried to surrender at Kandahar and Tora Bora, however, did so thinking that the United States would grant them protection and amnesty. Karzai and U.S. leadership clashed on this issue. Karzai wanted the United States to accept the Taliban's surrender under the terms that its members would live peacefully under the new government.

Karzai's magnanimity ran counter to the White House's single-minded determination to destroy the Taliban, not negotiate with its leaders.²¹³ Traditionally in Pashtun culture, a defeated tribe can do one of two things: make a peace deal with its foe or seek vengeance. From its position of strength, the United States had a chance to offer a peace agreement to the Taliban leaders, who, by December 2001, knew they had been beaten. The United States balked at making a peace offering because there was no guarantee that making a deal with the Taliban leadership would preclude further hostilities, especially given the extreme religious convictions held by the Taliban. By refusing to negotiate,

however, the Bush administration gave many of the Taliban, who would not surrender unconditionally (and without honor to non-Muslims), no choice but to continue fighting.

PAKISTAN

Pakistan would soon become an insolvable problem, because, despite siding with the United States officially, it aided in the rejuvenation of the Taliban. Pakistan's people and government played both sides of the war. On one hand, President Musharraf sided openly with the Americans by granting them overflight rights, promising to help secure the border, and helping the United States capture key Taliban leaders. On the other, Pakistani citizens and government agents, particularly from the Inter-Services Intelligence agency, unofficially provided support and sanctuary to members of al-Qaeda and the Taliban.²¹⁴ U.S. ground troops could not pursue fleeing Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters into Pakistan. It is not clear how much more successful they would have been had they had permission to do so considering the terrain and sheer size of the border region. Regardless, U.S. forces had to depend on Pakistan's assurances that it would help capture fleeing enemy troops.

Pakistan remained focused on India as its principal threat, however. It continued to clash with India over an ongoing civil war in Kashmir to the point that Pakistan's army had to shift troops away from the Afghan border, where U.S. Special Forces depended on them to interdict fleeing Taliban and al-Qaeda troops.²¹⁵ Faced with threats to its east, Pakistan could not secure the porous Afghan border, nor could it effectively monitor the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, where many of the Taliban and al-Qaeda escapees found refuge. Attempts to do so sparked conflict with Pakistani Pashtun tribes, who sympathized with the Taliban and al-Qaeda's cause. By the summer of 2002, therefore, the U.S. military could destroy neither the Taliban nor al-Qaeda because of their ability to hide and regroup in Pakistan.

WAR WITH IRAQ

Although each one of these issues would require a great deal of focus, resources, and troops to manage successfully, the White House soon embarked on a path toward war in Iraq. As early as December 2001, not long after the battle at Tora

Bora, President Bush ordered General Franks to update Central Command's plans for Iraq. Franks and his staff then shifted their attention away from both immediate and long-term concerns in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Believing that the Taliban had been permanently defeated, they began diverting military and naval assets away from the campaign as early as the spring of 2002. In doing so, General Franks carried the lessons he had learned from Afghanistan into the planning and preparation for Iraq. Namely, he felt that they could rely on special operations forces with precision-guided munitions, which rendered large combat formations unnecessary for toppling Saddam Hussein's regime. As they had with Afghanistan, Donald Rumsfeld and General Franks wanted a "transformation force"—one that was small, flexible, and highly mobile—to invade Iraq. What this force would do after taking Bagdad, however, remained unclear.²¹⁶ Iraq, not Afghanistan, dominated the U.S. military's attention for the rest of President Bush's time in office.

CONSEQUENCES

Beginning in the summer of 2002, while Central Command planned for a different front in the Global War on Terrorism, Taliban survivors gradually made their way back into Afghanistan to conduct small and clandestine operations. Working with local sympathetic mullahs and businesses, small fronts of undercover Taliban reappeared and began to gather funds and support. Meanwhile, ongoing U.S. military operations inadvertently helped the Taliban. By July 2002, U.S. air strikes had killed 400 innocent Afghans accidentally.²¹⁷ The Taliban used these events to bolster its cause by painting the United States as invaders and as enemies to all Afghans. The Taliban also started threatening and assassinating collaborators with the U.S. military and Afghan government. Once the Taliban was strong enough, it planned to take advantage of the low U.S. troop numbers and launch a new jihad, an insurgency, to take back the country.²¹⁸ "In retrospect," President Bush wrote later, "our rapid success with low troop levels created a false comfort, and our desire to maintain a light military footprint left us short of the resources we needed."²¹⁹ It would not take the Taliban long to exploit this mistake and make its enemies realize that the peace they thought they had achieved was illusory.

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CHRONOLOGY

1979–1989

» Soviet-Afghan War

1992–2001

» Afghan Civil War

————— 1994 —————

APRIL

» Osama bin Laden's family disowns him, and the Saudi Arabian government strips him of his citizenship.

4 NOVEMBER

» The Taliban emerges near Kandahar, Afghanistan, to end the depredations and highway robbery committed by warlords.

5 NOVEMBER

» The Taliban gains control of Kandahar.

25 NOVEMBER

» Helmand and Kandahar Provinces fall under Taliban control.

————— 1995 —————

11 FEBRUARY

» The Taliban gains control of seven more provinces.

11 MARCH

» Ahmad Shah Massoud repulses the Taliban near Kabul.

5 SEPTEMBER

» The Taliban takes the western city of Herat.

11 OCTOBER

» The Taliban plans and prepares to take Kabul; shifts more forces from Kandahar to Kabul.

11 NOVEMBER

» The Taliban launches large rocket attack on Kabul, killing dozens of civilians; continues to bomb Kabul for the next ten months.

————— 1996 —————

20 MARCH

» A major Taliban shura meets in Kandahar with more than 1,000 Pashtun tribal elders in attendance.

4 APRIL

»The Kandahar shura ends, and Mullah Mohammed Omar becomes Amir-ul Momineed (Leader of the Faithful). He calls for a jihad against Massoud and the enemies of the Taliban.

MID MAY

»Osama bin Laden leaves Sudan in Africa and reenters Afghanistan.

23 AUGUST

»Bin Laden issues his first fatwa for Muslims to declare war on the United States.

11 SEPTEMBER

»The Taliban captures Jalalabad.

26 SEPTEMBER

»Kabul falls to the Taliban; Massoud and his forces retreat to the Panjshayr River Valley to regroup and continue the war.

27 SEPTEMBER

»The Taliban captures and hangs Mohammed Najibullah, the former president of Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation.

10 OCTOBER

»Massoud forms a temporary alliance with Abdul Rashid Dostum; together they begin counterattacks against Taliban positions near Kabul.

18 OCTOBER

»Massoud and Dostum recapture Bagram. War in the north continues unabated.

1997

1 JANUARY

»The Taliban retakes Bagram from Massoud's forces.

19–28 MAY

»The Taliban attempts to take Mazar-e-Sharif unsuccessfully. Generals Rashid Dostum and Malik Pahlawan, on-again, off-again enemies, lead Uzbek fighters against the Taliban.

26 MAY

»Pakistan officially recognizes the Taliban government.

JUNE–DECEMBER

»Dostum continues to fight against the Taliban around Mazar-e-Sharif; General Pahlawan flees to Iran.

1998

23 FEBRUARY

»Bin Laden issues second fatwa from Afghanistan calling on all Muslims to kill Americans.

7 AUGUST

»Al-Qaeda bombs U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing 224 people.

8 AUGUST

»The Taliban captures Mazar-e-Sharif and massacres thousands of Hazaras.

10 AUGUST

»Taluqan falls to the Taliban.

20 AUGUST

»The United States begins Operation INFINITE REACH, a series of military strikes against Jalalabad, with cruise missiles meant for Osama bin Laden.

21 AUGUST

»The Taliban condemns the U.S. attack and vows to protect bin Laden.

OCTOBER–DECEMBER

»International pressure on the Taliban increases in response to its human rights abuses and harsh treatment of women and girls. War between the Taliban and various northern warlords, especially Massoud and Dostum, continues.

1999

9 FEBRUARY

»The Taliban rejects U.S. demands to hand over Osama bin Laden. Mullah Omar believes that to do so is against Islam and the Pashtunwali code of hospitality.

13 FEBRUARY

»Bin Laden goes into hiding after the U.S. military strikes and extradition requests. The Taliban claims ignorance of his location.

22 MAY

»The Taliban quells an uprising in Herat, killing more than 100 people.

6 JULY

»The Clinton administration issues economic sanctions on the Taliban for providing safe haven to bin Laden and for refusing to hand him over.

13 AUGUST

»The Taliban retakes Bagram from Massoud.

23 SEPTEMBER

»In a presidential campaign speech, George W. Bush vows to strengthen the U.S. military and defend the nation from terrorists.

2000

12 OCTOBER

»Al-Qaeda suicide bombers attack the USS *Cole*, killing seventeen and wounding thirty-nine sailors while in port at Aden, Yemen.

7 NOVEMBER

»U.S. presidential election

12 DECEMBER

»George W. Bush confirmed as president-elect of the United States.

2001

9 SEPTEMBER

»Al-Qaeda assassinates Ahmad Shah Massoud.

11 SEPTEMBER

»Al-Qaeda terrorists hijack four passenger airliners and crash them into the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and a field in

rural Pennsylvania, killing nearly 3,000 people. The Taliban officially condemns the attacks. The CIA reports that al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden are responsible.

12 SEPTEMBER

»U.S. Central Command begins planning for military strikes against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

18 SEPTEMBER

»Congress passes Public Law 107–40, a joint resolution authorizing President Bush to launch military strikes against terrorists responsible for the 11 September attacks.

20 SEPTEMBER

»President Bush issues a public ultimatum in a speech to Congress, demanding that the Taliban either gives bin Laden over to the United States or it faces destruction. Mullah Omar refuses.

5 OCTOBER

»Uzbekistan's President Islam A. Karimov agrees to allow the United States to use the airfield at Karshi Khanabad Air Base for operations in Afghanistan.

7 OCTOBER

»Operation ENDURING FREEDOM begins. United States and United Kingdom military and naval forces bomb Taliban positions throughout Afghanistan.

19 OCTOBER

»Operational Detachments Alpha (Alpha Teams) 555 and 595 insert in northern Afghanistan. The 160th SOAR inserts elements of the 75th Ranger Regiment at Objective RHINO and Task Force SWORD at Objective GECKO.

26 OCTOBER

»Alpha Team 585 links up with General Bariullah Khan, north of Kunduz, near the Tajikistan border.

2 NOVEMBER

»Alpha Team 553 links up with General Karim Khalili.

»Alpha Team 534 inserts south of Mazar-e-Sharif to aid Dostum and Alpha Team 595.

5 NOVEMBER

»The battle of Tiangi begins. Anti-Taliban forces clear the pass by 8 November.

8 NOVEMBER

»Alpha Team 586 inserts north of Taluqan; Alpha Team 594 inserts north of Bagram.

10 NOVEMBER

»The Taliban abandons Mazar-e-Sharif. General Dostum's troops and U.S. Special Forces enter the city.

13 NOVEMBER

»Alpha Team 586 aids General Daoud Khan in forcing the Taliban to abandon Taluqan.

»Taliban troops abandon Kabul.

14 NOVEMBER

»Alpha Team 574 inserts and links up with Hamid Karzai near Tarin Kot.

18 NOVEMBER

»Alpha Team 574 repulses a large convoy of Taliban fighters advancing toward Tarin Kot.

»Alpha Team 583 links up with Gul Agha Sharzai near the Afghan-Pakistan border.

19 NOVEMBER

»Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC), under the command of Lt. Gen. Paul T. Mikolashek, establishes headquarters at Camp Doha, Kuwait.

23 NOVEMBER

»Alpha Team 583 and Sharzai's militia fight a Taliban force at Takhtah Pul. The Taliban retreats the next day.

24 NOVEMBER

»Kunduz falls to Alpha Team 585 and General Bariullah Khan's militia.

25 NOVEMBER

»Marines from the 15th and 16th Marine Expeditionary Units establish Forward Operating Base RHINO.

»Sharzai and Alpha Team 583 attempt to seize the Arghistan Bridge and Kandahar Airfield. They pull back south of the bridge after encountering stiff resistance at the airport.

»Taliban and al-Qaeda prisoners at Qala-i-Jangi revolt.

28 NOVEMBER

»A special meeting of United Nations delegates convenes in Bonn, Germany, to discuss Afghanistan's future.

1 DECEMBER

»Coalition troops quell the revolt inside Qala-i-Jangi.

2 DECEMBER

»Alpha Team 572 links up with militia commanded by Mohammed Zaman Ghun Shareef and Hazarat Ali near Jalalabad preceding a planned assault on the cave complexes at Tora Bora.

3 DECEMBER

»Sharzai's force tests Kandahar Airfield's defenses and retreats while covered by U.S. airpower.

4 DECEMBER

»Karzai's militia and Alpha Team 574 engage Taliban fighters at the Arghandab bridge, 17 kilometers north of Kandahar.

5 DECEMBER

»A B-52 bomber crew mistakenly drops a 2,000-pound bomb on Alpha Team 574. Two members are killed; nine are seriously wounded. Twenty Pashtun fighters also are killed; fifty more, including Hamid Karzai, are injured.

»Delegates of the Bonn Conference nominate Hamid Karzai to chair the Afghan Interim Authority.

»Hamid Karzai receives two satellite phone calls: one from the Bonn Conference notifying him of his selection to head the Afghan Interim Authority, and the second from Mullah Naqib to negotiate the handover of the city of Kandahar.

»Mullah Omar steps down from Taliban leadership and disappears.

7 DECEMBER

»Sharzai's militia and Alpha Team 583 enter Kandahar. Mullah Omar is nowhere to be found.

»Maj. Gen. Franklin L. “Buster” Hagenbeck arrives at Karshi Khanabad with his 10th Mountain Division headquarters to operate as CFLCC-Forward.

8 DECEMBER

»Nine wounded al-Qaeda fighters take control of the southern wing of the Mirwais Hospital. A nearly two-month-long standoff ensues.
»Alpha Team 572 and eastern Afghan militias begin an assault on Tora Bora.

10–14 DECEMBER

»Al-Qaeda troops fight to the death at Tora Bora to buy their comrades time to flee through the various mountain passes out of the valley.

14 DECEMBER

»Task Force 58 relocates marines from Forward Operating Base RHINO to Kandahar International Airport.

19 DECEMBER

»Coalition forces end enemy resistance at Tora Bora. Alpha Team 561 arrives to help search the area for intelligence and dead al-Qaeda fighters. Osama bin Laden is nowhere to be found.

20 DECEMBER

»The United Nations adopts Resolution 1386 creating the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Headquarters elements begin to arrive in Kabul in late December.

2002

JANUARY

»Elements of ISAF headquarters continue to arrive in Kabul under the command of British Maj. Gen. John C. McColl.

CA. 28 JANUARY

»The standoff at Mirwais Hospital ends after Alpha Team 524 kills the al-Qaeda fighters in close-quarters combat.

15 FEBRUARY

»CFLCC-Forward headquarters moves to Bagram Air Base and forms Combined Joint Task Force MOUNTAIN (CJTF-MOUNTAIN). Planning begins for Operation ANACONDA.

2 MARCH

»CJTF-MOUNTAIN begins Operation ANACONDA.

4 MARCH

»MAKO-30 attempts to land on the summit of Takur Ghar. A daylong fight known later as “Roberts Ridge” ensues that costs seven American lives.

19 MARCH

»Operation ANACONDA concludes.

11–19 JUNE

»The Afghan Interim Authority convenes a loya jirga in Kabul.

Note: This chronology was inspired and partially informed by the chronology in Appendix B of Donald P. Wright et al.’s *A Different Kind of War: The United States Army in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF), October 2001–September 2005* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010), 337–40.

COMMAND AND CONTROL RELATIONSHIPS

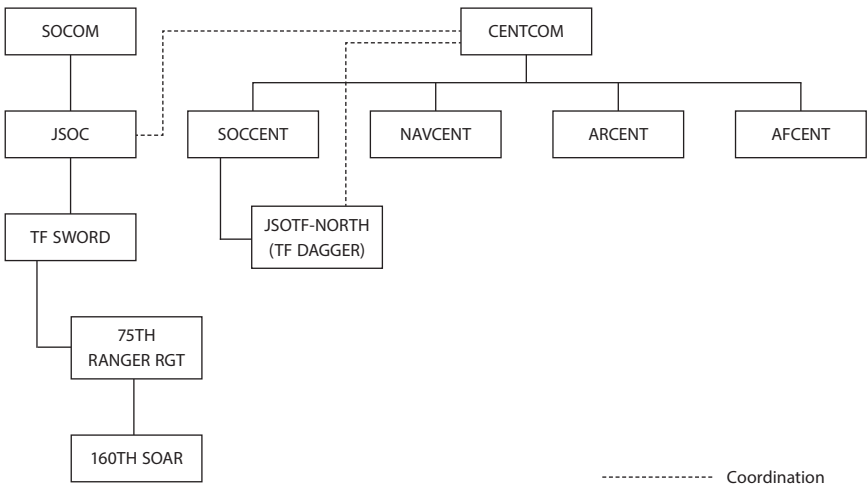


Diagram 1: Command and Control Relationships, September–October 2001

Key: See *Diagram Abbreviations*, page 94.

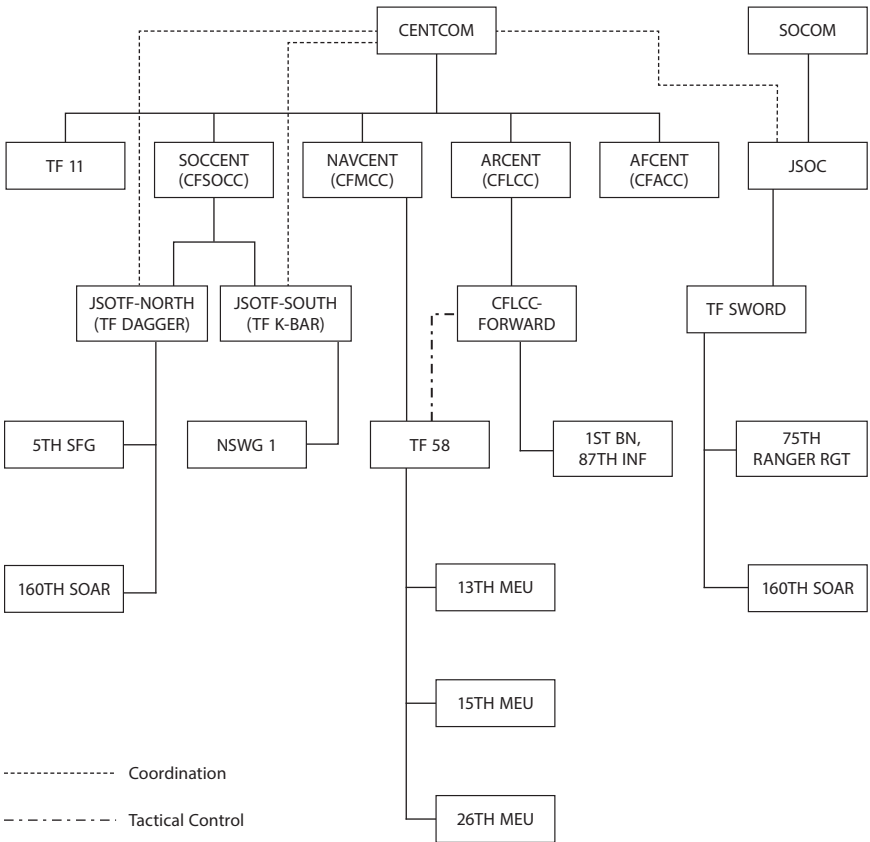


Diagram 2: Command and Control Relationships, December 2001

Key: See *Diagram Abbreviations*, page 94.

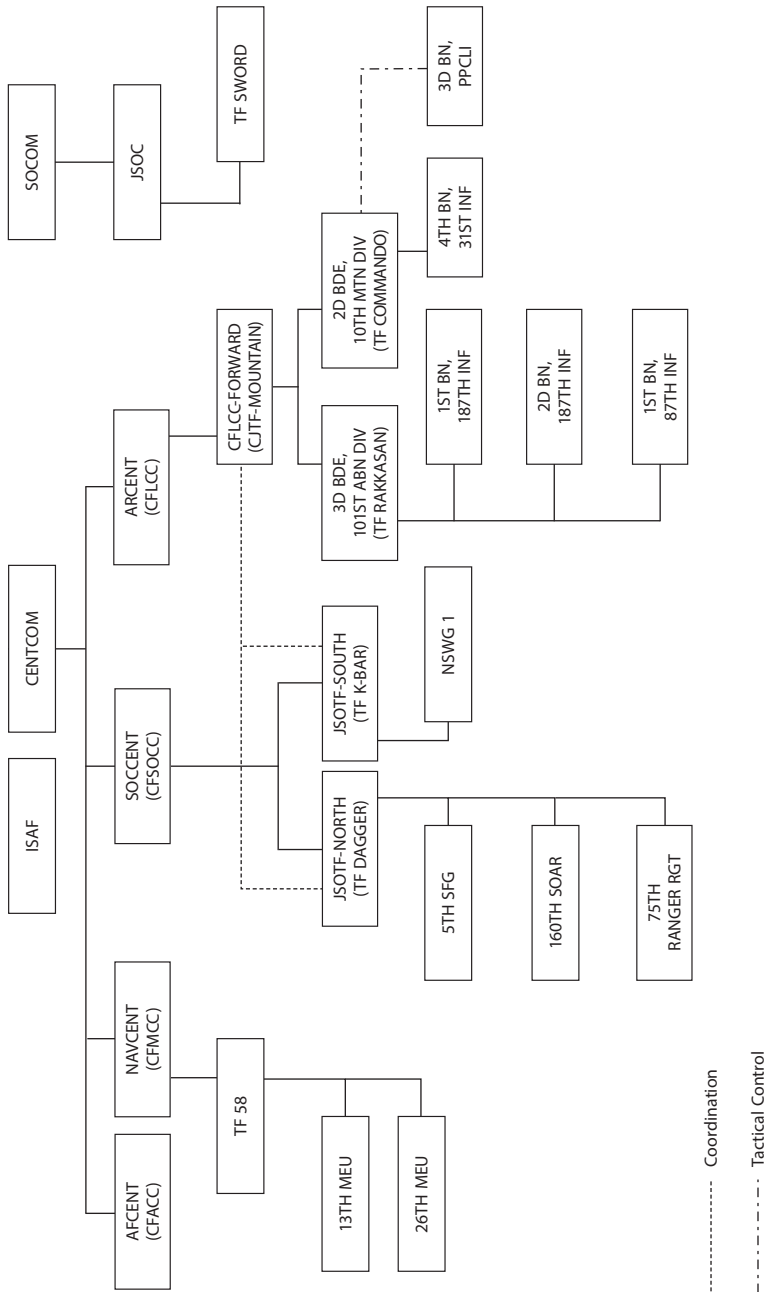


Diagram 3: Command and Control Relationships, Operation ANACONDA, March 2002

Key: See Diagram Abbreviations, page 94.

DIAGRAM ABBREVIATIONS

ABN	Airborne
AFCENT	Air Forces Central Command
ARCENT	U.S. Army Central Command
BDE	Brigade
BN	Battalion
CENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
CFACC	Combined Forces Air Component Command
CFLCC	Coalition Forces Land Component Command
CFMCC	Combined Force Maritime Component Command
CFSOCC	Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
DIV	Division
INF	Infantry
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JSOC	Joint Special Operations Command
JSOTF	Joint Special Operations Task Force
MEU	Marine Expeditionary Unit
MTN	Mountain
NAVCENT	U.S. Naval Forces Central Command
NSWG	Naval Special Warfare Group
PPCLI	Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry
RGT	Regiment
SFG	Special Forces Group
SOAR	Special Operations Aviation Regiment
SOCENT	Special Operations Command Central
SOCOM	Special Operations Command
TF	Task Force

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ABBREVIATIONS

CFLCC	Coalition Forces Land Component Command
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
SEAL	sea-air-land
SOF	special operations forces

THE AUTHOR

Dr. Mark R. Folse is a U.S. military and naval historian who came to the Center of Military History in the spring of 2020. After completing his doctorate at the University of Alabama in 2018, he served as the 2018–2020 Class of 1957 Post-Doctoral Fellow at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, where he taught Navy and Marine Corps history. He was the 2015 recipient of the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation’s Lemuel C. Shepherd Jr. Memorial Dissertation Fellowship and the U.S. Naval Institute’s 2020 *Naval History* Author of the Year. Dr. Folse is a U.S. Marine Corps infantry veteran who deployed to Afghanistan in 2004 and Iraq in 2005.

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This monograph is a preliminary history of this campaign; a more detailed account is in preparation. To assist the author in fully capturing the U.S. Army’s role in the operation, the Center of Military History encourages readers to send comments, corrections, and additional information via email to usarmy.mcnair.cmh.mbx.answers@army.mil or via mail to 102 Fourth Ave., Fort McNair, DC 20319.

