

THE U.S. ARMY IN AFGHANISTAN

# THE AFGHAN SURGE

JANUARY 2009–AUGUST 2011



**JOHN J. MORTIMER JR.**

Front cover: 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team,  
4th Infantry Division (*U.S. Army*)

THE U.S. ARMY IN AFGHANISTAN

# THE AFGHAN SURGE: JANUARY 2009–AUGUST 2011

BY  
JOHN J. MORTIMER JR.



CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY  
UNITED STATES ARMY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 2023

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Mortimer, John J., Jr., 1985- author. | Center of Military History, issuing body.

Title: The Afghan surge : January 2009-August 2011 | by John J. Mortimer Jr.

Description: Washington, DC : U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2023. |

In scope of the U.S. Government Publishing Office Cataloging and Indexing Program (C&I); Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) distribution status to be determined upon publication. | Includes bibliographical references. | Summary: "The short publication covers the U.S. Army's activities in Afghanistan from January 2009 to August 2011. This time period is often referred to as the Afghan Surge. During this time period the United States sent additional troops (a surge) to Afghanistan hoping for similar results to a similar tactic in Iraq"-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2023006582 | ISBN 9781959302018 (paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: United States. Army--History--Afghan War, 2001-2021. |

Afghan War, 2001-2021--Campaigns. | Counterinsurgency--Afghanistan.

Classification: LCC DS371.412 .M68 2023 | DDC 958.104/7--dc23/eng/20230309

| SUDOC D 114.2:AF 3/6

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2023006582>



# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	7
STRATEGIC SETTING.....	9
OPERATIONS .....	24
A New American Strategy.....	24
Campaign Plan and COIN Approach.....	28
Operations in RC East, January–May 2009.....	30
Choosing RC South and Change of Command.....	36
McChrystal Takes Command.....	39
Securing RC South.....	41
The Strategy Evolves .....	49
McChrystal’s Assessment.....	52
NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan.....	54
RC East Intensifies.....	56
Obama’s Final Surge.....	64
Operation MOSHTARAK Begins.....	65
McChrystal’s Exit .....	70
Petraeus Takes Command .....	71
Operation HAMKARI, Summer 2010–December 2010.....	74
RC East Restructures .....	81
The Afghanistan Drawdown.....	85
ANALYSIS.....	87
NOTES .....	95
THE AUTHOR .....	110
FURTHER READINGS.....	110
ABBREVIATIONS.....	111
GENERAL MAP SYMBOLS .....	112
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	113
MAPS	
Afghanistan, 2009.....	10
Ethnic Groups, Afghanistan 2009.....	13
Regional Command Headquarters, Afghanistan 2009 .....	21

CJTF-101, Regional Command East, February 2009 .....	32
Regional Command South, September 2009.....	37
Operation MOSHTARAK Phase II, RC South, February– March 2010.....	68
Operation HAMAKARI Phase IIIA–IIIB, 13 September–6 December 2010 .....	78

## DIAGRAMS

International Coalition’s Organizational Structure, December 2008 .....	19
Petraeus's Anaconda Plan .....	74
Number of Enemy Initiated Attacks.....	89
U.S. Troop Levels in Afghanistan .....	90

## ILLUSTRATIONS

General David D. McKiernan .....	17
MQ-9 Reaper .....	27
Patrol in Korengal Valley.....	43
Patrol in Taktehpol.....	46
Aerial image of Ganjgal Village .....	58
Capt. William Swenson assists wounded soldier.....	60
Combat Outpost Keating .....	62
Lt. Col. Calvert L. Worth Jr. and General Stanley A. McChrystal .....	66
General David H. Petraeus .....	72
Preparation for Operation BULLDOG BITE .....	83
Operation HAMMER DOWN .....	86

# 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.

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.  
May 2023

JON T. HOFFMAN  
Chief Historian



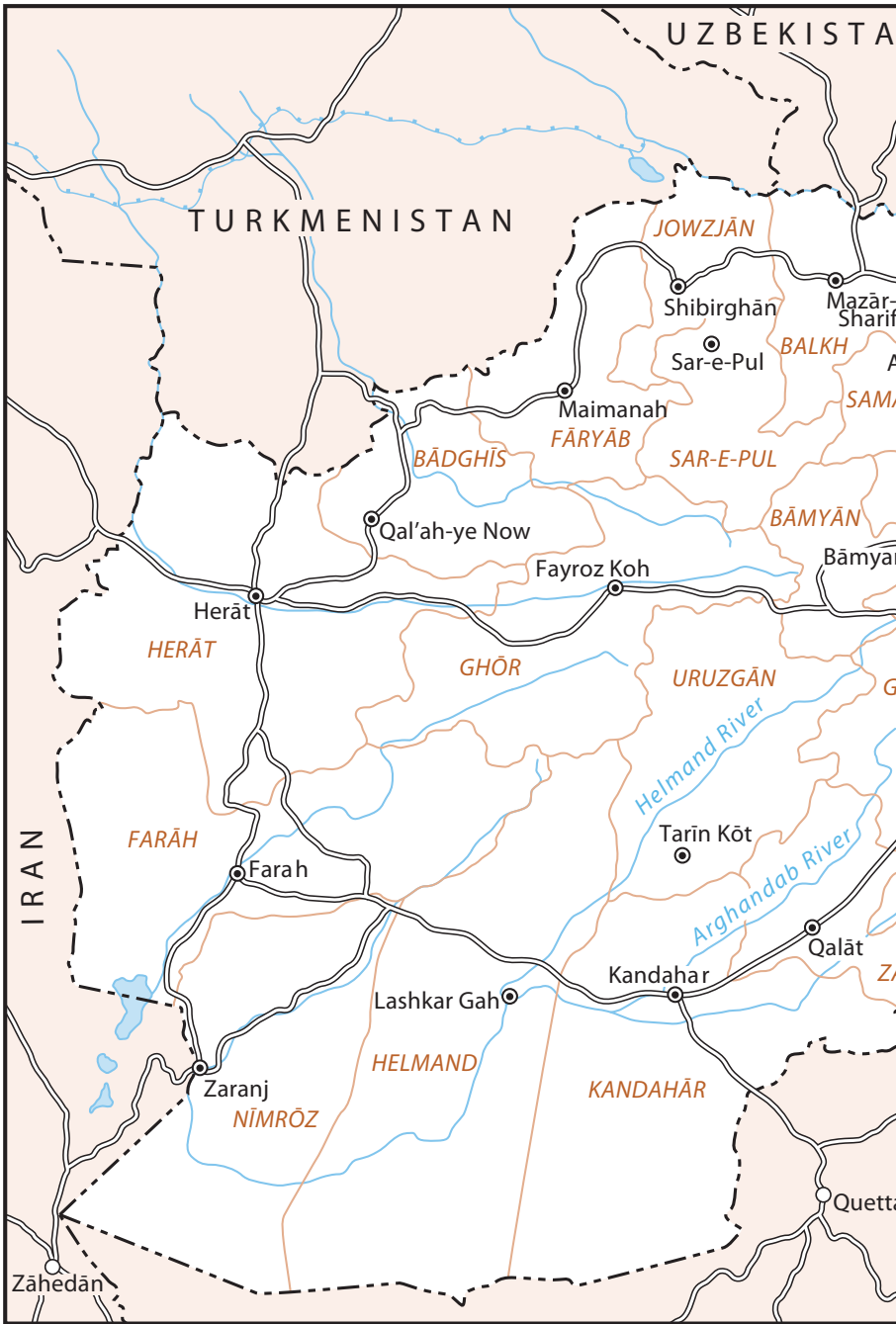
# THE AFGHAN SURGE:

JANUARY 2009–AUGUST 2011

The war in Iraq had long overshadowed the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, receiving priority for resources and forcing the U.S. Army to make do with less for the latter mission. When the situation had worsened in Iraq in 2006, President George W. Bush opted for a dramatic and controversial change in course, committing additional troops and refocusing operations to protect the population centers. In December 2007, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael G. Mullen summed up that reality, telling members of the House Armed Services Committee, “In Afghanistan, we do what we can. In Iraq, we do what we must.”<sup>1</sup> By the time this new strategy, known as the surge, reached its culmination in mid-2008, it had drastically reduced the level of violence and brought a measure of stability to Iraq. American commanders deemed it a triumph and viewed it as a recipe that also could turn around the situation in Afghanistan. In October 2008, Bush authorized sending six thousand additional personnel as a down payment to bolster the failing effort in that theater. In early 2009, his successor, President Barack H. Obama, gave precedence to the mission in Afghanistan and authorized more troops. Lacking the fanfare of the Iraqi reinforcement, the effort in Afghanistan became the “quiet surge,” but it remained to be seen whether it would achieve similar results.

## STRATEGIC SETTING

The United States and its NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) allies contended with significant obstacles related to Afghanistan’s topography, scattered population, and traditional tribal and familial ties. Located in Central Asia, Afghanistan is a landlocked and mineral-rich country that shares a border with Iran to the west and



Map 1

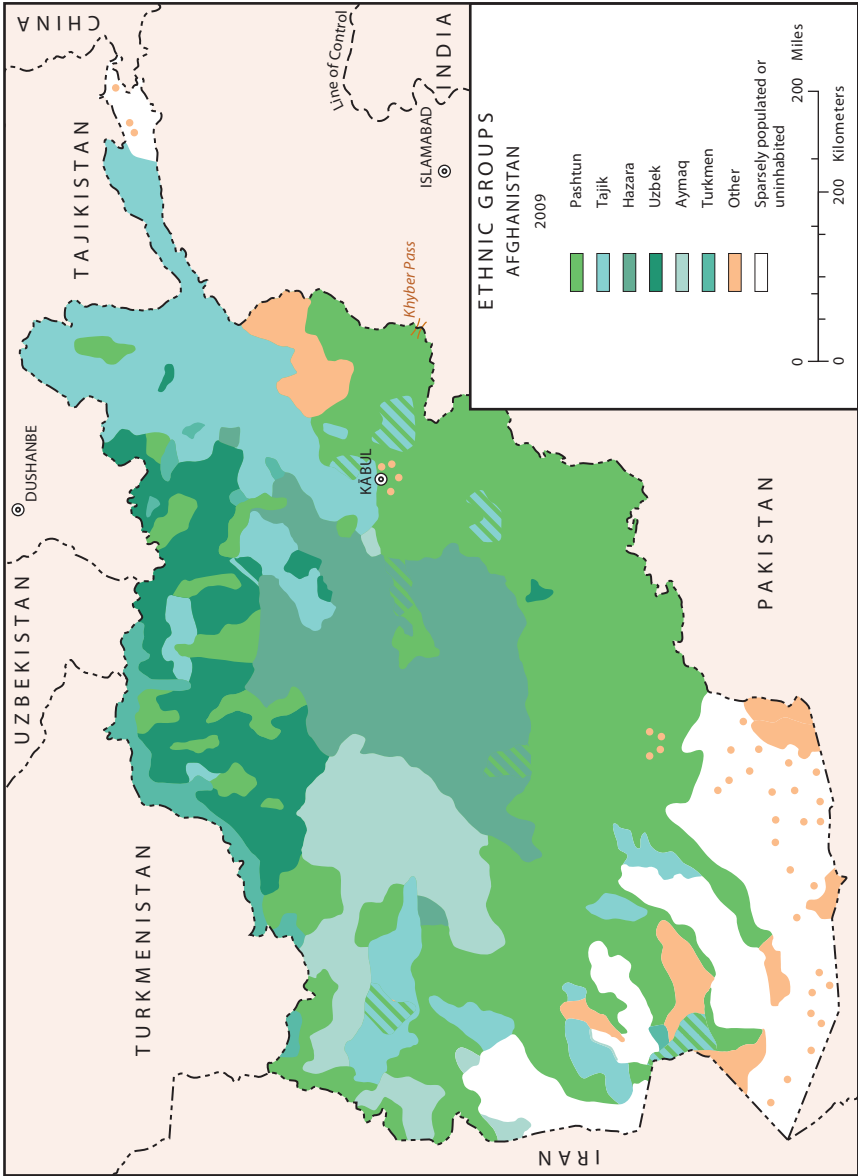


Pakistan to the east and south. It borders the former Soviet republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan in the north, and China to the northeast (*See Map 1*). The Hindu Kush Mountains, which run from northeast to southwest, dominate much of the landscape and divide the northern provinces from the rest of the country. In the north, the Central Highlands flatten into the Turkestan Plains along the Amu River. In the southwest, the mountains transform into the flat and arid Dasht-e-Margo and Registan Deserts. Adding to the segmented nature of Afghanistan, more than half the roads are unpaved, and there is one national highway, Afghanistan National Highway 1, formerly the Ring Road. Despite allied reconstruction efforts to tie the country together, decades of war left the transportation networks in poor condition and much of the population disconnected.

Afghanistan's demographics are as diverse as its geography. In 2009, it had a population of approximately 33.5 million. An estimated 90 percent of Afghans practice Sunni Islam, with the remainder mainly devoted to Shi'a Islam. The largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, the Pashtuns (42 percent) occupy the provinces south of Kabul. The Tajiks (27 percent) live mostly in northeastern Afghanistan. The Hazaras (9 percent) and nomadic Aymaqs (4 percent) reside in the Central Highlands, while the Uzbeks (9 percent) and Turkmens (3 percent) dwell in the north (*Map 2*).<sup>2</sup> Each group speaks a different language. The two most widespread, Dari and Pashto, are Afghanistan's official languages. A long history of tribal and familial ties created an inward-looking social system that inhibited the formation of a national identity. War and drought in the south and west between 2001 and 2007 forced an estimated 130,000 Afghans, mostly Pashtuns, to leave their homes, adding to the country's burden of internally displaced people.

Afghanistan is overwhelmingly poor and mostly rural with more than three-quarters of the population living in the countryside engaging in agriculture.<sup>3</sup> To increase their earnings, many farmers raise poppies, the source of opium used to make heroin and other narcotics. The illegal drug trade fueled corruption among police and government officials. Geography, tribal divisions, and economic





**Map 2**

backwardness hindered national unity, kept Afghanistan fractured, and impeded the creation of a stable and democratic government.

The United States launched Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) in response to the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, which killed nearly 3,000 people. The initial aim of OEF was to dismantle the al-Qaeda network, which was responsible for the attacks, and kill or capture its leader, Osama bin Laden. The United States also wanted to topple Afghanistan's Taliban government, which sheltered the terrorists. After two months of fighting, U.S. forces and allied Afghan militias occupied all of Afghanistan's major cities and deposed the Taliban. In December, under the auspices of the United Nations Bonn Agreement, Hamid Karzai became the head of an interim government. To provide security in Kabul, the United Nations also created the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). In 2003, the United Nations transferred ISAF command authority to NATO.

After OEF's initial success, the United States wanted to create a democratic and secure Afghanistan that would no longer remain a safe haven for terrorists. Over the course of 2002–2003, Washington called for reconstruction efforts and announced an end to major combat operations. The new mission of rebuilding Afghanistan was open ended and would be difficult to achieve.

The Global War on Terrorism, which began with OEF, widened significantly in March 2003, when a U.S.-led coalition invaded Iraq to remove dictator Saddam Hussein and his Baathist regime from power. Operation IRAQI FREEDOM became the main effort, leaving fewer American resources for Afghanistan. The post-invasion rise of sectarian violence in Iraq only exacerbated the situation. Faced with the growing demand for forces in Iraq, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld wanted to limit American involvement in Afghanistan by divesting OEF of most nation-building efforts and shifting overall responsibility for Afghan security to NATO.<sup>4</sup> American troop levels in the two countries—just under 20,000 in Afghanistan and roughly 137,000 in Iraq—illustrated which country held priority. The head of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) from 2003 to 2007, General John P. Abizaid later admitted that he could only dedicate “maybe 10 percent” of his time to the OEF campaign.<sup>5</sup>

In 2008, U.S. Central Command directed ISAF commander, General David D. McKiernan to make Afghanistan “moderate and stable, representative of its populace, capable of self-governance, and willing to contribute to a continuing partnership in the global war on terrorism.”<sup>6</sup> The one significant change was the substitution of “stable” for “democratic” with regard to the Afghan government. By its last year, the Bush administration had become more realistic concerning what was possible in Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup>

The United States contended with multiple enemies in Afghanistan. The initial focus was on al-Qaeda. Persistent U.S.-led counterterrorism efforts degraded the organization and the remnants scattered and took refuge in sanctuaries inside Pakistan.<sup>8</sup> While some Al-Qaeda members went to fight in Iraq following the 2003 U.S. invasion, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) believed that bin Laden, America’s most wanted enemy, was hiding in a cave in Pakistan. Despite a massive search for him, Bush’s presidency ended in January 2009 with the terrorist leader still at large. The effort to bring bin Laden and Al-Qaeda to justice thus continued to consume U.S. resources in Afghanistan.

The Taliban was a homegrown, mostly Pashtun, Islamic movement that arose in Afghanistan after the Soviet military’s withdrawal in 1989. Following the U.S.-led invasion in 2001, Mullah Omar fled Afghanistan and established a leadership council in Quetta, Pakistan, some 240 kilometers southeast of Kandahar. The Afghanistan-Pakistan border area was mainly Pashtun, rural, and deeply religious. From this new powerbase, the Taliban embarked on a persistent and disciplined campaign to take control of Afghanistan from the coalition and the new U.S.-backed government in Kabul. The Taliban relied on charitable donations, trade—especially in narcotics—and the informal money transfer system known as *hawala* to fund the insurgency. Their strategy incorporated four principles: crippling the economy in Afghanistan to undermine the governing authority, terrorizing the enemy to instill fear and dissent in the population, expanding their base of operations, and destroying the will of the United States and its NATO partners.<sup>9</sup>

As the Taliban's strength and influence increased between 2002 and 2008, the organization improved its tactics against American and coalition forces. Lacking heavy weapons, the insurgents attacked coalition outposts using small arms, mortars, rockets, and rocket-propelled grenades, as well as suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). They also improved their effectiveness by combining reconnaissance, snipers, and large coordinated assaults from multiple directions. On several occasions, Taliban operatives infiltrated the Afghan National Army (ANA) and committed "green-on-blue" incidents in which Afghan security forces turned their weapons on coalition personnel. Estimated Taliban strength in 2008 was placed between 17,000 and 20,000 fighters.<sup>10</sup> As the Taliban numbers steadily grew so did its lethality. In 2008—the deadliest year for the coalition since the beginning of OEF—the Taliban carried out 148 suicide attacks and was responsible for 3,200 roadside bombings that resulted in a total of 243 coalition deaths and 1,854 wounded.<sup>11</sup>

Coalition forces did not solely contend with the Taliban. The Pakistani-based Haqqani Network sometimes operated in conjunction with the insurgent group. Initially led by Jalaluddin Haqqani and his son Sirajuddin, this terrorist group was more ethnically diverse and included Uzbeks, Chechens, Kashmiris, and Pakistanis. Unlike the Taliban, which typically recruited locally, the Haqqani Network attracted jihadist converts from Southwest Asia and Europe and conducted cross-border operations into Afghanistan. Their attacks were small in scale but well-coordinated. They utilized small arms and rockets as well as suicide car bombers and frequently targeted Afghanistan government buildings and facilities housing foreign dignitaries.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar led another insurgent group, the anti-Western, Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HiG). He was a Sunni Muslim and ethnic Pashtun who gained a reputation for brutal and vicious tactics fighting the Soviets in the 1980s. Toward the end of the civil war of 1992–1996, Hekmatyar served as prime minister of an interim government in Afghanistan that lasted just over a year before the Taliban took Kabul in September 1996. In the aftermath, he fled to Iran, and became a sworn enemy of the Taliban. But after the 2001



General David D. McKiernan speaks at a ceremony commemorating 11 September 2001 at Bagram with coalition troops in attendance, 11 September 2008. (DVIDS)

invasion, he returned to fight alongside the Taliban against American and coalition forces.<sup>12</sup>

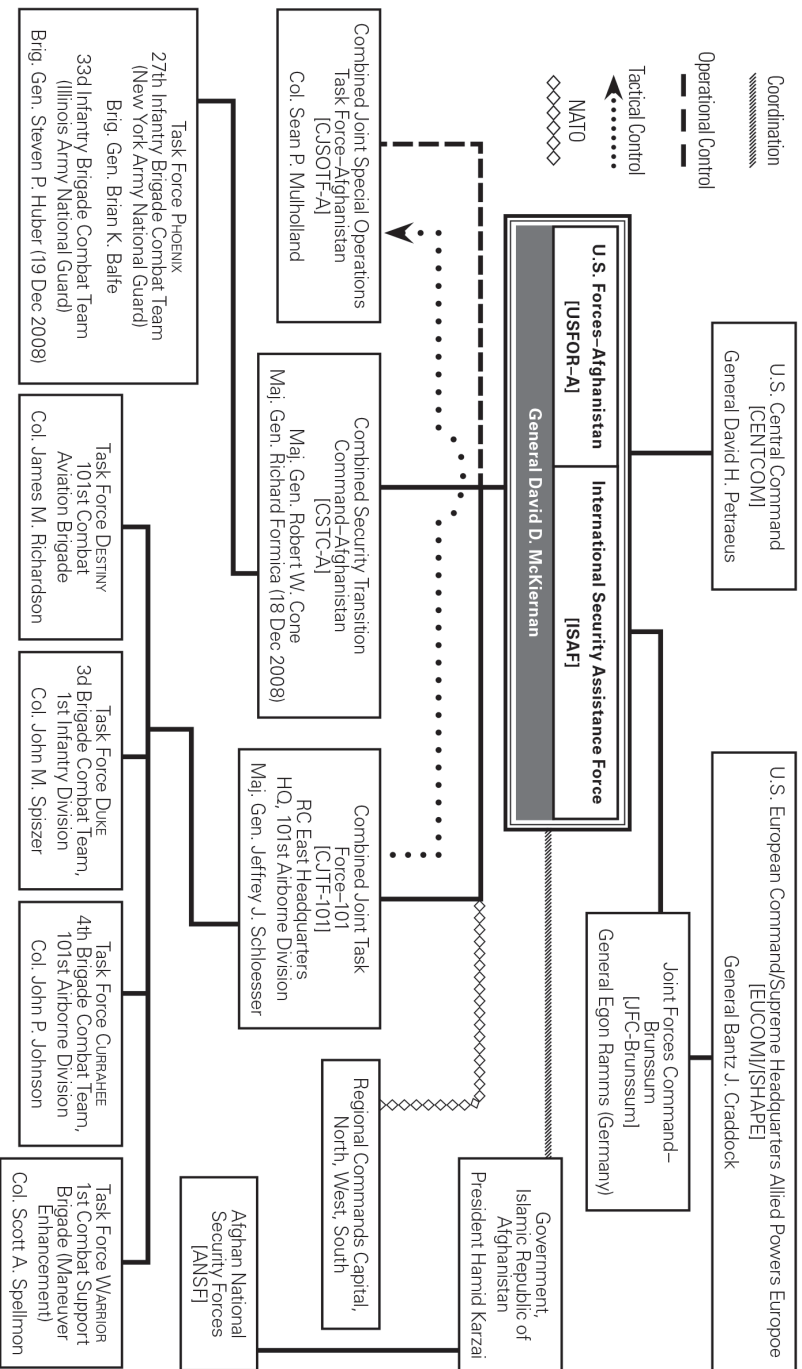
When General McKiernan arrived in June 2008 to assume command of ISAF, he inherited a complicated command structure divided between the United States and NATO. Allied forces under ISAF included troops from forty-one nations, with the bulk coming from the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, and Italy. Their collective objective, arising out of the initial mission to protect and defend Kabul, was to provide security and stability. Although the highest-ranking U.S. military officer in theater, General McKiernan

was technically not in charge of all U.S. counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations. That mission, more offensive in nature, fell to Maj. Gen. Jeffrey J. Schloesser, commander of Combined Joint Task Force-101 (CJTF-101). In that capacity, he reported directly to CENTCOM in Tampa, Florida. Schloesser also commanded Regional Command (RC) East, which fell under McKiernan's authority as part of ISAF. McKiernan, in turn, answered to NATO via the Joint Forces Command-Brunssum in the Netherlands and the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe in Belgium.

McKiernan observed that regional commands conducted independent campaigns, which hindered theaterwide coordination. France's mission in RC Capital, which was comprised of Kabul and fourteen districts surrounding the city, was to provide security for the Afghan government. In RC East, where ISAF concentrated two-thirds of the 33,000 American troops, counterterrorism operations took place alongside counterinsurgency efforts to protect Afghan citizens from hostile forces in the sparsely settled countryside. In RC South, which included Kandahar and Helmand Provinces, the British, the Dutch, and the Canadians initially rotated command every six months and oversaw a disjointed range of NATO operations determined by the various national commands responsible for each province (*See Map 3*).

Similar scenarios existed in RC West and RC North, where Italian and German forces, respectively, had to balance combating insurgent activity with restrictive national caveats instituted by their governments. All regional commands administered and provided security for reconstruction projects executed by provincial reconstruction teams. Ironically, the very issue that prevented a national identity from forming in Afghanistan also hampered ISAF operational efficiency. Years later, McKiernan described the lack of unity of command and effort as "very tribal and very different depending on where you're at in Afghanistan."<sup>13</sup> The ISAF commander concluded that the United States needed to overhaul its strategic approach and command structure to secure Afghanistan and prevent it from falling to a revitalized Taliban.

**Diagram 1: International Coalition Organizational Structure, December 2008**



(Source: Brian Neumann and Colin Williams, *Operation Enduring Freedom May 2005-January 2009*, 71.)

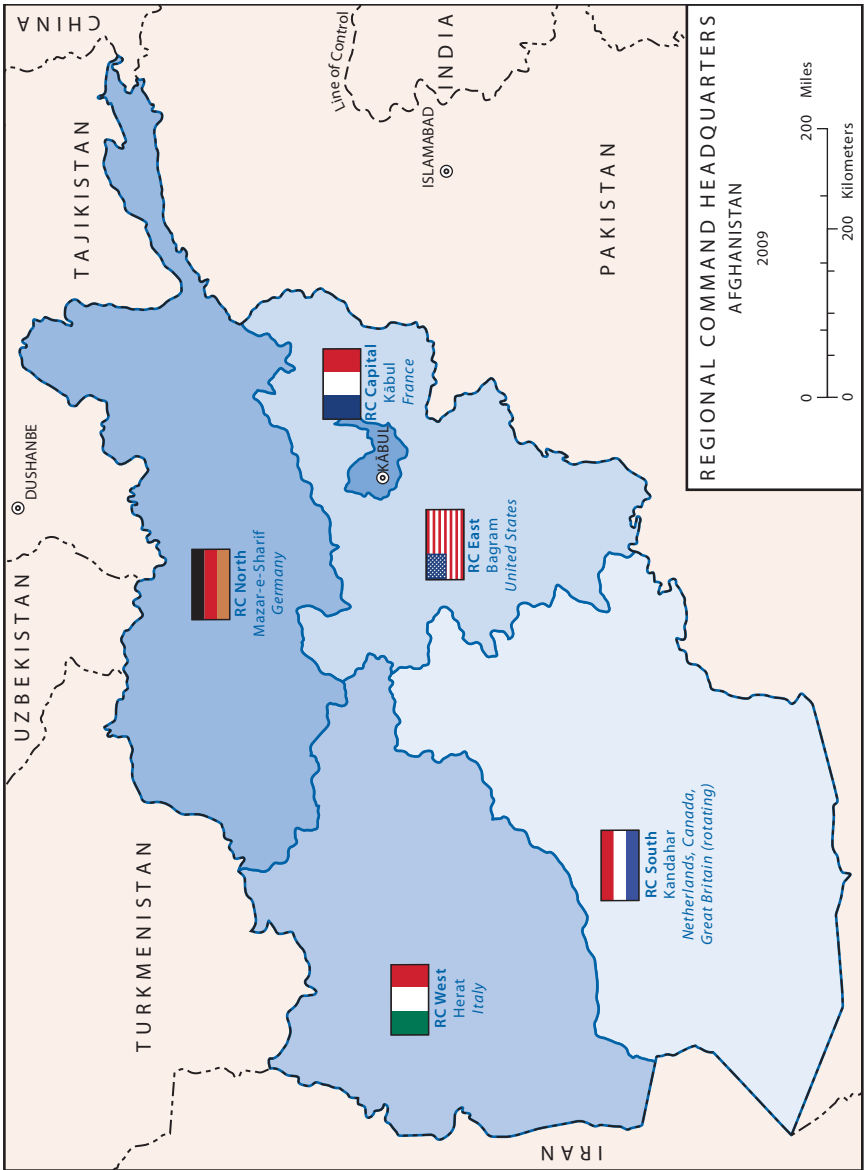


To align the American and ISAF command chains, McKiernan established a new headquarters, United States Forces–Afghanistan (USFOR-A) (*Diagram 1*). This organization would “coordinate the funding, resourcing, and activities on the U.S. side to meet and support that one intent, that one command and one strategy.”<sup>14</sup> As commander of both ISAF and USFOR-A—parallel four-star headquarters with separate reporting chains—McKiernan controlled nearly all American forces in theater, with the exception of special operators, who targeted important enemy combatants. They reported to Special Operations Command.<sup>15</sup>

General Schloesser had two maneuver brigades in RC East. In June 2008, Col. John M. Spiszer’s 3d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, known as TF DUKE, deployed to Afghanistan at Forward Operation Base (FOB) Fenty in Jalalabad, and conducted joint operations with the 2d Brigade, 201st Corps, Afghan National Army. Col. John “Pete” P. Johnson’s 4th Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 101st Airborne Division, carried out operations from FOB Salerno in Khost Province while partnering with units from the ANA’s 203d Corps. In June, Col. Scott A. Spellmon’s 1st Maneuver Enhancement Brigade, primarily composed of engineers, logisticians, and military police, deployed to RC East to conduct security and sustainment operations. NATO also had elements attached to RC East. Col. Rajmund Andrzejczak commanded 1,600 Polish soldiers from the Task Force (TF) WHITE EAGLE. Additionally, Col. Nicholas Le Nen commanded one French maneuver unit from the 27th Alpine Battalion. In RC South, Col. Peter Petronzio’s 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit arrived in March and served under the ISAF chain of command.<sup>16</sup> Altogether about 51,000 coalition troops were serving in Afghanistan.<sup>17</sup>

Training the ANA and other Afghan security forces was an ongoing mission for the ISAF and the United States. Formed in 2006, Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan, was a three-star, multinational headquarters. One of its subordinate commands, PHOENIX, spearheaded the effort to train, mentor, and aid the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), which was comprised of both the ANA and Afghan National Police and their subordinate elements.





Map 3

As of February 2008, the Afghan army totaled approximately 49,000, but only one battalion and one corps were rated capable of conducting independent missions.<sup>18</sup> The Afghan National Police

had about 100,000 personnel. ANSF suffered from a lack of long-term training, low readiness, and high attrition. Many units had so-called “ghost soldiers”—men who appeared on rosters but did not exist. Their commanders pocketed the extra salaries, a practice emblematic of the endemic corruption in the country. Despite their numerical strength on paper, McKiernan reasonably assessed that the ANSF was not prepared to bear the burden in Afghanistan.<sup>19</sup> In late 2008, Brig. Gen. Steven P. Huber’s Illinois Army National Guard 33d Infantry Brigade Combat Team, deployed to Afghanistan to take over TF PHOENIX.

Because coalition partners would not provide additional forces and the ANA was far from a state of readiness, McKiernan asked Admiral Mullen for an additional 30,000 troops. Field Manual (FM) 3–24 *Counterinsurgency*, the Marine and Army doctrine adopted in 2006, suggested between 20 and 25 security personnel for every 1,000 residents as the minimal force required, though it recognized situations could vary widely.<sup>20</sup> In December 2008, McKiernan had approximately 200,000 allied and Afghan soldiers and police, for a population of over 33 million, less than one-third of the troops recommended by FM 3–24.

McKiernan focused his ISAF and OEF forces on stabilizing population centers, which enabled reconstruction projects and economic development. His effort to expand security into additional areas resulted in the formation of more forward operating bases and combat outposts, but that required regional commanders to reduce garrison size, making each site more vulnerable to attack. Roughly one month after McKiernan took command of ISAF, the Taliban launched a surprise attack on a U.S.-Afghan occupied combat outpost in Wanat, located in the northeastern region of Nuristan Province. Seventy-three U.S. and ANA soldiers defended the remote position from between 100 and 200 insurgents in a battle that lasted four hours. The engagement ended after sustained artillery fire and attack helicopters drove off the attackers. Nine Americans were killed in action and another twenty-seven wounded.<sup>21</sup> In August, suicide bombers attacked FOB Salerno in Khost Province, killing

Afghan civilians. An increase in Taliban attacks highlighted the lack of security in theater.

In the fall of 2008, Bush approved an additional brigade for RC East and more units for RC South, partially fulfilling McKiernan's request. However, he deferred the decision concerning more reinforcements to the next administration.<sup>22</sup> In October 2008, General David H. Petraeus became the CENTCOM commander. Petraeus had risen rapidly through the ranks in just five years. As a major general in 2003, he commanded the 101st Airborne Division during the invasion of Iraq and was lauded for his statesmanship in the occupation of Mosul. Promoted to lieutenant general in 2004, Petraeus commanded Multi-National Security Transition Command–Iraq and NATO Training Mission–Iraq. In January 2007, the U.S. Senate confirmed Petraeus's promotion to four-star rank and his appointment as commander of Multi-National Force–Iraq where he oversaw the Iraqi surge.

Petraeus's elevation to CENTCOM created a difficult situation. In 2003, McKiernan was the commander of Coalition Forces Land Component Command for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, two levels above Petraeus. Now the tables had turned. Petraeus was senior to McKiernan this time around and in the eyes of many observers Petraeus was going to tell McKiernan and other leaders in Afghanistan how to properly fight the war. Although Petraeus viewed the working relationship as decent but awkward, McKiernan later noted it was "Not good . . . we went head to head a couple times on enablers . . . very pointed conversations."<sup>23</sup>

The expansion of outposts into new zones and a more aggressive approach meant greater risks, including risk to innocent Afghans. A United Nations report for 2008 concluded that U.S., ISAF, and ANSF troops were responsible for 828 of the 2,118 civilians killed.<sup>24</sup> American air strikes and special operations missions generated considerable collateral damage compared to previous years. Coalition forces dropped more ordinance in June and July 2008 than in all of 2006. On 22 August 2008, American aircraft bombed the small town of Azizabad in western Afghanistan. The target, a Taliban commander, escaped; but the air strikes killed dozens of civilians.

The political fallout from the failed mission resonated throughout Afghanistan. The Afghan government ordered a review of the presence of foreign troops and air strikes on civilian targets. Afghan President Karzai stated, “I want an end to civilian casualties....As much as one may argue it’s difficult, I don’t accept that argument.... It seriously undermines our efforts to have an effective campaign against terrorism.”<sup>25</sup>

The increase in civilian casualties not only created political tension but also jeopardized ISAF’s mission, which depended heavily on gaining and maintaining popular support. With forces spread so thin, many in Washington believed “the coalition was treading water.”<sup>26</sup> In response to Afghan concerns, McKiernan directed ISAF to have better communication and partnering with ANSF, a greater respect for Afghan culture and customs, and restraint and proportionality during engagements to limit civilian casualties and the destruction of property.<sup>27</sup> McKiernan wanted to put an Afghan face on operations to prevent the coalition from appearing as an occupying force while limiting the damage that civilian deaths had in undermining the legitimacy of the Afghan government. Despite their best efforts, the coalition’s approach to Afghanistan was not working. In only a matter of weeks, newly elected President Obama would come to a foreign policy crossroads: continue with the current strategy or reexamine the entire situation and adjust.

## OPERATIONS

### A NEW AMERICAN STRATEGY

President Obama ushered in a series of strategic changes in Afghanistan. He had campaigned on ending the war in Iraq and making Afghanistan a priority but first needed a new approach to

the war. Before his inauguration, Obama sent Vice President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr. to Islamabad to meet Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari. The Taliban and al-Qaeda terrorists had relied on sanctuaries on the Pakistan side of the border, and the gathering of officials demonstrated the incoming administration's commitment to Afghanistan and their expectations of Pakistan moving forward. "Pakistan has got to stop providing safe haven," Biden said, "Your military and intelligence services have got to get your act together."<sup>28</sup> Biden's interaction with Zardari exhibited a balance between support and pressure to reinvigorate relations and a greater effort toward dismantling terrorist safe havens in Pakistan. On his return leg of the journey, Biden met with McKiernan in Afghanistan and learned of minimal al-Qaeda activity in RC East, which affirmed the administration's conclusions that the terrorist group operated out of Pakistan.

Obama and the coalition had many issues to contend with in Afghanistan. The war was under resourced, with too few troops to properly execute accepted doctrine. Widespread corruption within ministries, governorships, and local police forces siphoned funds for reconstruction and undermined the legitimacy of the Afghan government. McKiernan expected the Taliban to launch its usual summer offensive at the same time he needed to beef up security for the Afghan presidential elections scheduled for May 2009.

On 30 January 2009, the recently inaugurated president ordered a sixty-day review of U.S. policy to be headed by Bruce O. Riedel—a former CIA officer and Middle East expert. The administration wanted the report completed prior to a scheduled April NATO summit. But even that short timeline was too long. The pending election in Afghanistan and the time required to deploy troops forced the administration to make some decisions while Riedel conducted his study. On 13 February, Obama convened his National Security Council to discuss whether to surge troops in Afghanistan and how and when they would deploy if the answer was affirmative. Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, Admiral Mullen, and General Petraeus, all advocated for additional reinforcements, fulfilling McKiernan's 30,000 troop request.

In mid-February, President Obama recommitted the United States to the war in Afghanistan by authorizing the deployment of more troops to provide additional security for the planned Afghan election and to stabilize RC South. With the Riedel Report still a month from completion, however, Obama was not ready to give McKiernan all the troops he wanted. In addition, the new Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard C. A. Holbrooke, argued the timing of the May election undermined the coalition's ability to provide security and prevented opposition parties from having a chance to defeat Karzai. For Holbrooke, a postponement would provide the administration with ample time to find a replacement for Karzai, who many believed needed to go.<sup>29</sup> That likely delay also seemed to lessen the immediate need for more forces. On 17 February, Obama ordered the deployment of 17,000 additional troops but that was barely half of what McKiernan believed he needed. The number ultimately rose to about 21,000 when the Pentagon included support staff and trainers for ANSF.<sup>30</sup> Many of these reinforcements found themselves in RC South where a resurgent Taliban had been gaining ground against coalition forces.

In addition to authorizing a troop increase, Obama implemented a civilian surge to supplement the military with subject matter experts from government agencies and the civilian sector.<sup>31</sup> They would focus on tasks such as equipment maintenance, rebuilding infrastructure, and reinforcing government efforts to maintain stability. The State Department aimed to triple the number of civilians in Afghanistan from 320 officials in 2009 to 974 by early 2010.<sup>32</sup> Once trained in the cultural intricacies and security issues in country, these civilians were supposed to join troops in southern provinces, but most wound up in Kabul.<sup>33</sup>

One month later, Riedel concluded his Afghanistan study, which advocated ambitious changes to policy and strategy, a new regional approach, and the resources required to achieve these aims. With a reinvigorated focus on al-Qaeda and terrorist networks, the study endorsed five objectives: disrupting terrorist networks in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, promoting a more efficient Afghan government and ANSF, ending Pakistani support for terrorist and



**An MQ-9 Reaper from the U.S. Air Force's 62d Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron takes off from Kandahar Air Base, 13 March 2009. (DVIDS)**

insurgent groups, strengthening civilian control in Pakistan, and using diplomacy to end the distrust between India and Pakistan. Riedel also concluded that “a fully resourced counterinsurgency campaign will enable us to regain the initiative and defend our vital interests.”<sup>34</sup> Accepting some of its recommendations, Obama redefined the OEF mission by narrowing its focus to preventing former terrorist forces from reentering Afghanistan.

Obama presented his new Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy to the American public during a speech on 27 March 2009, when he linked success in the war to a stable and prosperous Pakistan. “The future of Afghanistan is inextricably linked to the future of its neighbor Pakistan,” Obama asserted.<sup>35</sup> The fundamental objective was “to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda and its safe havens in Pakistan,



and to prevent their return to Pakistan or Afghanistan.”<sup>36</sup> Though the new strategy stressed counterterrorism, it also emphasized an integrated civil-military campaign and counterinsurgency in RC East and RC South while building host nation military capacity.

The administration’s policy of targeting terrorist sanctuaries in Pakistan required the expanded use of unmanned aerial vehicles in the region. Except for occasional Joint Special Operations Command actions and joint American-Pakistani training missions, ISAF and U.S. forces did not venture into Pakistan. In 2009, CIA Director Leon E. Panetta noted that targeted drone attacks are “the only game in town in terms of confronting or trying to disrupt the al-Qaeda leadership.”<sup>37</sup> This position remained consistent throughout both of Obama’s terms. The United States had been using this technology to target enemy personnel in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, but the Bush administration had carried out only fifty non-battlefield attacks. Over the course of Obama’s two terms, the U.S. launched 350 strikes, with their use peaking in 2010 during the Afghanistan surge.<sup>38</sup> Though civilian casualties decreased in later years, drone use ran the risk of encouraging terrorist recruitment. Kurt D. Volker, U.S. Ambassador to NATO, maintained that the “reliance on drone strikes allows our opponents to cast our country as a distant, high-tech, amoral purveyor of death.”<sup>39</sup>

---

## CAMPAIGN PLAN AND COIN APPROACH

While the Obama administration debated the merits of General McKiernan’s request for troops in early 2009, the ISAF commander continued revising his plans to create a unified effort in Afghanistan. He later noted there “were four national campaigns that were not linked together, that in many ways stopped at the provincial boundaries . . . there was no civil military campaign plan.”<sup>40</sup> After McKiernan’s initial assessment in June 2008, he also wanted to expand and improve five areas: Afghan security force development, anticorruption efforts, strategic communication, counternarcotics support, and regional relations with Pakistan.<sup>41</sup>



To better link the work of the embassy and the military, McKiernan drafted a new blueprint to coordinate civilian and military efforts. He also authorized a new military campaign plan, ISAF Operations Plan 38302, to better coordinate ISAF regional efforts and to incorporate language from Army FM 3-24. After issuing OP 38302, McKiernan revised the ISAF operations order (OP), TOLO HAMKARI, (OP TOLO). OP TOLO encouraged “support for the population of Afghanistan through an ISAF and Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) partnership to build GIROA capacity and credibility (legitimacy).”<sup>42</sup> It included four lines of effort that guided all subordinate commands: governance, security, reconstruction, and information operations. In subsequent orders, McKiernan made improvements to clarify the overall mission and increase unity of effort within ISAF’s regional commands. Because of coalition national caveats and resistance from President Karzai, McKiernan was unable to include the term “counterinsurgency” in the mission statement. McKiernan sought to provide better security and freedom of movement. He focused his efforts along Highway 1, a 2,200 kilometer stretch of national highway that was under construction and designed to run from Kabul to Kandahar to Herat and circle back around the country.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the inclusion of references to FM 3-24 in his plans, McKiernan had some reservations about implementing the doctrine’s population-centric strategy in Afghanistan. This concept emphasized providing security to the people and making them the center of gravity for operations instead of enemy insurgents. That required troops to remain in close contact with the local population on a continuous basis to protect them and to facilitate engagement. It also potentially required a long period of military presence in the host nation and large-scale monetary investment.

Many had judged the Iraqi surge and counterinsurgency campaign there a success and wanted to implement a similar strategy in Afghanistan, but the two countries differed greatly. In Iraq, approximately 70 percent of the population lived in urban centers compared with roughly 23 percent in Afghanistan. The majority of Afghans had little interest in a centralized government. To provide

security in this situation, coalition soldiers needed to disperse in outposts scattered in remote areas in mountainous country. In order to gain maximum coverage with the forces available, detachments were small and sometimes relied on Afghan forces to boost their strength. The enemy, meanwhile, might concentrate to attack any one of these isolated outposts, making the small coalition units vulnerable. The paradox arising from applying FM 3–24’s playbook to Afghanistan concerned McKiernan.

Significant obstacles impeded the process of keeping ISAF and OEF forces supplied. The cost of getting materiel into land-locked Afghanistan by air was ten times that of shipping supplies via water or land routes. For this reason, munitions were often shipped into major regional ports and then flown into staging areas. Convoys transported fuel and other supplies through Pakistan on one of two land routes, which both started in Karachi. The northern route ended in Kabul after traversing the dangerous Khyber Pass. The southern route crossed the border and ended in Kandahar. Once in the staging areas, soldiers prepared the equipment for aerial resupply, as the remote nature of forward combat outposts often required delivery by air.

Strategically, the ISAF and OEF missions coordinated similar efforts, focusing on the security, reconstruction, and the stabilization of the Afghan government, but they differed operationally. The OEF mandate was broader and allowed for more offensive operations. With the limited number of troops McKiernan had at his disposal, he tried to secure centers of trade along Highway 1 and supply lines coming in from Pakistan, and also conduct counterinsurgency operations. As a result, his forces were spread very thin.

---

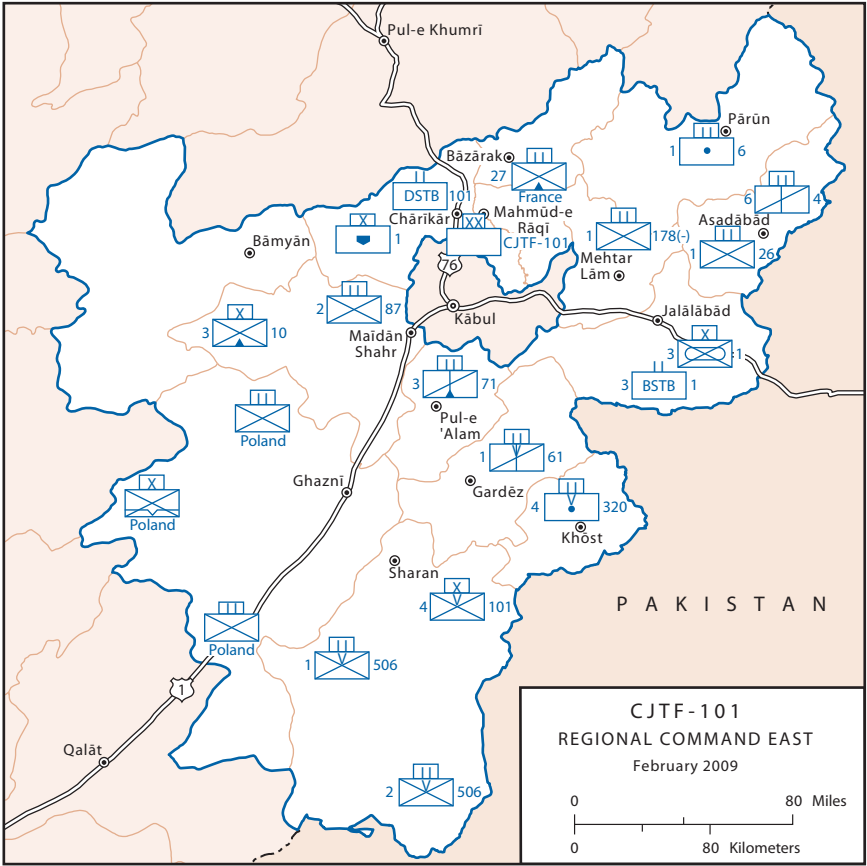
#### OPERATIONS IN RC EAST, JANUARY–MAY 2009

Roughly the size of Pennsylvania, RC East included fourteen Afghan provinces and had the highest population of any regional command. The RC East headquarters was situated at Bagram Airfield, just north of Kabul. In early 2009, General Schloesser’s CJTF-101 commanded approximately 20,000 U.S. military personnel. Although a

deteriorating security situation in RC South justified McKiernan's request for additional forces, intensified enemy activity in RC East demanded an ongoing effort there as well. Increased activity by the Haqqani Network and HiG resulted in more suicide attacks, car bombings, and kidnappings. The provinces of Nangarhar, Nuristan, Kunar, and Laghman, where HiG remained the primary enemy, revealed rising levels of conflict. In the eastern provinces of Paktika, Paktiya, Khost, Ghazni, and Logar, U.S. forces chiefly encountered the Haqqani Network. Insurgent goals concentrated on discouraging support for the government of Afghanistan, using suicide attacks to destabilize the region, and restricting coalition freedom of movement by ambushing convoys and patrols and planting IEDs.

The CJTF-101 mission aimed to build the government's capacity and capability to provide its own security, sustain economic development, and practice effective government. In order to facilitate these goals, Schloesser outlined a series of objectives for RC East. The first focused on improving security through increased ANSF competency and involvement by having forces secure select areas and control border crossings. Second, he intended to enhance governance at the provincial and local level to provide essential services to the population. This approach—combined with economic development, improvement of infrastructure, and information activities—sought to elicit the Afghan people's support of the government.<sup>44</sup> To achieve these ambitious aims, Schloesser needed more troops.

In January 2009, the first of Bush's approved reinforcements arrived in Afghanistan. Schloesser's CTJF-101 now had three maneuver brigades in RC East. Col. David B. Haight's 3d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Task Force SPARTAN), of Fort Drum, New York, deployed to RC East. TF SPARTAN initiated operations with Lt. Col. Kimo C. Gallahue's 2d Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment (TF CATAMOUNT) and Lt. Col. Daniel P. Goldthorpe's 3d Squadron, 71st Cavalry Regiment (TF TITANS).<sup>45</sup> The task force's third maneuver command, Lt. Col. Frederick M. McDonnell's 1st Battalion, 32d Infantry Regiment (TF CHOSIN), detached and joined Spiszer's task force in Kunar Province. The 4th Battalion, 25th Field Artillery Regiment (TF WOLFPACK), 710th Support Battalion (TF SUPPORT),



**Map 4**

and a Special Troops Battalion (TF VANGAURD) remained with TF SPARTAN.<sup>46</sup> Operating out of FOB Salerno, Colonel Johnson’s 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (TF CURAHEE) was responsible for Khost, Paktiya, and Paktika Provinces (*Map 4*).

In Wardak Province, TF CATAMOUNT developed working relationships with local elders, who believed economic improvement would limit Taliban recruitment. Gallahue’s task force provided security for economic projects like bridges and well repair and the construction of highways, health clinics, schools, and irrigation.<sup>47</sup> Despite these efforts, over the course of 2008–2009, coalition troops

in Wardak and Logar Provinces experienced a significant increase in engagements with the enemy. It is unclear whether this was the result of the enemy undertaking more offensive operations or U.S. forces creating more contact as they expanded into new areas, but in all likelihood, it was a combination of both.

Maintaining a forward presence in RC East remained a difficult task. Previous commands placed small-unit combat outposts in areas throughout the region that leaders deemed strategically important to securing the Afghan population. For this reason, outposts remained near population centers, provincial capitals, and trade centers but were also situated in remote areas to disrupt insurgent activity. Some of these positions could only be resupplied by airlift. Outposts typically supported a large platoon or small company numbering approximately eighty personnel.<sup>48</sup> With enemy strength and activity increasing, these forces transitioned from population security toward combat missions focused on raids and clearing operations with the intention of disrupting and destroying enemy forces.<sup>49</sup>

On 5 March 2009, the spring fighting season arrived a full month earlier than Schloesser expected when HiG, al-Qaeda, and the Taliban launched twenty-one coordinated attacks across RC East. In one instance, a rocket skidded across the roof of the CJTF-101 headquarters. Schloesser believed allied operations were responsible for the increase in enemy activity. He later recalled, “What we did forced them to remain engaged throughout the winter, causing them to improvise in ways we had not seen before, and in one sense, to match our own winter campaign.”<sup>50</sup> In March, the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division (TF YUKON), commanded by Col. Michael L. Howard, relieved TF CURAHEE.

Developing the capabilities of the ANSF was a crucial step toward creating a stable Afghanistan and a central piece of counterinsurgency strategy. In April at the NATO Strasbourg/Kehl two-day summit, participating nations agreed to supply nonmilitary assets to Afghanistan to support the ANA and Afghan police and more resources for the provincial reconstruction teams. The meeting ended with the promise to provide an additional 5,000 personnel. The Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan was

responsible for training the ANSF. Its capacity was constrained because it only had half the personnel it needed for the task due to the demand the population-centric strategy placed on the limited number of troops in theater.<sup>51</sup> Although Embedded Training Teams worked with Afghan army units, recruitment, retention, and desertion rates hindered significant progress. In RC East, the ANA 201st Corps and 203d Corps operated jointly with American units and were in the lead for roughly half of the operations conducted during Schloesser's command. However, ANA combat proficiency remained a pressing issue for the coalition.

The same month, McKiernan revised OP TOLO (now OP TOLO 2), and Schloesser changed the RC East mission statement. It now stipulated that U.S. troops would jointly work with coalition forces to conduct counterinsurgency operations until the Afghan elections. The goal of these operations was to increase Afghan capacity to provide their own security, governance, economic stability, and to increase the overall quality of Afghan life.<sup>52</sup> Supported by Obama, the publication of the Riedel Report, and Petraeus's appointment to CENTCOM commander in late 2008 influenced the change in mission statement to include counterinsurgency. To facilitate the transition in operational emphasis, McKiernan ordered CJTF-101 to relinquish command and control responsibilities to USFOR-A in April 2009, allowing the two star-headquarters to shed the obligations normally assigned to a three-star command. This was McKiernan's intention when he created USFOR-A several months prior. Schloesser's CJTF-101 could now focus on the tactical fight in RC East.

Another significant development came in early April. McKiernan's December 2008 tactical directive emphasized limiting civilian casualties because they undermined strategic objectives in Afghanistan. Obama and Gates also wanted to prevent collateral damage because it risked compromising mission success. On 6 April 2009, deep in northern Kunar in Watapur Valley, a special operations mission against a suspected enemy encountered more resistance than anticipated. After requesting air support, accompanying AH-64 Apaches received authorization to fire. The engagement resulted

in the death of six civilians, and fourteen wounded. McKiernan told Schloesser, “you have to get civilian casualties under control.”<sup>53</sup>

RC East outposts and supply lines remained susceptible to enemy attack. On 1 May, a Taliban force estimated between 100 and 200 strong, attacked and overran Observation Post Bari Alai near the Nishagam district center. The 6th Kandak (Battalion), 2d Brigade of the 201st ANA Corps defended the position. An ISAF Operation Mentor and Liaison Team—the ISAF version of an American embedded training team—and three American soldiers advised the ANA forces. In the immediate aftermath of the attack, which resulted in the death of five ANA troops, two Latvian soldiers, and all three American personnel, a days-long operation ensued to rescue prisoners the Taliban had taken.<sup>54</sup> Additional ANA and U.S. forces closed off escape routes in the valley resulting in the subsequent release of the captives. The reinforcements and rescue efforts showed that despite the decentralized nature of combat in RC East, coalition operations could achieve success. The attack on Bari Alai also revealed that ANA forces were a long way from taking over the fight for the coalition.

With ISAF and U.S. forces focused on RC East, Taliban and militant groups quietly opened up a front in northeastern Afghanistan. The northern insurgency consisted of elements from the Quetta Shura Taliban, HiG, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Cooperation among these groups existed to such a degree that leaders shared command and control between their organizations.<sup>55</sup> The movement had two primary objectives. The first involved information warfare—establishing a narrative of a national popular revolt by using high-profile local offensive actions to make a splash in the global news. They also planned to take over the illegal drug trade to help fund the insurgency.<sup>56</sup> By spring, the Taliban had wrestled control of Chahar Darah, an outlying district in Kunduz Province, away from ISAF and ANSF troops. Relying on IEDs, small arms, and car bombs, insurgents outmaneuvered German forces who were limited by their number of troops and rules of engagement.



## CHOOSING RC SOUTH AND CHANGE OF COMMAND

Until May 2009, RC South had a limited American presence. One of six provinces in RC South, Helmand, the Taliban's stronghold in Afghanistan, accounted for half the nation's narcotics production. Though poppy production in Afghanistan decreased by 22 percent from 2008 to 2009, it remained a principal source of income.<sup>57</sup> Especially concerning for McKiernan, five out of the six primary Taliban infiltration routes came through RC South.<sup>58</sup> Assisting ISAF troops, Col. Duffy W. White's 3d Marine Regiment headquarters; Lt. Col. David O. Odom's 3d Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment; a heavily reinforced aviation squadron; and Combat Logistic Battalion 3 formed the Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force–Afghanistan, which operated out of Kandahar Airfield.<sup>59</sup>

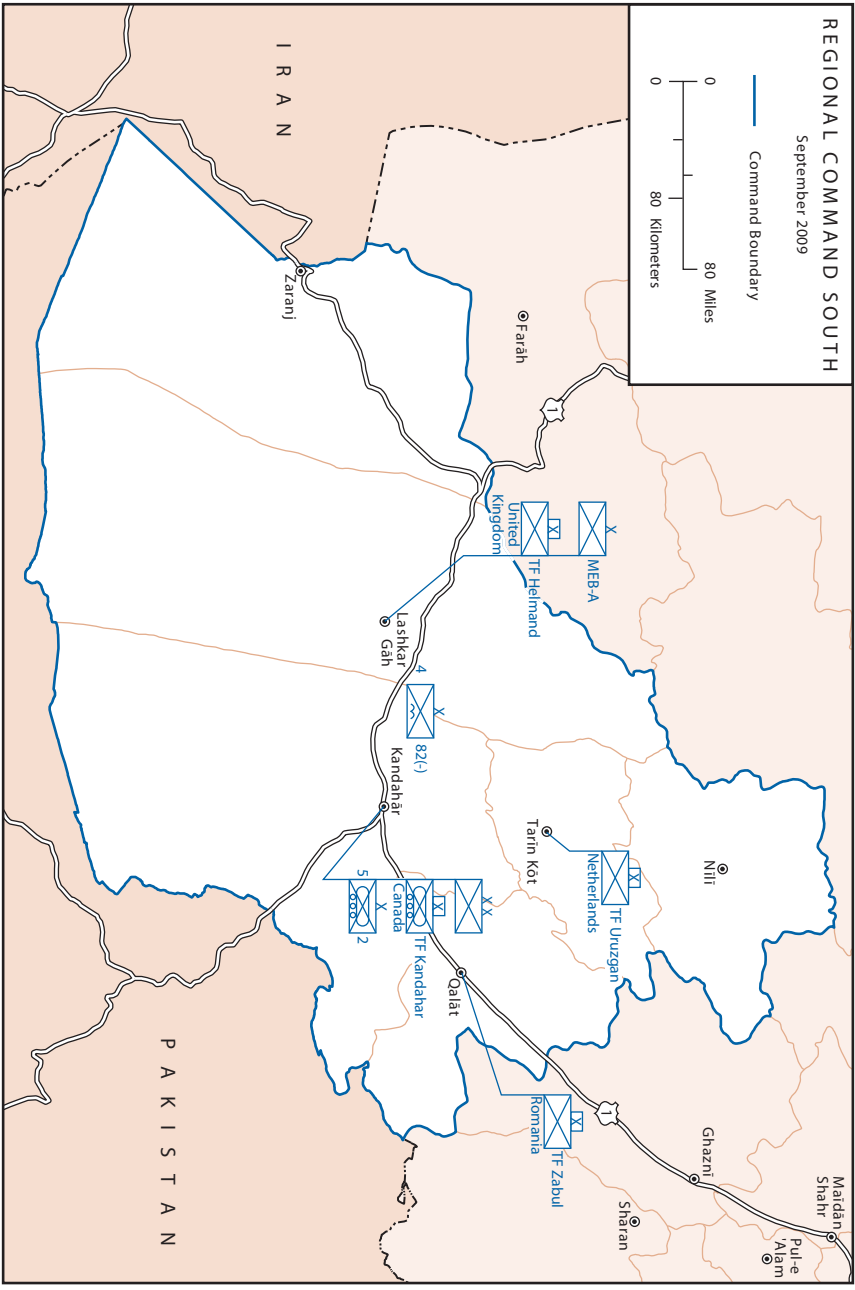
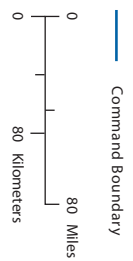
On 29 May, the 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade (TF LEATHERNECK), commanded by Brig. Gen. Lawrence "Larry" D. Nicholson, deployed to RC South sending roughly 8,000 Marines into Helmand Province. The ground element of TF LEATHERNECK included 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, and 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion. Combat Logistics Regiment 2, Combat Logistics Battalion 8, and the 8th Engineer Battalion deployed providing support for these ground units. Marine Aircraft Group 40, which also included elements of Marine Attack Squadron 214, Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 352, and Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 2 also joined this task force in RC South.<sup>60</sup> After a transfer of authority, all forces previously operating under the Special Marine Air Ground Task Force now fell under TF LEATHERNECK's command—which the Marine Corps designated Marine Expeditionary Brigade–Afghanistan (*Map 5*).

Some officials in the Obama administration privately questioned McKiernan's choice to position so many Marines in Helmand where only 1 percent of the Afghan population lived. Marine Commandant, General James T. Conway, had requested that all Marines in Afghanistan serve in one battlespace, operating as an air-ground task force in accordance with Marine Corps doctrine. In RC South, the most contentious areas were Helmand and Kandahar



# REGIONAL COMMAND SOUTH

September 2009



Map 5

Provinces. Of the two, McKiernan saw Helmand as the smaller problem, despite having high insurgent activity throughout 2008. He believed that sending the Marines to Kandahar would result in extended engagements leading up to the Afghan elections, which would have given the appearance of a weak central government. He ran his deployment proposal by RC South Dutch Commander, Maj. Gen. Mart de Kruif who accepted the plan.<sup>61</sup> McKiernan delegated tactical command of the Marines to RC South, allowing de Kruif to assign missions to these forces, but requiring him to keep the air-ground task force intact. Additionally, one incoming combat aviation brigade and Stryker brigade combat team would deploy to Helmand under the command of USFOR-A. RC South security operations would soon take precedence over election security in RC East.

The administration had much deeper disagreements with McKiernan's leadership. Throughout the spring, Gates and Mullen attempted to solve issues revolving around the dual-hatted role of the ISAF commander, who controlled combat operations and handled strategic issues related to NATO and the Afghan government. Gates, Mullen, and Petraeus preferred to imitate the structure which had existed in Iraq, where a four-star headquarters dealt with the political and strategic level, while a subordinate three-star command focused on the operational and tactical levels. After McKiernan "strongly resisted" this change, Petraeus convinced Gates that McKiernan lacked the "flexibility" required for conducting operations in Afghanistan.<sup>62</sup> On 9 May, in what may have been the last straw for the administration, McKiernan told reporters in Kabul that the war was "stalemated" in RC South and faced "a very tough fight" in RC East.<sup>63</sup> Two days later, Gates announced that he intended to replace McKiernan.<sup>64</sup> The Secretary of Defense later commented that McKiernan "had made no egregious mistake," but the White House and the Pentagon wanted a commander with a fresh look on Afghanistan.<sup>65</sup> Petraeus believed that "the decisive issue here is that I think he lost the confidence of the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman [of the Joint Chiefs of Staff]."<sup>66</sup>

## MCCHRYSTAL TAKES COMMAND

Obama named Lt. Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal to replace McKiernan. McChrystal was the commander of Joint Special Operations Command from 2003 to 2008. In 2006, his command was credited with the targeted killing of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Since August 2008, he had been serving as the Director of the Joint Staff. In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on 2 June, McChrystal recommended taking a holistic approach to counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. The measure of success, he noted, “will not be on enemy killed. It will be the number of Afghans shielded from violence.”<sup>67</sup> In a reference to the mistakes generals made in Vietnam, McChrystal promised to avoid them, but gauging effectiveness through civilians saved presented its own set of issues. Though his confirmation was expected, it was delayed due to questions regarding the Spc. Patrick D. Tillman friendly-fire incident and later controversy and detainee abuses while he headed Special Operations Command. Despite those concerns, the Senate confirmed McChrystal’s appointment to commander of ISAF and USFOR-A and his fourth star on 10 June.

During the summer, several units rotated into Afghanistan. On 3 June 2009, Maj. Gen. Curtis M. Scaparrotti’s 82d Airborne Division relieved Schloesser’s 101st Airborne Division and assumed command of RC East and CJTF-82. One month later, Col. Randy A. George’s 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division (TF MOUNTAIN WARRIOR), relieved Colonel Spiszer’s TF DUKE, which operated out of Jalalabad Airfield.<sup>68</sup> TF SPARTAN, which deployed to Afghanistan in January, continued security and clearing operations in Logar and Wardak Provinces.

Before McChrystal departed for Afghanistan, Gates gave him several tasks for immediate action. First, he wanted McChrystal to conduct a strategic assessment to determine if any changes were needed to the current mission, strategy, or organization of U.S. forces. He also wanted McChrystal to establish a three-star headquarters, ISAF Joint Command, which would run the daily operations and supervise the five regional commands. Finally, Gates

wanted McChrystal to determine whether U.S. troop requirements could be reduced or made more efficient.<sup>69</sup>

For months, both Karzai and Obama had made known their concerns regarding civilian casualties and the detrimental effect it had on the legitimacy of the Afghan government. General McKiernan had attempted to limit the number of incidents with a tactical order, but it had little impact. Gates's final directive to McChrystal was to take all possible steps to mitigate collateral damage and better handle the situation when operations led to civilian loss. Despite allied efforts to curtail the occurrence, much was out of their control. According to a United Nations report for 2009, only 25 percent (596) of the reported civilian deaths (2,412) were directly related to pro-government force actions.<sup>70</sup>

When McChrystal arrived in Afghanistan on 13 June, he began his strategic assessment with a "listening tour" around the country to learn what was happening. Over the course of ten days, he visited all regional commands, and spoke with every brigade and battalion commander. His initial findings echoed his predecessor's. "It seems like we're fighting five very different wars, not one coherent plan."<sup>71</sup> When McKiernan took command, he concluded the same, but finding a solution to the issue was limited by ISAF national caveats. More troublesome for McChrystal, he discovered that field commanders had differing understandings of counterinsurgency doctrine and were under resourced.<sup>72</sup>

These themes dominated the discussion when McChrystal reported his initial findings to the Secretary of Defense in a 24 June video conference. The situation, according to McChrystal, was more troubling than he had anticipated. In RC East, the Haqqani Network had expanded its reach, and in the RC South province of Kandahar, the Taliban controlled five of thirteen local districts. "Overall, governance was very bad and creating a lot of problems. . . there is no legitimacy," he asserted.<sup>73</sup> Some of these issues stemmed from the loosely connected nature of the Taliban and their ability to take advantage of local grievances and exploit this to their advantage. In one sense, ISAF and CENTCOM forces were not fighting one monolithic organization, but instead, many independent

insurgencies. Weak local government and collateral damage only added fuel to these brush fires. On the other hand, McChrystal saw the disjointed nature of the insurgency as an enemy weakness and believed that establishing legitimate local and national government could break Taliban momentum.

Just as the “listening tour” concluded, both CENTCOM and NATO officially ordered McChrystal to conduct an evaluation of Afghanistan. On 26 June, Gates instructed CENTCOM commander Petraeus to issue formal orders for McChrystal to provide a written assessment. Less than a week later, NATO followed suit when Secretary General Jaap de Hoop and Supreme Allied Commander Europe General Bantz J. Craddock gave a similar order.<sup>74</sup> Determined to save time, McChrystal combined the two assessments.

Consistent with his desire to reorient operations toward population-centric counterinsurgency, McChrystal directed ISAF and CENTCOM forces on 6 July to curtail civilian casualties and collateral damage. Comparable to the order issued by General McKiernan six months prior, McChrystal insisted on restraint, preventative measures to protect civilian loss of life, “cultural sensitivities” when dealing with women, and the use of ANSF when entering Afghan houses and mosques. For McChrystal, these were not isolated measures, but part of a larger strategy intended to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people. He cautioned against “winning tactical victories—but suffering strategic defeats—by causing civilian casualties.”<sup>75</sup> In his mind, a failure to adopt these initiatives and win the support of the people would likely result in the loss of the war. McChrystal insisted that “The Taliban cannot militarily defeat us—but we can defeat ourselves.”<sup>76</sup> He intended these measures to enhance stability and security ahead of the scheduled 20 August Afghan elections. Both directives aimed to limit civilian casualties but had partial success.

## SECURING RC SOUTH

The arrival of TF LEATHERNECK in early June changed the landscape of RC South by increasing operational capability. The

additional personnel allowed ISAF to mass and reposition troops. With reinforcements still trickling into the country and Afghan elections on the horizon, ISAF and ANA forces conducted one of the largest offensive maneuvers to date, Operation PANCHAI PALANG (Panther's Claw).

The first phase began near midnight on 19 June 2009 when 350 soldiers from Lt. Col. Stephen Cartwright's The Black Watch, 3d Battalion, Royal Regiment of Scotland, boarded a dozen CH-47 Chinook helicopters and landed around Babaji, a small suburban center located approximately 8 kilometers north of the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah. The area was a known Taliban stronghold and the mission aimed to secure and connect local population and agricultural centers in the Helmand River Valley with Lashkar Gah. Later on 25 June, soldiers from the 1st Battalion, Welsh Guards, secured fourteen canal crossings to disrupt Taliban resupply and reinforcement.<sup>77</sup> British and U.S. aviation supported ground operations.<sup>78</sup>

Over the course of a month, more than 3,000 British, Danish, Estonian, and Afghan troops cleared the region and provided security for the upcoming Afghan elections. The operation concluded on 20 July with allied forces having suffered several casualties, mostly from IEDs, including one British battalion officer. Brig. Timothy Buchan Radford, commander of Task Force HELMAND, called the operation a success, noting it freed upwards of 90,000 Afghans from Taliban rule before the election.<sup>79</sup> Tactically, the mission achieved its goal and the Taliban suffered "significant losses," but it did little to limit enemy freedom of movement beyond the ground occupied by friendly troops. This operation would be the first in a series of ISAF and U.S. engagements to retake Helmand during the summer of 2009.

In early July, while Operation PANCHAI PALANG progressed, roughly 4,000 Marines and 650 ANA soldiers launched a second incursion into the Helmand River Valley, just south of Lashkar Gah. Operation KHANJAR (Strike of the Sword), the largest Marine operation since the Battle of Fallujah, got underway when the Army's Combat Aviation Brigade, 82d Division, airlifted Lt. Col. William F. McCullough's 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, into the village of Nawah-ye Barkaza'i and Lt. Col. Christian G. Cabaniss's 2d Battalion, 8th





**Soldiers from Company B, 2d Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, patrol the Korengal Valley floor, in Afghanistan's Kunar Province. (DVIDS)**

Marines, into Garm Ser District.<sup>80</sup> Approximately 500 Marines from the 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion moved into Reg-e Khan Neshin.<sup>81</sup>

On 2 July, elements from the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, engaged insurgents in a small compound in Nawah-ye Barkaza'i. Though encountering enemy forces in a concealed position, the Marines used helicopter gunships instead of fixed-wing air support, to limit civilian collateral damage. The militants in the compound ultimately escaped, but the marines refrained from using heavy ordnance because they could not verify whether the compound contained civilians. The 2d Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion did not

meet any initial resistance in Khan Neshin and began discussion with local elders upon moving into the village.

The next day while clearing Garm Ser, a unit from 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, encountered militants in a walled compound and engaged the enemy for eight hours before an AV-8B Harrier II hit the location, killing an estimated forty to fifty Taliban insurgents inside. The marines resorted to heavier ordnance when the Taliban refused to surrender, and officials authorized the strike only after watching drone footage for hours and not seeing any civilians at the location.<sup>82</sup> Over the course of the next few days, patrols encountered sporadic enemy resistance.

The objective for these three prongs of attack was to increase security and Afghan government influence in the area by seizing the southern portion of the Helmand River Valley, which remained the heart of the Taliban insurgency and central to poppy production—their key source of funding. The Marine Expeditionary Brigade commander, General Nicholson, explained an aspect of the operation: “One of the most critical things is to tell people why we’re there, and we are going to have a limited opportunity to gain their trust.”<sup>83</sup> Many local Afghans had known no other form of governance, which made this task extremely crucial and just as difficult. The mission also aimed to protect the population from intimidation and register voters.

In early August, 400 marines and 100 ANA soldiers conducted clearing maneuvers during Operation EASTERN RESOLVE II. Much of the mission centered on Taliban-held Dahaneh, a small town in northern Helmand province with a population of approximately 2,000. Task Force LEATHERNECK ordered the action to disrupt insurgent intimidation campaigns and provide freedom of movement. “Our mission is to support the Independent Election Commission and Afghan national security forces. They are the ones in charge of these elections. Our job is to make sure they have the security to do their job,” General Nicholson noted.<sup>84</sup> Just before dawn on 12 August, the ground element left New Zad, a Marine base, and traveled via Humvees and Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles. Supported by Harrier jets, three CH-53 Stallion helicopters



transported the air element. Once inserted, the ISAF troops met varying levels of resistance, encountering small arms fire, mortars, and rocket propelled grenades (RPGs). After four days of battle, ISAF troops had taken control of the town.

In preparation for the election, these three operations temporarily secured Helmand Province.<sup>85</sup> The cost was high. August was the deadliest month for U.S. personnel since the start of the war, with 47 fatalities. Between April and October 2009, ISAF and ANSF troops killed in action increased by 84 and 87 percent, respectively, over the course of the same months during 2008.<sup>86</sup> Increased troop levels, which resulted in more offensive-oriented activity, were a contributing factor.

While these moves were underway in Helmand, the 2d Infantry Division's, 5th Brigade Combat Team, 2d Infantry Division, dubbed TF STRYKER, based out of Fort Lewis, Washington, deployed to Afghanistan. The unit was built around the M1126 Stryker—an eight wheeled, medium armored combat vehicle that could transport up to nine soldiers. In late-July and early-August 5th BCT moved into Kandahar and Zabul Provinces with its subordinate units: the 402d Support Battalion and a Special Troops Battalion. Lt. Col. Jeffrey W. French's 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry Regiment (TF LEGION), went to RC South as the Regional Reserve Force. Lt. Col. Jonathan T. Neumann's 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment, was stationed at FOB Frontenac, just under 50 kilometers north of Kandahar Airfield. The unit was responsible for securing the northern approaches to the city, which ran through the Arghandab River Valley and mountainous Shah Wali Kot District.<sup>87</sup> Joining the Romanian 280th Battalion in southwest Zabul Province, Lt. Col. Burton K. Shields's 4th Battalion, 23d Infantry Regiment (TF ZABUL), conducted clearing operations out of FOB Wolverine. The 8th Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, commanded by Lt. Col. William Clark, deployed south of the city. These four maneuver units were given tactical control of the firing batteries of Lt. Col. Dennis Smith's 3d Battalion, 17th Field Artillery Regiment.

Not long after TF STRYKER arrived in Afghanistan, friction developed between its commander, Col. Harry D. Tunnell IV, and



**Soldiers conduct a dismounted patrol in Taktehpol, Afghanistan, 4 January 2010.**  
*(DVIDS)*

RC South Commander, General de Kruif, over counterinsurgency tactics.<sup>88</sup> A major factor was differing interpretations of the mission. Predeployment training and preparation for its assignment also played a significant role in how Tunnell envisioned his unit operating in Afghanistan.

The brigade initially was destined for Iraq, and it underwent months of training in the language, cultural intricacies in that country, and urban warfare. In February, TF STRYKER learned that it would instead go to Afghanistan. Though flagged under the 2d Infantry Division, based in Korea, I Corps had assumed responsibility for training Tunnell's brigade. U.S Army Central

Command, which provided guidance for all deploying Army units, issued Operations Order 06-007 to 5th BCT, 2d Infantry Division's headquarters.<sup>89</sup> Using these instructions, which referred to Army FM 90-8 *Counter Guerrilla Operations* and not FM 3-24, Tunnell wrote a training program that U.S. Army Forces Command and I Corps approved. Consequently, the unit focused on a different doctrine than McChrystal had implemented in Afghanistan.<sup>90</sup>

Early training exercises at Fort Irwin National Training Center illustrated the disconnect between the training program and 5th BCT's later mission in Afghanistan. Tunnell wanted his brigade proficient in high-intensity combat and viewed counterinsurgency operations as complimentary of counterinsurgency doctrine: "... many of those [enemy] organizations are organized as guerrilla formations. And so you have to understand how to organize, train, and equip a friendly formation to solve that problem and counterinsurgency operations gets at that very well."<sup>91</sup> After the Vietnam War, Army COIN doctrine moved away from conventional high-intensity operations and the teachings of FM 90-8—last published in 1986. Nevertheless, elements of *Counter Guerrilla Operations*, persisted into newer doctrine, including FM 3-24.4, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency*.<sup>92</sup>

Just before 5th BCT, 2d Infantry Division, deployed, RC South Commander General de Kruif issued Operations Order 09-07. Though it did not state that the mission was to conduct counterinsurgency, it employed the doctrinal language; in order to foster governance, security, and development in RC South, ISAF would partner with ANSF to "shape, clear, hold, and build" areas deemed critical.<sup>93</sup> Tunnell's brigade trained for more offensive counterinsurgency operations, which were appropriate for the "clear and hold" elements of the order, but not so much the "build" aspect.

Upon arriving in Afghanistan, Tunnell attended a meeting where de Kruif made known his intent. During discussion, Tunnell described his unit's mission with the terms "interdict" and "clear," implying TF STRYKER would focus on eliminating the enemy in their assigned areas. De Kruif interrupted to clarify that he disagreed with this interpretation. He believed using nonlethal methods, like

reconstruction and development projects, was a more effective method to neutralize enemy influence.<sup>94</sup> The RC South commander believed that Tunnell was too offensive minded but recognized the unit was “probably the most capable force” to secure the approaches to Kandahar.<sup>95</sup>

Just before elections, while conducting security for polling locations, 5th BCT suffered some of its first casualties of the war. On 18 August, local Afghan police provided 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment, with intelligence that the enemy was massing in a small town southwest of the Shah Wali Kot District center. Second Platoon, Alpha Company, moved toward the town in four Stryker vehicles. Not long after arriving, the enemy opened fire with automatic weapons and RPGs.<sup>96</sup> During the fighting, insurgents remotely detonated two IEDs, which killed two American soldiers and wounded six others. While Stryker vehicles provided increased mobility and speed, because of their flat bottoms, they had limited protection against IEDs. A consequence of a lack of armor resulted in infantryman clearing roads ahead of the vehicles when they moved into IED-laden areas.

Over the next two months, elements of TF STRYKER continued clearing operations to restrict enemy presence and movement into Kandahar. In August, Tunnell’s brigade planned and launched Operation OPPORTUNITY HOLD. The mission aimed to clear insurgents from the Arghandab River Valley for the purpose of setting up two combat outposts and gathering intelligence on the enemy. The nine-day operation concluded with one American casualty and an unknown number of enemy killed in action. Through November, TF STRYKER conducted operations in Kandahar and Zabul Provinces until their mission changed to route security. Operations in the fall resulted in a majority of the unit’s 35 killed in action and 239 wounded.<sup>97</sup> Due to TF STRYKER’s new mission, the 2d Battalion, 508th Infantry Regiment, of the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division, assumed responsibility for the Arghandab River Valley.<sup>98</sup>

In the short term, the actions of 5th BCT, 2d Infantry Division, cleared enemy insurgents from their area of operation, but these

tactical victories, though limiting enemy movement, could not address the larger issue of Taliban entering the region from Pakistan. TF STRYKER's actions in the autumn also revealed that that a much larger enemy element operated in the region than anticipated. The unit helped provide security and freedom of movement for the Afghan elections, but it also developed a reputation for aggressive tactics that did not necessarily fit with the coalition's piecemeal implementation of population-centric counterinsurgency.

## THE STRATEGY EVOLVES

Though McChrystal did not arrive in Afghanistan until mid-June, ISAF had moved forward and published an updated version of Operations Order 38302 in the interim. Revision 3 now incorporated the Army FM 3-24 shape-clear-hold-and build language but did not go as far as mentioning "counterinsurgency operations" in its mission statement.<sup>99</sup> With the Afghan election only weeks away, an unforeseen development in RC East soon dominated the new commander's attention and resources.

In the morning hours of 30 June 2009, a roll call revealed that COP Mest-Malak, located in the mountains of Paktika Province, was missing one soldier, and the acting platoon leader radioed the situation to his superiors. Pfc. Beaudry "Bowe" R. Bergdahl was unaccounted for and had disappeared. Units in range received orders to maneuver into blocking positions in the valley and surrounding area and started searching the region, using gathered intelligence. Multiple predator drones and fixed wing aircraft provided constant surveillance and support of operations. Colonel Howard, commander of TF YUKON, ordered that "all operations will cease until the missing soldier is found. All assets will be focused on the DUSTWUN [duty status—whereabouts unknown] situation and sustainment operations."<sup>100</sup> Aviation resources in the region were already stretched thin and the search for Bergdahl pushed those components to their limit.

The following day, an opportunity arose to meet with the Taliban to free Bergdahl. Local elders had reached out to a police chief, who then conveyed a message to American forces. In exchange for Bergdahl,

the Taliban wanted fifteen prisoners released and an undisclosed sum of money, but the groups did not reach an agreement. Ground and aviation forces continued looking for the American, but as days turned into weeks, and weeks into months, the search area grew and continued taxing the already limited resources in RC East.

The events surrounding the Bergdahl disappearance further reinforced with McChrystal that Afghanistan was under resourced. McChrystal's vision of population centric counterinsurgency also added a renewed emphasis and demand for special operations forces. In June, he requested additional units and drones for Afghanistan, which General Petraeus and Vice Admiral William H. McRaven, fulfilled.<sup>101</sup> In July, Col. James E. Craft of the 7th Special Forces Group arrived in Afghanistan with three battalions.<sup>102</sup> By the end of the year, the number of special operations teams in Afghanistan had tripled.<sup>103</sup>

The command structure for special operations units was undergoing change, as well. In January, U.S. Special Operations Command established Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan to enhance continuity of leadership, and Brig. Gen. Edward M. Reeder Jr. took command. In August, 3d Special Forces Group became the core for the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Afghanistan headquarters.<sup>104</sup> Influenced by the Vietnam hamlet program, Reeder implemented unconventional warfare concepts and embedded Operational Detachment Alpha teams in local villages as part of stability operations to increase security and further enhance the legitimacy of the Afghan government.<sup>105</sup>

On 20 August 2009, Afghanistan held the widely anticipated presidential election. It was supposed to be a monumental occasion and a key measuring stick for coalition progress. Providing security for voting was the principal motivation for expanding the war in RC South. In the months prior, the U.S. relationship with Karzai had soured. Many officials, including Holbrooke and Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry, believed that the Afghan president had not done enough to combat corruption within his government, but Karzai blamed the instability on Pakistani meddling.<sup>106</sup> Prior to the election,



both Eikenberry and Holbrooke had openly encouraged opposition candidates to run against Karzai.

ISAF security efforts had varied results on election day. The Afghan government hired 10,000 armed local tribesmen to assist coalition forces. Additionally, McChrystal ordered a halt to all offensive operations so ISAF could focus on polling locations, but these efforts were not enough to deter the Taliban. The Afghan government reported that seventy-three incidents of violence had taken place across fifteen different provinces, resulting in the death of twenty-six people.<sup>107</sup> Additionally, unconfirmed reports suggested the Taliban had specifically targeted civilians who had voted. A United Nations report later noted that election day witnessed the highest number of recorded attacks in over a decade.

The Taliban attacks and fear campaign proved somewhat successful. Though voter turnout was disputed by many, the consensus was that no more than 30–40 percent of registered voters went to the polls. In the southern provinces, where ISAF had spent considerable resources throughout the summer, voting was extremely low. In Babaji, early reports suggested that only 150 people voted out of an eligible 55,000.<sup>108</sup> The poor turnout signaled that despite successful missions to rid the Taliban from these areas, their influence remained.

Over the course of several weeks, officials tallied votes, but complaints of irregularities started to surface. Independent observers and journalists soon discovered fraudulent activities had occurred during the voting process, which included bribes, voting cards being sold, armed coercion, and ballot stuffing. By mid-September, totals showed incumbent President Karzai with more than 50 percent of the popular vote—the required percentage for reelection. With reports of massive voter fraud to the Independent Election Committee, the United Nations-backed Electoral Complaints Commission moved forward with an investigation and recount. By late-September, the commission had found clear evidence of fraud in several provinces.<sup>109</sup> After a recount, the commission reported that although Karzai still held a majority of the vote, his total was below the required threshold. As a result, a runoff election would take place

on 7 November between Karzai and a former minister of foreign affairs in Afghanistan, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, who obtained the second highest number of votes. After calls for change to the election process by Abdullah met silence, he withdrew from the race and the Afghan election commission proclaimed Karzai the winner. Low voter turnout and evidence of election fraud diminished what little influence and support Karzai had with the international community. Whereas in previous years, officials in the U.S. government pushed for the Afghan president to battle corruption, they now saw him as part of the problem.

### MCCHRYSTAL'S ASSESSMENT

General McChrystal delivered his strategic review in August. "The key takeaway from this assessment," he wrote:

is the urgent need for a significant change to our strategy and the way that we think and operate. NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) requires a new strategy that is credible to, and sustainable by, the Afghans. This new strategy must also be properly resourced and executed through an integrated civilian-military counterinsurgency campaign that earns the support of the Afghan people and provides them with a secure environment. To execute the strategy, we must grow and improve the effectiveness of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and elevate the importance of governance.<sup>110</sup>

McChrystal's vision for implementing counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan still faced several roadblocks. Despite McKiernan's earlier efforts to address unity of command issues, they still persisted. The most significant obstacle for McChrystal though, was that the United States and coalition could not agree on whether they were fighting a counterinsurgency or leading a nation building effort. The current ISAF commander also wanted to nearly double ANSF troops to better address security issues and corruption at all levels of government, but a rapid increase in size ran the risk of sacrificing



quality for quantity. Many of McChrystal's COIN based conclusions centered on protecting the population from these groups. But he had erred in assuming that most of the population viewed the Taliban as an outside oppressor, when in fact, portions of the Pashtun population in the South and East supported and assisted the insurgency.<sup>111</sup>

McChrystal later asked for reinforcements totaling 40,000—four combat brigades and support personnel—to conduct COIN operations. In addition to his request, he provided alternative options for 11,000 and 85,000 additional troops. When the suggested force numbers reached Obama's desk, it came as a complete shock. The president questioned how a surge and counterinsurgency helped the United States in Afghanistan.<sup>112</sup> In the coming weeks, the administration debated the merits of sending more troops. If Obama accepted McChrystal's recommended troop surge, it would bring American boots on the ground close to 100,000.

Before Obama and the National Security Council had concluded a full review of McChrystal's assessment, a series of events would make it appear as though the military was trying to force the president's hand. On 4 September, the *Washington Post* published an interview that columnist Michael Gerson conducted with Petraeus. The general stated that he gave no guarantee additional troops would result in success in Afghanistan but noted "it won't work out if we don't" send more. Then, on 21 September, McChrystal's assessment was leaked to Bob Woodward at the *Washington Post*. The front-page headline read: "McChrystal: More Forces or 'Mission Failure.'"<sup>113</sup> Several days later, CBS aired a prerecorded interview with General McChrystal on "60 Minutes," where he noted he had only spoken with Obama once in the last seventy days—making the president look removed from the war.<sup>114</sup>

Adding insult to injury, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, a think tank, invited McChrystal to give a speech in London on 1 October. McChrystal sought the approval of Admiral Mullen, who cautioned him to tread lightly. While at the event, he was asked if a scaled back effort in Afghanistan could succeed. He commented: "the short answer is: No. You have to navigate from where you are, not where you wish to be. A strategy that does not leave Afghanistan

in a stable position is probably shortsighted.”<sup>115</sup> Obama did not want to continually increase troops in Afghanistan, especially with no end in sight. Regardless of these ill-timed series of events, the administration and National Security Council moved forward with a review of McChrystal’s assessment and recommendations for troop increases.

While Washington considered the next steps for Afghanistan, McChrystal worked to improve the efficiency of ISAF command. On 4 August 2009, the North Atlantic Council, NATO’s principal political decision-making body, had approved a new structure. Inspired by the setup in Iraq, it interposed a three-star headquarters between the regional commands and McChrystal’s headquarters, allowing him to focus on the political and strategic level. In September, McChrystal selected Lt. Gen. David M. Rodriguez to lead the new ISAF Joint Command, which became fully operational on 12 November.<sup>116</sup>

## NATO TRAINING MISSION–AFGHANISTAN

Another component within the new command structure that McChrystal pursued was the creation of the NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A). Per the Riedel Report’s recommendations, President Obama encouraged NATO leaders to create a new international organization whose responsibilities included the expansion and improvement of Afghan security forces. Approved by the North Atlantic Council in April, the NTM-A would bring all coalition training efforts in Afghanistan under a single command. On 21 November, Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell IV assumed command of the newly established multinational and combined organization of NTM-A and Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan.<sup>117</sup>

Caldwell soon discovered significant obstacles when he arrived in Kabul. In order to achieve the end state of 270,000 ANSF, he anticipated the need for 5,000 ISAF and U.S. trainers, having already “identified, in the first 30 days, that the 1,200 people we had was woefully inadequate.”<sup>118</sup> But McChrystal, who was trying to staff the newly created ISAF Joint Command, went in the opposite direction,

mandating a 10 percent reduction in the NATO training mission staff. In an effort to bolster NTM-A's numbers, in December Gates diverted the 10th Mountain Division's 2d Battalion, 22d Infantry Regiment, to Caldwell's training command.<sup>119</sup>

The NTM-A mission was to generate as quickly as possible more trained ANSF units to support ongoing counterinsurgency operations while providing the building blocks to increase overall quality of forces. But the shortage of NTM-A personnel made this task increasingly difficult. To assist, ISAF Joint Command took control of the liaison and mentoring teams, which at least permitted the NTM-A to focus solely on building new units and ANSF institutional capability.<sup>120</sup> Even though the coalition considered training ANSF a prerequisite for handing the war over to host nation forces, it devoted only 3 percent of ISAF and U.S. forces to the mission. Afghan forces suffered from high desertion rates and ghost soldiers, and drug use also hindered growth.<sup>121</sup> Recruiting motivated soldiers also proved difficult. Like the U.S. military, some Afghans joined seeking a challenge, brotherhood, or service to their country. However, a large portion joined to escape poverty, and as the sole income for a family, few were willing to risk their lives.<sup>122</sup>

Beginning in 2010, Caldwell took measures to professionalize ANSF personnel. He estimated that of the incoming recruits, about 14 percent could read, write, or count.<sup>123</sup> These low numbers directly affected the efficiency and capability of soldiers. He mandated literacy training for all soldiers, though it took 4–6 months to fully implement, largely due to delays in obtaining the funding, course material, and personnel to teach soldiers. Despite these issues, the NTM-A put 33,000 soldiers through the course of instruction during the first year. Another 55,000 received literacy training in the field. To assist further development, Caldwell instituted a fund that coalition nations could support if they lacked the ability to send trainers.<sup>124</sup> The NTM-A also devised a new training model, which incorporated Afghan and Western counterinsurgency concepts. The first of the program's three parts focused on developing both noncommissioned and commissioned officers' knowledge of COIN by sending them to an Afghan-led training academy. Second, Afghan battalions would

rotate through a training center. Lastly, the NTM-A created mobile teams for soldiers unable to attend the training centers.<sup>125</sup>

One last hurdle remained for McChrystal. He needed to get all ISAF troops committed to COIN operations. Until this point, national caveats had limited the types of missions their forces could conduct. McChrystal had previously noted, “ISAF is not adequately executing the basics of counterinsurgency warfare.”<sup>126</sup> He argued that ISAF needed to change its operational culture and transform its processes to become more effective and efficient. Receiving guidance from Gates and NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, McChrystal published Revision 4 of Operations Plan 38302 in September, including a new ISAF mission statement to “conduct population-centric counterinsurgency operations.” One month later at a defense ministerial meeting in Bratislava, Slovakia, NATO endorsed McChrystal’s changes.<sup>127</sup>

---

## RC EAST INTENSIFIES

While Afghanistan and the international community waited for the election to be finalized, daily operations resumed in RC East. Part of McChrystal’s efforts to implement a fully resourced COIN doctrine in Afghanistan required turning over to host nation forces more responsibility for the war. This included greater involvement in coalition patrols, leader engagements, and manning of outposts. Developments in RC East during the fall would demonstrate the inherent difficulties in transitioning to COIN while fighting a war with limited materials and troops.

On 3 September 2009, an embedded training team led a group of ANSF on a patrol around Dam Darah, a small village in eastern Kunar Province. The area was a known infiltration route. Black market exports like lumber and gems crossed the border into Pakistan in exchange for weapons. On the return leg of the patrol, the team encountered small arms fire. Local elders from Ganjgal, a village near Dam Darah, publicly renounced the attack, and requested the presence of coalition forces to conduct a census of military age males and aid in rebuilding the town’s mosque.

Operation BURI BOOZA (Dancing Goat II) was initially scheduled for 7 September but postponed one day due to a conflicting operation by Afghan border soldiers. The next day, Embedded Training Team 2-8, with additional advisers from FOB Joyce, moved toward Ganjgal with approximately ninety combined Afghan forces. According to an embedded journalist, “they [coalition forces] were on a mission to search the village of Ganjgal...for weapons and...a meeting with the village elders who had reached an agreement to renounce the Taliban and accept the authority of local government.”<sup>128</sup> The settlement was situated in a narrow and mountainous horseshoe shaped valley, with high cliffs to the north and south. The roughly sixty buildings in the hamlet were built upon one another and ran up the slopes of the valley. A member of the training team, Marine Cpl. Dakota L. Meyer, recalled that the compounds looked like “a set of interlocking gun pillboxes.”<sup>129</sup>

Marine Maj. Kevin Williams led the small contingent of American forces but delegated operational command and control to his ANA counterpart. Army Capt. William D. Swenson advised the Afghan border patrol element. Since the meeting with elders had been postponed one day, no dedicated aviation support was available due to other planned operations.<sup>130</sup> Leaders proceeded with the operation because they anticipated that indirect fire support would mitigate the lack of available aviation resources.

In the early morning hours of 8 September, fifteen American advisers and their Afghan allies traveled to the outskirts of Ganjgal. Due to the narrow road leading into the village, troops dismounted their vehicles before advancing on foot. Directed by Americans, two small groups of ANA soldiers provided overwatch from positions located north and south of the village. Unbeknownst to the coalition, Taliban and HiG forces coordinated an ambush from the high sides of the valley and from within the village.<sup>131</sup>

Meyer and a fellow soldier waited in the rear with the vehicles as coalition forces moved into the village via a wash that ran through its center. As the column approached the hamlet, the Taliban assaulted from three sides employing small arms, machine guns, and mortar fire. The opening engagement at the Battle of Ganjgal forced the





**An aerial image of Ganjgal Village, Kunar Province, Afghanistan. (U.S. Army)**

column to disperse and take cover. The lead element of Embedded Training Team 2-8, Team Monti, moved into a nearby building, while the Command Group found protection behind a wall of a terraced field.

Swenson requested artillery support several times, but the higher headquarters delayed their response because of too many uncertainties on the battlefield.<sup>132</sup> The close proximity to the village and ignorance of the positions of civilian and allied forces prevented

the approval of many requests. The lack of indirect fire support and smoke screen prevented coalition troops from initially breaking contact with the enemy and allowed the Taliban to flank their positions. After ninety minutes of intense fighting and close combat, air support from Lt. Col. Jimmy F. Blackmon's 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry Regiment (TF PALE HORSE), eventually arrived, allowing the Command Group and many ANSF to withdraw from Ganjgal, but Team Monti was missing and not responding to radio calls.

Not long after the opening engagement, Meyer asked for permission to leave his position and enter Ganjgal to support Team Monti. After his first request was denied, he decided to enter the village in a Humvee with a fellow soldier. While fighting continued, Meyer and Swenson, with two other soldiers, made repeated trips into the village trying to find the missing soldiers while evacuating friendly casualties. On the final run, Meyer found Team Monti away from their initially reported position. All four men and an Afghan interpreter had been killed. After their recovery, American and ANSF troops withdrew to FOB Joyce.

Later, it was determined that Qari Zia Ur-Rahman, the leader of Taliban operations in Kunar, had prior knowledge of the operation and had mustered upwards of 100–150 insurgents.<sup>133</sup> Coalition forces suffered thirteen killed and twenty-two wounded. After the battle, Combined Joint Task Force Command-82 commander, General Scaparrotti ordered an investigation that revealed “the actions of key leaders at the battalion level [TF CHOSIN] were inadequate and ineffective, contributing directly to the loss of life, which ensued” and that “timely aviation and indirect fire support was not provided. Repeated requests to employ an on-call QRF [quick reaction force] were not supported.”<sup>134</sup> Three unnamed personnel from TF CHOSIN received formal reprimands. Due to their heroism and bravery at Ganjgal, Marine Corporal Meyer and Army Captain Swenson, would eventually receive the Medal of Honor. The battle raised concerns regarding McChrystal's directive and the lack of support for training teams in the field.

Earlier in the spring, Colonel George and Lt. Col. Robert B. Brown, commander of 3d Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, had



**Capt. William Swenson (left), assists wounded Sfc. Kenneth Westbrook onto a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter. The photo is a frame taken from a video filmed by a helmet-mounted camera. Sfc. Westbrook later died as a result of complications from a rejected blood transfusion. (U.S. Army)**

devised a plan to close COP Keating and other small outposts, which could only be resupplied by air.<sup>135</sup> Both George and Brown presented the idea to Scaparrotti, who agreed, but he never appropriated the needed resources due to other demands. Significant obstacles existed in shutting down these outposts because of their remoteness. In the Korangal Valley, the Army had scheduled four closures. To accomplish this task, estimates suggested it would have taken approximately eighty Chinook sorties over four days to complete, but due to winter



setting in, the Army postponed ending these missions. In addition to the demand on the limited air assets, ground units would need to be flown in to provide additional security for these operations.<sup>136</sup>

COP Keating illustrated the difficulty the coalition faced in divesting itself of far-flung outposts. In late-September, McChrystal had authorized shutting down the garrison. The plan projected forty-five Chinook sorties to remove equipment and personnel out of the valley.<sup>137</sup> This assignment would have fallen to TF PALE HORSE, which only had four Chinooks.<sup>138</sup> Several other factors delayed the process. In late-June, the disappearance of Bergdahl pulled air resources into a futile search for his whereabouts. Then in July, President Karzai convinced McChrystal to reinforce the remote Nuristan district of Barg-e Matal. Karzai was concerned about a recent Taliban offensive in the area and wanted to reverse their momentum before the election. McChrystal recalls, “The election was a much bigger muscle movement than a lot of people realize. Militarily...every sinew was supporting that.”<sup>139</sup> The combination of the search for Bergdahl and the series of maneuvers to secure Barg-e Matal extended the timeline on COP Keating by two months. Then, with elections approaching and McChrystal focused on security, he suspended the closing of all coalition bases and outposts.<sup>140</sup>

On 3 October 2009, a combined force of 300 Taliban and HiG insurgents simultaneously attacked COP Keating and Observation Post Fritsche. Both locations neighbored the village of Kamdesh, situated 25 kilometers from the Pakistani border.<sup>141</sup> The observation post was on a cliff 2.2 kilometers to the south and lacked a direct line of sight of the position. In the months leading up to the attack, both positions experienced weekly probing attacks, which the Taliban studied in preparation for a larger coordinated assault. Since May 2009 when Troop B, 3d Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, started manning the outpost, they had forty-five engagements with smaller Taliban elements.

An opening volley of fire struck the outpost early in the morning. The Taliban had launched attacks by fire in the past, but the seriousness of this effort became apparent with the number of RPG rounds that targeted the outpost’s generators. Enemy insurgents had



**View of COP Keating on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in Nuristan Province, Afghanistan taken on 2 January 2005. (DVIDS)**

also placed snipers and machine guns in positions to cover building doors where coalition forces would exit. Anticipating air support and evacuation of casualties, the Taliban positioned DshKs—Soviet-made heavy machine guns—higher up the mountain to deal with approaching helicopters.<sup>142</sup>

Insurgents then used automatic weapons, RPGs, and B-10 recoilless rifles to pin down soldiers in the mortar pit, preventing

them from returning fire. Simultaneously, another force assaulted Observation Post Fritsche, preventing the isolated platoon from providing any assistance to COP Keating. Even with the generators disabled, the tactical operations center was able to get communications back online using batteries and radioed the severity of the situation to squadron headquarters at FOB Bostick. The closest available air support was at FOB Fenty, a forty-minute flight from Keating. By the time elements from TF PALE HORSE arrived at the embattled outpost, the enemy had breached the wire.<sup>143</sup>

Insurgent forces had launched a three-pronged attack, which pinned down coalition forces and forced the soldiers to collapse into a smaller perimeter within the camp. By this point, troops at nearby Fritsche had repelled the enemy assault and could now provide mortar fire for the surrounded troops at Keating. Approximately three hours into the battle, Apache support and mortar fire allowed the embattled troops to begin retaking areas of the outpost, but casualties limited progress. Additionally, the insurgents struck three Apaches with DshK fire, forcing two to leave the area.

As the battle raged on, a platoon-sized quick reaction force from FOB Bostick arrived at Fritsche and began a four-hour-plus hike down the mountain, using an indirect route.<sup>144</sup> Thirteen hours after the fight began, the quick reaction force reached COP Keating. By the time the Battle of Kamdesh had concluded, coalition forces had suffered a total of nine fatalities and thirty-two wounded. Estimates for enemy casualties placed the total number at 150. For their actions during the battle, Spc. Ty M. Carter and Sgt. Clinton L. Romesha later received the Medal of Honor.

In the aftermath of the attack, 3d Squadron, 61st Cavalry, conducted platoon level after action reports, which drew several conclusions regarding force protection. The outpost was encircled by concertina wire, but Afghan troops had routinely gone through and over the wire creating a weak point. When the attack started, many ANA troops fled through this gap, leaving it unmanned and allowing the Taliban to enter the compound. Since the creation of the outpost in 2006, it was continually enlarged without additional troops allocated for defense. During the engagement, several attempts to detonate

aging claymores failed. Leaders knew about these weaknesses, but because of the anticipated closure of the garrison, did not marshal resources to remedy the situation. The mindset of imminent closure and inadequate defenses made Keating an “attractive target” for the Taliban.<sup>145</sup>

The Army later conducted an investigation that identified similar force protection issues and determined the unit’s leadership was negligent by failing to correct these problems. The entire chain of command at the tactical level received formal reprimands.<sup>146</sup> The shortcoming of the investigation, however, was that it was limited to American actions during the battle and ignored the ANA role. Though McChrystal placed a moratorium on the closure of outposts and bases during the election period, he never outright rejected Brown and George’s plan. Instead, due to the demand on aviation resources needed for the closure missions, his headquarters denied requests.<sup>147</sup> In the days following the attack, Troop B, 3d Squadron, withdrew from COP Keating and on 6 October, an Air Force B-1 Bomber demolished the camp to prevent the enemy from using it.<sup>148</sup>

---

## OBAMA’S FINAL SURGE

In the fall of 2009, the Obama administration debated the merits of McChrystal’s assessment and recommendation for another troop increase. Mullen, Petraeus, and McChrystal argued for more troops to implement a fully resourced COIN strategy. Biden and Eikenberry opposed that approach. Biden preferred an increase of 20,000 troops that focused on counterterrorism and training Afghan forces. In November, Eikenberry sent Secretary of State Hillary R. Clinton a classified diplomatic cable that leaked to the public. He believed that a surge strategy built solely around COIN was unachievable.<sup>149</sup> He also argued that the U.S. overestimated ANSF capability and misjudged the time it would take to establish a fully functioning Afghan government. Eikenberry pointed to Karzai’s leadership, increasingly questioned after the Afghan elections. He noted that McChrystal’s proposed strategy would not remedy the

inadequate civilian structure in place. He also went on to argue that the insurgency would not end if sanctuary remained in Pakistan.<sup>150</sup>

Taking issue with the steadfast position of some military leaders, President Obama sought the advice of Secretary of Defense Gates, who provided input that ultimately shaped the surge.<sup>151</sup> The new strategy was a compromise between the pro- and anti-COIN camps within the administration. Obama authorized 30,000 reinforcements and gave Gates the option to send an additional 3,000 if he deemed it necessary. The president hoped that this renewed commitment would persuade ISAF countries to increase their troop contribution. He announced the surge during a speech on 1 December 2009 at the United States Military Academy, West Point. “Our overarching goal remains the same,” Obama declared, “to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan and to prevent its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future.”<sup>152</sup> He stressed the importance of building up Afghan capacity over the course of the next 18 months, setting a troop drawdown of July 2011. Providing a deadline publicly may have been counterproductive, as one historian has noted.<sup>153</sup> In essence, Taliban leaders now knew they only needed to wait for American forces to leave Afghanistan. The new strategy linked counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations, while setting a troop cap of 98,000 with a small margin for troops rotating in and out of theater.

## OPERATION MOSHTARAK BEGINS

Beginning in the summer of 2009, McChrystal and Marine General Nicholson had started shaping the battlefield for an assault on Marjah, a Taliban stronghold, but due to logistical issues, limited troops, and Afghan elections, ISAF delayed the main operation until February 2010. With units deploying as part of the surge, Marine total numbers in RC South had grown from 12,000 to roughly 20,000. General Nicholson pulled together 2,250 Marines, based on Col. Randy P. Newman’s Regimental Combat Team 7, which replaced Colonel White’s headquarters in October. The main composition of the assault force came from Lt. Col. Calvert L. Worth Jr.’s 1st Battalion,





Lt. Col. Calvert L. Worth Jr., commanding officer of 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, briefs General Stanley A. McChrystal, commander of ISAF and USFOR-A, before a patrol in Marjah, 1 April 2010. (DVIDS)

6th Marine Regiment, and Lt. Col. Brian S. Christmas's 3d Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment.<sup>154</sup> McChrystal also directed Colonel Shields's 4th Battalion, 23d Infantry Regiment, and Col. Paul W. Bricker's Combat Aviation Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, to support the mission.<sup>155</sup>

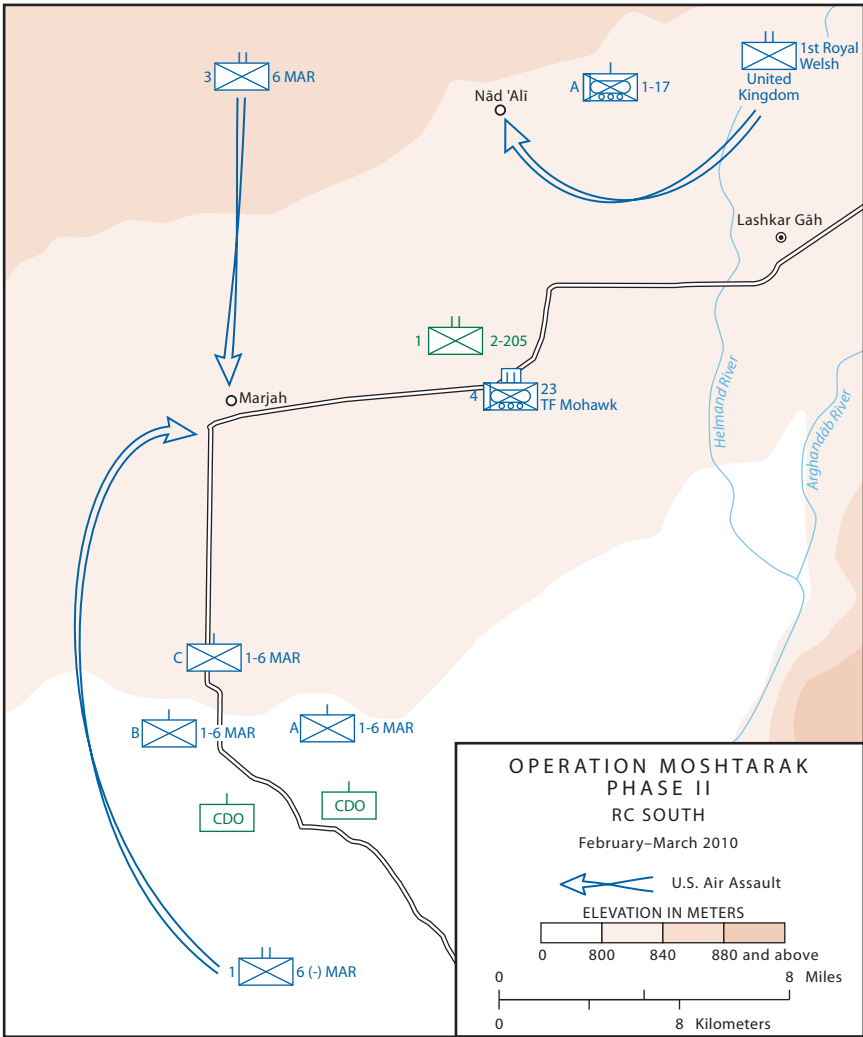
Following the elections, it was a priority for ISAF in RC South to eliminate Taliban enclaves. Throughout the fall, ISAF and U.S. forces had carried out a series of clearing operations, and McChrystal viewed this operation not just as a continuation, but an opportunity to vindicate the principles conveyed in his assessment.<sup>156</sup> Part of his

plan was to have a “government in a box,” a prepared organization with personnel and resources, follow behind military forces and link up isolated communities with their provincial and national government.<sup>157</sup> This also was the first time for a mission of its size that the ANA fully partnered with coalition troops. This applied to special operations as well. Adding a fourth company to each of its three battalions before deployment, the 75th Ranger Regiment conducted missions with Afghan Special Operations units.

Though Operation MOSHTARAK officially started in February 2010, a preliminary phase had been underway since November 2009. Taking command of RC South that month, British Maj. Gen. Nicholas P. Carter sought to deceive the enemy by changing TF STRYKER’S mission to route security on major highways, moving it away from the planned Marine air and ground insertion into Marjah. This adjustment also enabled other task forces to concentrate on protecting the population.<sup>158</sup> These shaping missions prepared the battlefield for the later assault on Marjah. Likewise, in early February, British and Afghan troops conducted similar activities northeast of Marjah, through Nad Ali. About 400 soldiers from 5th BCT, the ANA, and Canadian trainers, moved into positions north of the city. U.S. Navy Seals and British SAS conducted extensive raids into Marjah in the days leading up to the operation, carrying out as many as fifty targeted killings to weaken Taliban ranks and leadership.<sup>159</sup>

On 13 February 2010, phase two of Operation MOSHTARAK commenced when sixty helicopters inserted three companies of marines and Afghan soldiers into the middle of Marjah, near the city’s two bazaars. Remaining elements of 1st and 3d Battalion, assaulted the city from the east and southeast (*Map 6*).

The purpose as McChrystal recalls, was to “suddenly present insurgents with threats from multiple directions, thwarting any Taliban effort to conduct a deliberate, phased defense.”<sup>160</sup> Coalition forces encountered between 400 and 1,200 enemy combatants. By 17 February, elements clearing from outside the city started linking up with the troops from the assault. The process was slow. Despite providing civilians with ample time to leave the city, many stayed, which limited the employment of air support. The Taliban booby



**Map 6**

trapped many buildings and had planted IEDs on roads approaching the city center. Finding themselves in an unwinnable situation, the Taliban continued with a tactic that they had used in the past—engage and withdraw. Some Taliban remained in the city and did not fight, simply melting into the populace.



By early-March, military leaders deemed Marjah safe enough for Afghan President Karzai to visit, but this was by no means a symbol of the coalition's pacification of the city and Helmand Province. As was the case with many previous operations, forces won tactical victories, but they endured strategic setbacks and stalemates. McChrystal's "government in a box" was slow to install local administration and initiate projects meant to reintegrate Marjah under national authority.

While the operation was ongoing, ISAF authorities conducted a search of personally owned computers belonging to soldiers of the 5th Striker Brigade amidst rumors that members had taken photographs or videos of dead insurgents. This practice would have violated military policy, which prohibits soldiers from recording enemy casualties in a war zone. Concerned that some of Tunnell's men had sent photos and images stateside, the Army ordered its own Criminal Investigation Command to conduct a similar search, which led to the discovery of something much more serious than just photographing the dead.<sup>161</sup> An expanded search revealed that several soldiers from Company B, 2d Battalion, 1st Infantry Regiment, had murdered civilians in three separate staged incidents to make it appear as though they had been attacked by the Taliban. Later in 2011, five soldiers were convicted. The ringleader of the kill team, S. Sgt. Calvin R. Gibbs, was found guilty of three cases of premeditated murder among other charges, which resulted in a life sentence.<sup>162</sup> Spc. Jeremy N. Morlock, took a plea deal, and was sentenced to twenty-four years in prison with the opportunity for parole after seven.<sup>163</sup> In July, TF STRYKER's tour came to end when they rotated out and Col. James R. Blackburn Jr.'s 2d Cavalry Regiment deployed.

In the summer of 2010, U.S. commanders on the ground encouraged splitting RC South into two separate commands due to the growth in both U.S. and ISAF troops and the increased complexity of operations in Kandahar and Helmand. On 14 June, ISAF established RC Southwest. The sixth regional command assumed control of Helmand, Nimroz, and three districts within Farah Province. Under the new configuration, ISAF redesignated the Marine Expeditionary Brigade as I Marine Expeditionary Force

(Forward), but the unit continued to operate as TF LEATHERNECK.<sup>164</sup> Headquartered in Kandahar, General Carter's 6th Division remained in control of RC South, which now consisted of Kandahar, Daykundi, Uruzgan, and Zabul Provinces. The new command structure also encouraged better cooperative efforts with Afghan soldiers from the 205th and 215th ANA Corps.<sup>165</sup>

## MCCHRYSTAL'S EXIT

Back in April, on a return trip to Afghanistan from Europe, McChrystal attended a memorial service for a soldier who was killed during an IED attack in Zharey District. Michael M. Hastings, a reporter with *Rolling Stone*, accompanied the general and his staff. Later, the same journalist traveled to Paris with McChrystal, who was trying to convince NATO members of the new Afghanistan strategy. The long war had taken its toll on America's allies. Canadian conservative leader Stephen Harper announced the country would extend the military mission until 2011 and begin pulling its troops out with the surge drawdown. After four years in Afghanistan, the Dutch government decided to remove its troops.<sup>166</sup> In May, German President Horst Koehler resigned over comments made in reference to Afghanistan.<sup>167</sup>

Then, in late June, an article titled "The Runaway General" appeared in *Rolling Stone*. Hastings intended to draw more attention to the disconnect between leaders and soldiers on the ground concerning COIN, and the lack of success in Afghanistan. But the publication also noted disparaging remarks made by McChrystal's staff concerning the administration, though the officers spared Obama from the frat boy style banter. Not long after the comments became public, Obama summoned McChrystal to the White House. For all McChrystal's leadership qualities, he lacked the ability to handle the press and public engagement. This was not the first time he had overstepped in a public setting and this history played a role in Obama's final decision. Initially, the president wanted to give McChrystal the benefit of the doubt, noting in his memoir he thought McChrystal had been "played." However, a past pattern of military

insubordination—public statements and issues with the Defense Department—influenced his decision. Despite Gate’s insistence on McChrystal staying in command, noting his progress in Afghanistan and with President Karzai, Obama decided to replace him.

## PETRAEUS TAKES COMMAND

National Security Advisor Thomas E. Donilon suggested Petraeus as a replacement for General McChrystal.<sup>168</sup> As head of CENTCOM for more than twenty months, Petraeus was intimately familiar with the Afghanistan strategy, though he lacked field experience in the country. During 2005 and 2007, he served as commanding general of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, which oversees the dissemination of the Army’s lessons learned. Petraeus spearheaded the effort updating FM 3-24, published in 2006. While commanding Multi-National Force-Iraq in 2007, he published his “Commander’s Counterinsurgency Guide” to help train leaders.<sup>169</sup> By the time of his ISAF and USFOR-A confirmation hearings in June 2010, Petraeus was considered one of the world’s leading experts on the topic.

On 4 July, he arrived in Kabul and took command of coalition forces. The same day, he noted, “...my assumption of command represents a change in personnel, not a change in policy or strategy... [but] I will, as any new commander should...examine our civil-military effort to determine where refinements might be needed.”<sup>170</sup> He updated the Civil-Military Campaign Plan, and published Operations Plan 38302 Revision 5. Both documents reflected McChrystal’s vision, but with time already against Petraeus, he endorsed a more aggressive approach to meet the administration’s eighteen-month drawdown timeline.<sup>171</sup> Revision 5 had merged the previous campaign plan down to six lines of operation: protect the population, neutralize insurgents, develop ANSF, neutralize criminal networks, support government legitimacy, and encourage socio-economic progress.<sup>172</sup> Petraeus placed a greater emphasis on eliminating the insurgency than had McChrystal. Though he still wanted to protect the population and build Afghan forces, Petraeus viewed eliminating enemy networks and civilian security as interrelated.



**General David H. Petraeus, commander ISAF and USFOR-A, and Maj. Gen. James Terry, commander RC–South, visit forward operating bases. (*U.S. Army*)**

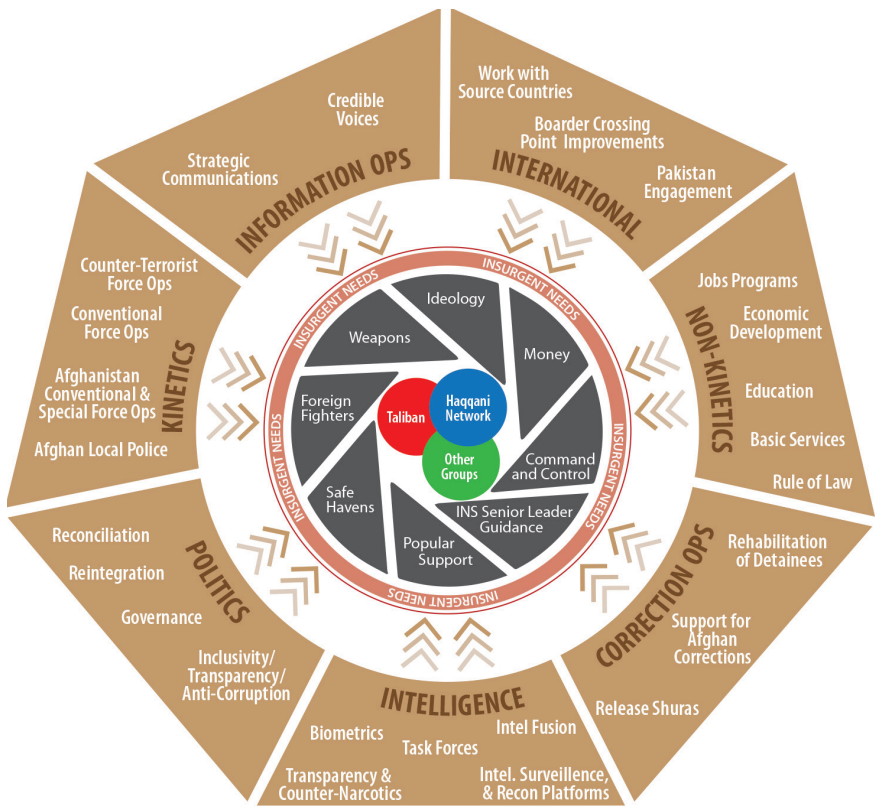
On 1 August 2010, Petraeus ordered coalition soldiers to practice the “disciplined use of force.” Many troops on the ground had complained that McChrystal’s directive unduly hampered soldiers from defending themselves. Through investigating, Petraeus discovered that as his predecessor’s guidance made its way down the chain of command, subordinate headquarters added restrictions, which made it more difficult to support troops in contact. Petraeus

later noted, "...my objective was to make sure that, number one, American and coalition soldiers are never going to feel that their commander and the overarching organization won't come to the rescue when they need it."<sup>173</sup> Heeding their concerns and knowing past practices, Petraeus barred any amendment to his instructions. He concluded, "We must train our forces to know and understand the rules of engagement and the intent of the tactical directive. We must give our troopers the confidence to take all necessary actions when it matters most, while understanding the strategic consequences of civilian casualties."<sup>174</sup>

Petraeus's tenure as ISAF commander was his first tour in country, and he decided to assimilate elements of his experience in Iraq into a nuanced approach in Afghanistan. While CENTCOM commander, he noted comparable strategies and tactics could work if planners considered the difference between the two countries. "You have to apply it in a way that's culturally appropriate. . . . You don't move into the village [in Afghanistan], you have to move on the edge of it," he noted.<sup>175</sup>

The new commander promulgated what he dubbed the "Anaconda Strategy," which combined elements of McChrystal's population-centric approach with the dynamics of McKiernan's favored kinetic model. To conceptualize his plan, Petraeus condensed all the economic, political, and military mechanisms needed to defeat the insurgency into a one-page diagram, which illustrated numerous military and government programs working together to suffocate the enemy (*Diagram 2*). Considering the timing of the Iraqi surge and decrease in violence in Iraq, it is understandable that many believed Petraeus's approach could be retrofitted for Afghanistan, but other factors contributed to success in Iraq.<sup>176</sup> In Afghanistan, the situation on the ground was much different. The Taliban had located their primary bases of operation in neighboring Pakistan, which provided sanctuary. Additionally, the Iraq surge benefitted from the so-called "Sunni Awakening," when Sunni Arabs, with American support, rose up against the harsh rule of al-Qaeda in Iraq in Al Anbar Province. In Afghanistan, there was no equivalent Pashtun uprising against the Taliban during this period. The greater





**Diagram 2: Petraeus's Anaconda Plan (Source: E. J. Degen and Mark Reardon, *Modern War in an Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 293.)**

concentration of the population in cities in Iraq and the much larger forces available also made it easier to implement a population-centric counterinsurgency doctrine.

### OPERATION HAMKARI, SUMMER 2010 DECEMBER 2010

The planning for a large-scale operation near and in Kandahar City had been in the works since November 2009. Initially intended to be the final phase of MOSHTARAK, ISAF redesignated it as Operation HAMKARI (Pashtu for cooperation). The strategy involved three

stages to secure Kandahar City and the surrounding area. The first called for an increased presence in the city and enhanced security measures. From there, ISAF, ANSF, and U.S. forces would expand outward into Arghandab District and conduct clearing missions. The final phase was to clear Zharey and Panjwa'i Districts to the south and southwest.<sup>177</sup> Upon successful completion of HAMKARI, Afghan forces would take over security for the region.

The first phase got underway in June 2010 when ANSF increased their presence in Kandahar City, erecting sixteen checkpoints.<sup>178</sup> Although the system could not altogether stop enemy infiltration, it did intercept some insurgents and IED shipments.<sup>179</sup>

In late-June, Col. Jeffrey R. Martindale's 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division (TF RAIDER), replaced the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division. Col. Arthur A. Kandarian's 2d BCT, 101st Airborne Division (Combined Task Force STRIKE), supplanted 2d Battalion, 508th Infantry Regiment, in the Arghandab River Valley. In addition to the brigade's organic units, Kandarian received tactical control of Lt. Col. Rodger Lemon's 1st Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment.<sup>180</sup> As ISAF and ANSF continued to expand the security perimeter around the city, Special Forces units conducted raids that targeted Taliban leadership. In preparation for the second and third phase of HAMKARI, ISAF began shaping operations in Arghandab and Zharey Districts.

On 25 July, a nighttime airborne assault by ANA commandos and their U.S. counterparts opened the second phase of HAMKARI. Reinforced by air support, the mission aimed to dislodge the Taliban from their stronghold, an approximate 15 square kilometer segment of the valley. To the west, Lt. Col. David S. Flynn's 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, served as a provisional infantry battalion, and with some of the Afghan army's more experienced forces initiated dismounted clearing operations to establish a bridgehead across a nearby canal.<sup>181</sup> The Taliban had planted IED belts around the local villages, which was a significant hindrance to Flynn's troops. During the first week of the operation, his unit suffered thirty casualties clearing the objective.<sup>182</sup>



After establishing COP Stout to limit enemy freedom of movement, the battalion moved north and set up another outpost on the outskirts of Babur. Early coalition maneuvers indicated that the Arghandab had become a hub for IED production. Throughout August and September, Flynn's troops held their positions on the east side of the canal, while bombing runs and special operation's missions weakened Taliban forces.<sup>183</sup> In September, ISAF assigned Lt. Col. Robert J. Harmon Jr.'s 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, from RC East, to Kandarian.

The enemy avoided head-on engagements throughout the fall but persisted in their use of IEDs and their preferred hit and run guerrilla tactics. On 6 October, after the 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery, ran into significant IED rings around villages on the northwestern side of the river, Flynn requested air support. Petraeus approved the strike because most of the civilian population had previously fled due to a growing Taliban presence. The Air Force later dropped twenty 2,000-pound bombs and fifty 500-pound bombs, flattening the villages. In the ensuing weeks, Flynn rebuilt Tarak Kolache, but few citizens returned.<sup>184</sup> In preparation for operations in Zharey and Panwa'i Districts, 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery, and 1st Battalion, 66th Armored, were reassigned to TF RAIDER. ISAF success in destroying insurgent strongholds in central Arghandab was reflected in the decrease in attacks from fifty a week in August to fifteen in October.<sup>185</sup>

In the fall, an unlikely source came forward to assist special operations forces in northern Kandahar. Col. Abdul Raziq, a police commander from Spin Boldak, offered to help coalition forces clear IEDs in the area of operation. A controversial figure for his alleged criminal activity and brutality in dealing with the Taliban, Raziq and his men helped remove upwards of one hundred IEDs and took many enemy insurgents prisoner.<sup>186</sup> His influence was a significant factor aiding ISAF troops who wrestled away parts of the province from Taliban forces and gathered actionable intelligence. Incoming commander of Canadian forces in Kandahar, Brig. Gen. Dean J. Milner later noted, "He's been extremely effective [but] I think you always have a few concerns because he's had some challenges in the




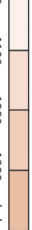
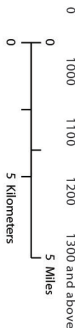
past.”<sup>187</sup> President Karzai later promoted Raziq to brigadier general and named him commander of all police forces in Kandahar.

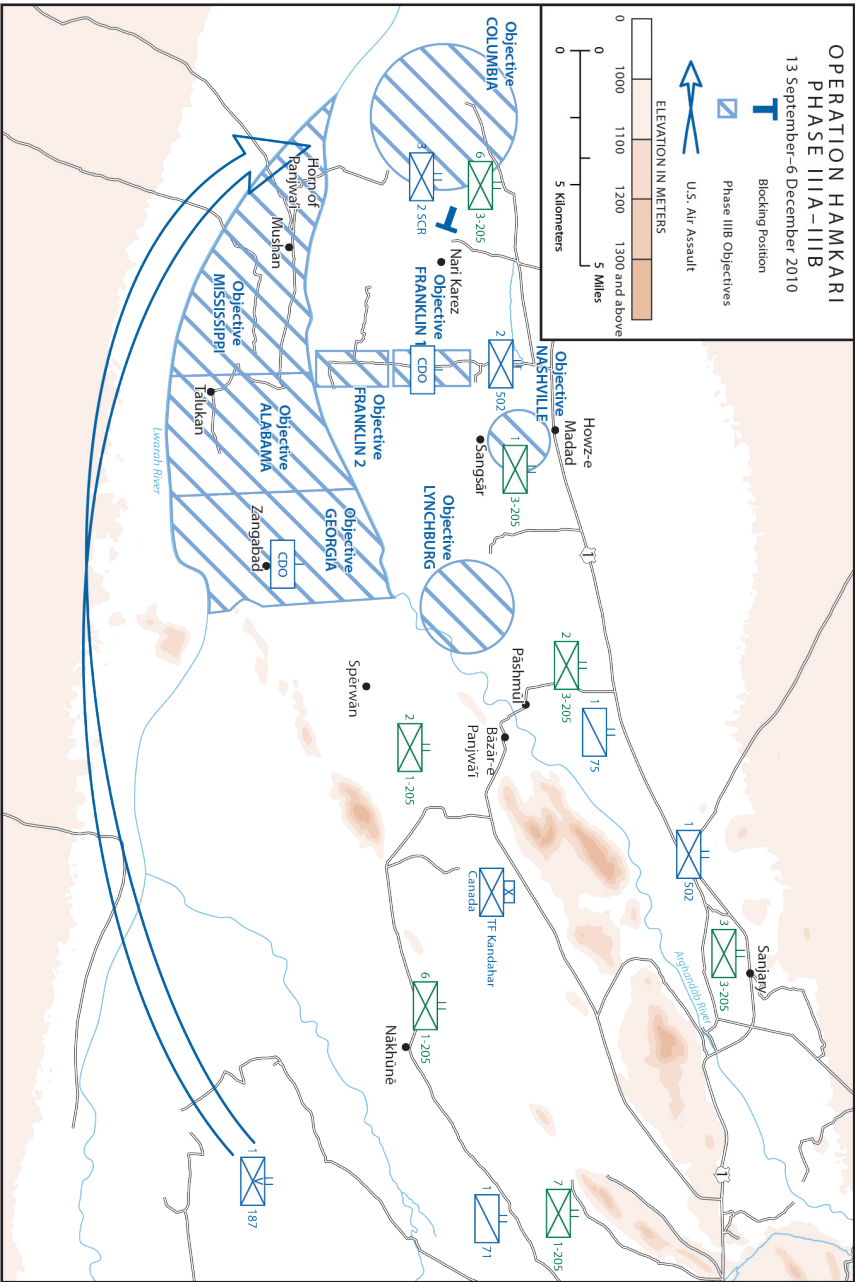
Before the execution of the final phase of HAMKARI, ISAF redesignated it Operation DRAGON STRIKE. The new mission was a series of mutually reinforcing maneuvers across Zharey and Panwa'i Districts, aiming to disrupt enemy movement around Highway 1, eliminate strongholds and IED facilities, and hold the territory (*Map 7*). This would be no easy task. This was the Taliban homeland and the location where the movement started. Throughout the entirety of the war, no permanent ISAF or Afghan government presence had lasted in the area.<sup>188</sup> The Taliban would make the endeavor much more difficult by assassinating tribal elders who cooperated with the coalition.<sup>189</sup>

Prior to the start of DRAGON STRIKE, shaping operations in Zharey revealed enemy lines of communication, control points, command and control elements, and weapons caches.<sup>190</sup> Three U.S. battalions from TF STRIKE partnered with ANA battalions and began clearing operations on 15 September 2010. On the eastern portion of Highway 1, Lt. Col. Johnny K. Davis's 1st Battalion, 502d Infantry Regiment, attacked the Afghan village of Makuan, a strategically located stronghold for the Taliban. With assistance from marines and British engineers, Davis's unit moved through a 300-meter IED belt and entered the hamlet to discover it abandoned by the local population.<sup>191</sup> The small village had been converted into a bastion with bunkers and fortified fighting positions. The Taliban also rigged many of the buildings with explosives. After defending against a counterattack the first night, the battalion continued clearing eastward. Speaking about his unit's operations, Davis noted, “This is where you separate the enemy from the people. This is one of many phases where we not only bring heavy security but we bring governance where governance has not been before.”<sup>192</sup> By early October, coalition forces had cleared eastern Zharey. Unfortunately, few Afghans who had fled these areas returned after the clearing operations.

Operations in central Zharey turned into a three-stage mission for Lt. Col. Thomas N. McFadyen's 1st Squadron, 75th Cavalry. First,

**OPERATION HAWKARI**  
**PHASE IIIA-IIIIB**  
 13 September-6 December 2010

 Phase IIIB Objectives  
 Blocking Position  
 U.S. Air Assault  
 ELEVATION IN METERS  




Map 7

the unit secured a cluster of settlements along the Arghandab River, then the surrounding area of Highway 1, before lastly, moving west and eliminating the enemy controlled hub in Siyah Choy and other areas in eastern Sangisar.<sup>193</sup> Initially facing stiff resistance and daily contact with the Taliban, 1st Squadron had completed all three stages by mid-October.

Similar operations and success occurred in western Zharey. Lt. Col. Peter N. Benchoff's 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry Regiment, advanced into the district from its western borders, moving east to clear the area of Taliban fighters and influence. On 26 September, coalition forces attacked enemy strongholds around Sangisar and secured the area after three days of consistent fighting. Later, south of Howz-e Madad, ISAF and ANA forces removed the last Taliban foothold for launching attacks on Highway 1.<sup>194</sup>

On 15 October, Colonel Harmon's 1st Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, three ANA battalions, and special operations forces conducted a two-day operation displacing the final Taliban remnants from Panjwa'i district. Harmon initially expected fierce resistance but discovered that remaining enemy leadership had fled and melted into neighboring population centers.<sup>195</sup> ISAF and special operations forces' missions in the fall splintered Taliban leadership, forcing them to mostly abandon Kandahar City's outlying districts.<sup>196</sup> By November, larger pockets of Taliban activity in southern Afghanistan no longer remained. Without high level leadership to guide them, Taliban fighters lingered but not in large numbers.

With the conclusion of Operations MOHSTARAK, HAMKARI, and DRAGON STRIKE, ISAF and ANSF transitioned from the clear phase of counterinsurgency doctrine into the hold and build stages. Clearing involved battalion-level operations, but as the handover occurred, most missions were company size and smaller.<sup>197</sup> Platoon-sized patrols still engaged with the Taliban. In Marjah, where ISAF troops had steadily increased government and ANA presence for several months, Marines encountered a surprise attack by Taliban at Patrol Base DAKOTA. While manning a rooftop security position, Marine L.Cpl. William "Kyle" Carpenter threw his body on a grenade that landed in his sandbag position, taking the full force of the explosion

and shielding a fellow marine.<sup>198</sup> For his courageous and selfless action, he was later awarded the Medal of Honor. Despite renewed efforts by ISAF soldiers in southern Afghanistan, Taliban attacks continued well into 2013. In November 2010, for the first time, an American unit took the reins in RC South when Maj. Gen. James L. Terry's 10th Mountain Division replaced Carter's 6th United Kingdom Division.

With large-scale operations in southern Afghanistan slowing down, German, American, and Afghan forces in RC North ramped up activity to counter the rise of the northern insurgency. The 1st BCT, 10th Mountain Division, spread throughout RC North with units in Faryab, Balkh, Kunduz, and Baghlan Provinces. The 2d Battalion, 22d Infantry Regiment, was detached from its organic command and assigned to the Kabul Military Training Center, and 1st Squadron, 71st Cavalry Regiment, supported operations in RC South. Lt. Col. Russell S. Lewis's 1st Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, had earlier reinforced 1,200 German soldiers and other ANSF elements. Lewis's unit was in Kunduz and Baghlan Provinces and stationed at FOBs Kunduz and Pul-e-Khumri.<sup>199</sup> Partnering with the ANA 209th Shahin Corps and the 303d Pamir Zone of the Afghan National Police in the fall, coalition forces moved clockwise through Kunduz, clearing districts and securing highways around the provincial capital. Much of the resistance stemmed from the Taliban's ability to gain support from sympathetic portions of the Pashtun population.<sup>200</sup> Special operations forces assisted conventional units through Village Stability Operations and raids that focused on high-value targets. Maneuvers continued into early 2011 with insurgent groups consolidating into areas less frequented by coalition troops.

With most districts cleared and small pockets of Taliban and local insurgents remaining, a disquieting stalemate had settled in.<sup>201</sup> ISAF operations had prevented the insurgency from becoming more deeply entrenched, but also revealed shortcomings in the viability of using local police forces for security. Suffering from poor training, discipline issues, and limited loyalty to the central government, a fealty which was only obtained through patronage, local forces delivered more uncertainty than stability in the region.<sup>202</sup>

## RC EAST RESTRUCTURES

While the coalition wrapped up its offensive in southern Afghanistan, the Army in RC East started to consolidate and realign its forces. Back in June, Maj. Gen. John F. Campbell's 101st Airborne Division deployed, taking over operational control of RC East. Now designated CJTF-101, the divisional headquarters had at its disposal more resources in RC East than any other period of the war. Campbell's maneuver units consisted of Col. Andrew P. Poppas's 1st BCT, 101st Airborne Division (TF BASTOGNE), Col. James H. Johnson III's 173d Airborne BCT (TF BAYONET), Col. Sean M. Jenkins's 4th BCT, 101st Airborne Division (TF CURAHEE), and Col. Viet Luong's 3d Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (TF RAKKASAN). Additionally, a Polish task force, National Guard units, and logistics elements supported operations in RC East.

Over the course of the summer, CJTF-101 headquarters approved Poppas's proposal to close combat outposts located in the Pech River Valley. Beyond intercepting black-market shipments coming in from Pakistan and disrupting enemy movement and egress routes, these outposts did little to carry out counterinsurgency doctrine. But before withdrawing troops in the region, the Army wanted to inflict losses on enemy insurgents operating in the area to disrupt their capacity to function throughout winter. Over the course of two weeks in November 2010, a joint U.S. and Afghan operation, codenamed BULLDOG BITE, targeted Taliban safe havens in the Watapur District.<sup>203</sup>

A series of night attacks beginning on 12 November, initiated operations in the valley. The commander of 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, Lt. Col. Joseph A. Ryan, devised a plan to space out air assaults into both sides of the valley.<sup>204</sup> Over the course of two weeks, Ryan's paratroopers and the 1st and 2d Battalions from the 75th Ranger Regiment, inserted into villages in the valley and encountered varying levels of enemy contact. Two days after the operation started, a heavy engagement broke out, lasting six hours. As part of this battle, airmen from the U.S. Air Force and the Alaska Air National Guard's 212th Rescue Squadron saved wounded soldiers. Providing overhead support, Apaches and Kiowas expended their

payloads before rotating out with other helicopters. Once munitions had been exhausted, an F-18 dropped a “danger close” 2,000-pound bomb on an enemy position located near coalition forces.<sup>205</sup> Before the Taliban broke contact, they had managed to kill five American soldiers. Operation BULLDOG BITE ended on 25 November. The two-week incursion into Watapur Valley resulted in upwards of 152 enemy insurgents killed.<sup>206</sup> Six paratroopers, an Army Ranger, and three ANA soldiers died during combat operations.<sup>207</sup> Coalition forces discovered several weapons caches and managed to weaken Taliban elements in the region in preparation for pulling out of the valley.

It took nearly two months for Petraeus to approve the plan, named Operation PECH REALIGNMENT, to disengage American forces from the valley, because of resistance from Karzai and ANA commanders. Afghan officials contended that the shift in U.S. troops amounted to abandoning territory where insurgents were deeply embedded. They also raised concerns regarding their own readiness to handle the area.<sup>208</sup> Ryan and Campbell argued that counterinsurgency did not work in the remote Pech River Valley, away from Afghan population centers, and that the U.S. presence was part of the problem.<sup>209</sup> Strategically, the pullout aligned with previous American withdrawal of forces from remote areas in Kunar and Nuristan.

On 15 February 2011, the planning team briefed Petraeus, who authorized PECH REALIGNMENT. One week after the order, ISAF started withdrawing from the valley and shutting down operations at FOB Blessing, near the town of Wanat in eastern Afghanistan. The Americans made one exception to the plan. The eastern most combat outpost, COP Honaker-Miracle, remained for the purpose of insulating Asadabad, the capitol city of Kunar, from insurgents.<sup>210</sup> On 4 March, U.S. troops held a ceremony signifying the transfer of the base to Afghan forces. Though not designed to do so, handing over control to Afghan forces would later provide insight into their still-limited capabilities.

In April, Col. Richard C. Kim’s 3d Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, replaced TF BASTOGNE and assumed responsibility for Nuristan, Nangahar, and Kunar Provinces. Kim





**A soldier from 3d Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, prepares to walk into Lagham Valley in support of Operation BULLDOG BITE, Kunar Province, 15 October 2010. (DVIDS)**

quickly identified the Pech River Valley as a top priority during the first months of the unit's deployment. He concluded that instability in the region had worsened since the transfer of authority to Afghan forces and that coalition troops needed to reestablish a presence. The responsibility of this task fell to the soldiers of Lt. Col. Colin P. Tuley's 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment (TF CACTI), which waited two months before going on the offensive because they needed to gather intelligence and develop a campaign plan. All indicators showed that enemy forces used the village of Kur Bagh to carry out direct and indirect attacks against COP Honaker-Miracle. Task Force CACTI would use this combat outpost as the staging ground for Operation HAMMER DOWN.<sup>211</sup>

While the task force prepared to reinsert into Pech River and Watapur Valleys, another covert mission was taking shape. For several months, a small cadre of analysts from the CIA had followed leads to the potential whereabouts of Osama bin Laden. Many believed that he had been hiding in the tribal areas of Pakistan, only making an appearance in the occasional propaganda video. Pouring over intelligence and tracking a known al-Qaeda courier, the organization believed bin Laden was located in a compound on the outskirts of Abbottabad, 56 kilometers north of Islamabad.<sup>212</sup> Working together, CIA Director Panetta and Admiral McRaven devised a raid to capture or kill the terrorist leader. Obama initially considered a drone strike and bombing the compound, but due to the potential of political fallout and civilian casualties, he elected to move forward with a special operations mission.<sup>213</sup> On 2 May 2011, twenty-three Navy Seals departed Jalalabad Airfield. Ninety minutes after the start of Operation NEPTUNE SPEAR, special operators inserted into the compound and killed bin Laden. Nearly a decade after the attacks on 11 September 2001, the successful mission had provided some closure for the victims of the attack. Despite the outcome, the al-Qaeda leader's death did little to mitigate the war in Afghanistan.

Back in RC East, the HAMMER DOWN plan called for CH-47 Chinooks to insert nearly a battalion size force into four landing zones. Once on the ground, troops would first set up staging areas, and then move to clear the Gambir jungle and village of Tsangar Darah.<sup>214</sup> After dark on 24 June, the 6th Squadron, 6th Cavalry Regiment, part of a multifunctional aviation task force, ferried elements of TF CACTI into Watapur Valley. Satellite imagery had assisted planners in determining landing zones, but once in the area, some pilots discovered the ridgeline locations too steep, forcing them to alternate locations. On 25 June, one Chinook crashed into the hillside near its landing position. Fortunately, the landing gear prevented the helicopter from rolling down the cliff side and saved the lives of all on board, but the crash resulted in thirteen wounded.<sup>215</sup> Tuley, who oversaw the operation from COP Honaker-Miracle, ordered the reserve units into the field to cover losses.

What was anticipated to be a 48-hour mission to clear two villages turned into six days of static fighting requiring several resupply missions. On 1 July, the last of TF CACTI exfiltrated from the valley. The initial objective of HAMMER DOWN was not met due to units running into a concentrated adversary that remained and fought. The coalition killed approximately 120 enemy fighters and wounded 50 more.<sup>216</sup> Coalition forces suffered five killed in action and roughly two dozen wounded. By the end of July, hundreds of U.S. and ANA troops would go back into Pech, advancing toward FOB Blessing.

## THE AFGHANISTAN DRAWDOWN

In a press release on 22 June 2011, President Obama followed through with his promised troop drawdown. “When I announced this surge at West Point, we set clear objectives,” he noted, “to refocus on al-Qaeda, to reverse the Taliban’s momentum, and train Afghan security forces to defend their own country.”<sup>217</sup> As a result, the U.S. mission would transition from combat to support-oriented operations. He proclaimed that 10,000 U.S. troops would leave Afghanistan by the end of 2011, to be followed by another 23,000 in 2012. By 2014, Afghanistan would take responsibility for the country’s security.<sup>218</sup> This did not mean that all U.S. forces would withdraw. The drawdown would place U.S. troops in country at approximately 67,000, down from a surge peak of 100,000. And this total was still double the number of Americans who were in Afghanistan before the surge. In accordance with earlier plans, some ISAF countries had deadlines to reduce troop strength, while others set similar timetables to those announced by Obama.

Petraeus knew the drawdown was inevitable but had hoped the success in RC South would convince the president to leave surge forces longer. In Afghanistan, his intention was to secure and hold RC South long enough that the Afghan government could take over operations and then transition excess forces to RC East by the end of 2012.<sup>219</sup> Obama was not swayed by the general’s argument, but Petraeus decided that, “. . . enough troops and civilians will remain in Afghanistan to pursue all the campaign plan’s lines of operation—



**S. Sgt. Thomas Manes from Company D, 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, gives a pilot a number one sign after receiving a supply drop during Operation HAMMER DOWN in the Watapoor district of Kunar Province, 26 June 2011. (DVIDS)**

protecting the people, dismantling insurgent networks, building Afghan forces, aiding local government, fostering development, [and] attacking corruption.”<sup>220</sup> He still believed that further progress in all these areas was required before a complete transition could occur.

At the Kabul Conference back in July 2010, NATO formalized the process of handing over operations to the Afghan government

and security forces. They established the Joint Afghan-NATO *Inteqal* Board, from the Dari and Pashtu word for transition. The consortium used three guidelines to judge the potential transfer of a province to Afghan control. First, it looked at the capability of the ANSF to handle existing and new security challenges. Second, assessments considered the ability of the Afghan government to provide the rule of law at both provincial and local levels. Lastly, the board judged the capacity of the government to sustain socio-economic development.<sup>221</sup>

By the time of the first transition on 17 July, ANSF had grown to 276,000 personnel. One day after ISAF handed over authority and security responsibilities of Bamyan Province to Afghanistan authorities, Petraeus relinquished command of ISAF and USFOR-A. Obama had earlier nominated him as the new Director of the CIA. After receiving a unanimous vote from the Senate and retiring from the military, Petraeus assumed the new position. Marine General John R. Allen replaced him and oversaw the drawdown, continued training, and the *Inteqal* process. By the end of the surge, counterinsurgency doctrine had fallen from grace. The new Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin E. Dempsey, emphasized to Allen the importance of not thinking in terms of counterinsurgency.<sup>222</sup> Moving forward, policy and military leaders would refocus on counterterrorism operations.

## ANALYSIS

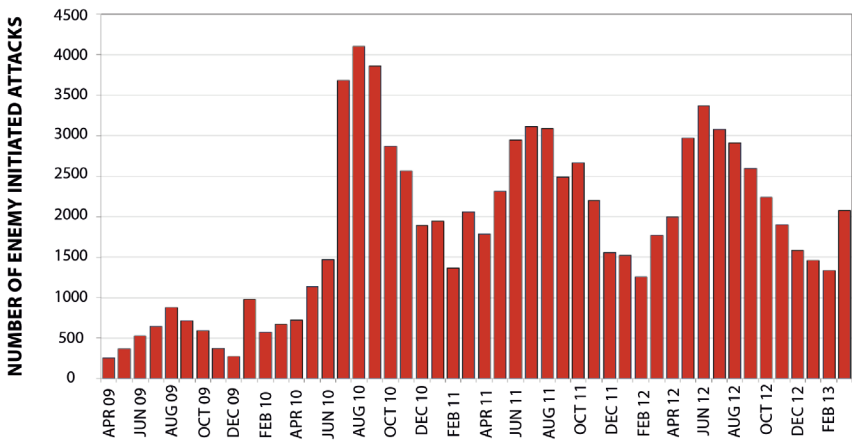
The Obama administration hoped that a surge in Afghanistan would have the same dramatic impact on the course of the war as the one in Iraq. When the surge was over and the extra troops went home, observers realized that the Afghan version failed to achieve all objectives, which had been to (1) disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, (2) halt Taliban momentum, and (3) build Afghan security capabilities to the point of taking over

the war. Viewed through a variety of lenses, the surge made progress in some areas, but major shortcomings continued in others.

Throughout the surge period, al-Qaeda remained a minor but persistent threat. Although the least materially significant in terms of direct combat, the organization posed the greatest international threat to the United States and its coalition partners.<sup>223</sup> U.S. drone strikes targeted and diminished the militant groups' leadership, which was located in safe havens in the federally administered tribal areas inside of Pakistan. In 2010, CIA Director Leon Panetta estimated that approximately 50–100 al-Qaeda terrorists were inside Afghanistan.<sup>224</sup> Some reports suggested that these operatives had moved back into the heavily forested areas in Kunar and Nuristan Provinces to escape drone attacks. A year later, Petraeus emphasized the necessity of stability operations to prevent reinfiltration. By the time of bin Laden's death, al-Qaeda mostly existed as an ideological movement. Although the surge did not accomplish the goals Obama set to the letter, conventional operations and counterterrorism activities prevented al-Qaeda from effectively reestablishing themselves in Afghanistan.

When McKiernan took command of coalition forces, the pendulum had swung in favor of the Taliban—especially in RC South where the movement originated. Realistically, the general proclaimed fighting in Afghanistan as a stalemate. With the goal of reversing this trend, consecutive ISAF commanders painstakingly worked to create unity of command and effort. In RC South, British, Canadian, Dutch, Australian, and Romanian forces all carried out different campaigns—each with their own set of military restrictions. When McKiernan arrived in 2008, he immediately deduced that “there was a missing sense of unity of command and unity of effort.”<sup>225</sup> His decision to create USFOR-A streamlined the command structure and allowed the ISAF commander to provide operational guidance to all forces. The formation of ISAF Joint Command helped ISAF headquarters divest itself from directing the operational level of the war. By 2010, the coalition had achieved a certain level of unity of command. But the continued existence of national caveats and limited forces offset this progress.





**Diagram 3: Number of Enemy Initiated Attacks (Source: Brookings Institute)**

ISAF commanders also worked to bring the differing missions under the same umbrella. American forces in RC East initially carried out counterterrorism while other regional commands under ISAF authority executed a hybrid strategy of nation building that included elements of counterinsurgency. Though having reservations at the outset, McKiernan started the process for ISAF troops to fully embrace an American counterinsurgency doctrine focused on protecting the population. The NATO governing body would not completely accept this until late-2010 under McChrystal’s guidance. Embracing this concept meant that nation building now occupied a prominent place in U.S. strategy.

One measure of progress was the level of violence during the surge (*Diagram 3*). The number of insurgent attacks ebbed and flowed with troops in country (*Diagram 4*). With the additional soldiers in theater, the coalition had the capability to carry out increased operations—meaning more kinetic engagements. In turn, with all the activities made possible with an increased troop presence—more patrols, and engagement with the population—the Taliban had more opportunities to target coalition troops. Unlike Iraq, there was no dramatic drop in violence that indicated substantial improvement in the situation.



# Diagram 4: U.S. Troop Levels in Afghanistan

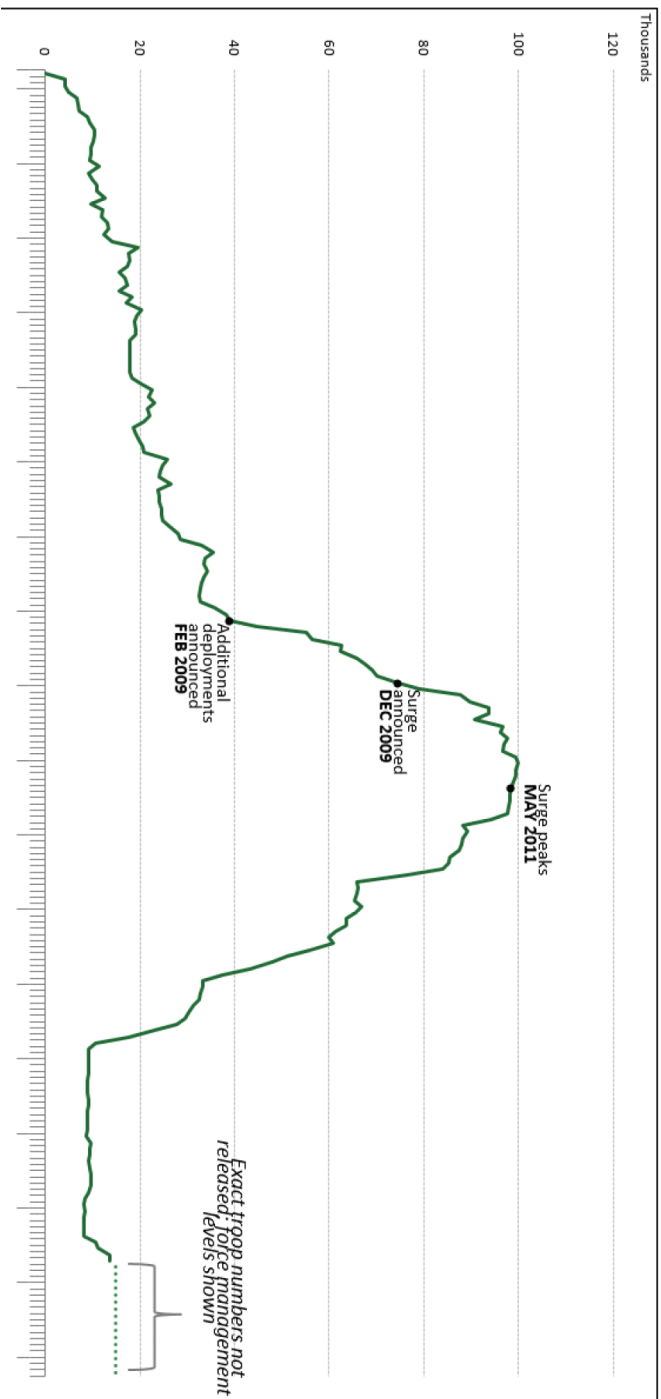


Diagram 4: U.S. Troop Levels in Afghanistan (Source: CRS Report)

The government's ability to garner popular support fell well short of expectations. In Iraq, because of al-Qaeda's brutality, including targeting Sunni Sheiks, the coalition and Sunni tribes in Al Anbar Province formed an agreement in 2006. Having a common enemy forged an unlikely alliance to drive the terrorist organization from the region. Similar circumstances did not materialize in Afghanistan. The Taliban was a homegrown insurgency, unlike al-Qaeda who recruited internationally. In some areas of RC South, the Pashtun population was sympathetic to their cause. In other situations, many tribes only chose a side out of necessity or fear.

Despite the limited number of troops, the coalition established outposts in remote areas, and each garrison was necessarily small. In some locations, these troops could only be resupplied by air and had limited artillery and air support, which made defending against a concerted enemy attack difficult. The self-imposed problem of having isolated positions conflicted with the counterinsurgency principle of protecting the population, but they remained due to limited resources and ISAF's main effort, which targeted the Taliban's center of gravity in the remote south of the country. These outpost positions provided coverage and a forward presence but did not fundamentally change the situation.

Occupying areas in RC South that had previously been under Taliban influence tested coalition doctrine and strategy. Part of the process of pacifying Marjah during Operation MOSHTARAK involved inserting local government after coalition forces cleared the area of insurgents. But the idea proved extremely difficult to implement for a number of reasons. Residual fighting continued well into 2013. Many of the Afghans destined to run the city's administration and provide basic necessities and the rule of law were illiterate and lacked the prerequisite knowledge to take on such a monumental task. Col. Gian Gentile later noted, "Unfortunately, American strategy has failed in Afghanistan (and Iraq) because it was founded on an illusion—that American-style counterinsurgency could win Muslim hearts and minds at gunpoint and create viable nation-states on the Western model virtually from scratch in a short period of time."<sup>226</sup>

Per the Army's own doctrine, successful COIN operations can take decades to achieve success.

Corruption also continued to create instability and instilled in the Afghan people a lack of trust in the Karzai government. The circumstances revolving around the 2009 election furthered these notions with the population and western governments alike. To combat the issue at the local and provincial levels, task forces worked to counter fraud and the narcotics trade. But in many cases, Afghan bureaucrats turned a blind eye to these criminal enterprises. Former State Department official, Barnett Rubin, noted, "The basic assumption was that corruption is an Afghan problem and we are the solution. . . . But there is one indispensable ingredient for corruption—money—and we were the ones who had the money."<sup>227</sup> The U.S. government had failed to consider that its largesse fueled the fraudulent activities.<sup>228</sup>

The training of ANSF continued to be a thorn in the coalition's side. ISAF, the United States, and Afghan forces all bear a portion of responsibility for these shortcomings. Before taking command in Afghanistan, Petraeus reviewed the training and equipment program and discovered the metrics did not account for important factors, such as retention rates.<sup>229</sup> These evaluations misrepresented the ANA because they depicted the manning, training completion, and equipping of units and not their combat readiness.<sup>230</sup> Toward the end of the surge, ANA total strength approached 160,000, but attrition rates had steadily increased on a monthly basis since September 2010.<sup>231</sup>

Many Afghan soldiers were incapable of performing the most basic military tasks without guidance from coalition forces due to low literacy rates, which slowed the education and training process, and had a direct impact on coalition forces' ability to train professional commanders. In some cases, ANA soldiers marked their weapons with symbols, so they knew which was their own, because they did not understand numbers. A lack of death benefits provided by the Afghan government and the hardship of going months without pay due to corruption also kept morale low. The few educated leaders that did exist were often replaced due to corruption and cronyism.<sup>232</sup>

In spite of these shortcomings, the ANA Commando Corps—based on the 75th Ranger Regiment structure—was a highlight for Afghan security forces. Only comprising approximately 7 percent of total Afghan forces, these elite trained units conducted upwards of 80 percent of the host country's fighting effort.<sup>233</sup>

The creation of ISAF Joint Command and NATO Training Mission—Afghanistan were supposed to correct many of these issues, but their formation was a late development during the surge. Working against the clock and with limited trainers, the coalition had no choice but to focus on quantity over quality. The average trainer to trainee ratio was 1:79. In some locations the proportion was more favorable, but in the worst-case scenario, it was 1:466.<sup>234</sup> Because of the urgency to field an Afghan army, many soldiers received only the most rudimentary training. The more experienced ANA commandos endured a minimum six-week course with additional field training. The inherent difficulties in training an illiterate population forced NTM-A to adapt and focus on basic education, but these programs had little impact as they started toward the end of the surge.

Over the course of two administrations, both policymakers and generals conducted a series of planned reviews of the war effort in Afghanistan. Though subtle changes to strategic and operational aims occurred, they were not always consistently carried out in country. In the summer of 2011, U.S. forces executed a realignment in RC East, closing outposts and handing over control of a forward operating base to Afghan forces, only to reverse course months later and push back into Pech River Valley.

Like President Lyndon B. Johnson during the Vietnam War, Obama was reluctant to expand the war to the degree military leaders in Afghanistan believed necessary. The surge had blunted Taliban momentum and bought time for Afghan forces. Nonetheless, with the deadline publicly set for the withdrawal of forces, the Taliban just needed to wait for the drawdown.

The surge was a costly effort. The period accounted for far more than half of American casualties in the twenty-year war. Over the course of 2009–2011, the U.S. suffered 1,224 killed in action and another 12,595 wounded. Combined with ISAF and ANSF, the

coalition had close to 5,500 lost due to enemy action and other causes, and approximately 20,000 who suffered injuries in the war zone.<sup>235</sup> The surge did not fundamentally alter the situation—the Afghan government failed to generate popular support and Afghan security forces did not get substantially better at being able to carry on the war themselves. By June 2011, Obama had ordered the drawdown of American troops. This decision did not mean the end of the conflict, however, and it remained uncertain if the surge had laid the groundwork for eventual victory or merely prolonged the stalemate for another few years.

1. Ann Scott Tyson, “Pentagon Critical of NATO Allies,” *Washington Post*, 12 Jun 2007.
2. Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook, 2010* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 1, 5.
3. Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook*, 1.
4. Brian F. Neumann and Colin J. Williams, *Operation ENDURING FREEDOM: March 2005–January 2009* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2020), 15.
5. Neumann and Williams, *Operation ENDURING FREEDOM*, 18.
6. Neumann and Williams, *Operation ENDURING FREEDOM*, 70.
7. For other CMH publications on Afghanistan and Iraq, see Mark R. Folse, *Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, 2001–2002* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2022); Brian F. Neumann, Lisa Munday, and Jon B. Mikolashek, *Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, March 2002–April 2005* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 2013); Neumann and Williams, *Operation ENDURING FREEDOM*; Nicholas J. Schlosser, *The Surge, 2007–2008* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2017); Katelyn K. Tietzen-Wisdom, *Transition and Withdrawal: The U.S. Army in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and Operation NEW DAWN 2009–2011* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, forthcoming); and, Mason W. Watson, *The Conflict with ISIS: Operation INHERENT RESOLVE, June 2014–January 2020* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2021).
8. Edmund J. Degen and Mark J. Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land: The United States Army in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2021), 470.
9. Mark Silinsky, *The Taliban: Afghanistan’s Most Lethal Insurgents* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2014), 89–92.
10. Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 5–6, 35; Courtney Kube, “The Taliban is Gaining Strength and Territory in Afghanistan,” NBC News, 30 Jan 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/numbers-afghanistan-are-not-good-n842651>, Historians Files, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC (hereinafter Historians Files, CMH). Estimates for Taliban forces are difficult to produce for a variety of reasons. Giustozzi provides

an estimate of 17,000 for 2006. Kube quotes U.S. officials placing the total number of Taliban in the range of 20,000 for 2014. There are outlying estimates that have Taliban strength in the 30,000 to 60,000 range.

11. Robert A. Pape, "To Beat the Taliban, Fight from Afar," *New York Times*, 14 Oct 2009, Section A, 35; Susan G. Chesser, *Afghanistan Casualties: Military Force and Civilians*, R41084, (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 6 Dec 2012), 1–2.

12. Mark Silinsky, *The Taliban: Afghanistan's Most Lethal Insurgents*, 144–45.

13. Interv, Brian F. Neumann and Lt. Col. John R. Stark, OEF Study Grp, with Gen (Ret.) David D. McKiernan, 11 Mar 2015, 25, Historians Files, OEF Study Gp, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC (CMH).

14. Neumann and Williams, *Operation ENDURING FREEDOM*, 70.

15. Neumann and Williams, *Operation ENDURING FREEDOM*, 69–70.

16. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 163.

17. Placemat, NATO, International Security Forces, Dec 2008, [https://www.nato.int/isaf/placemats\\_archive/2008-12-01-ISAF-Placemat.pdf](https://www.nato.int/isaf/placemats_archive/2008-12-01-ISAF-Placemat.pdf), Historians Files, CMH; Ian S. Livingston and Michael O'Hanlon, "Afghanistan Index," 6.

18. Department of Defense (DoD), *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2008*, Rpt to Cong., August 2008, 21–22, [https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/Joint\\_Staff/10-F-0018\\_Report\\_on\\_Progress\\_Toward\\_Security\\_and\\_Stability\\_in\\_Afghanistan.pdf](https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/Joint_Staff/10-F-0018_Report_on_Progress_Toward_Security_and_Stability_in_Afghanistan.pdf), Historians Files, CMH.

19. Livingston and O'Hanlon, "Afghanistan Index," (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 14 May 2014), 6, <https://www.brookings.edu/afghanistanindex>, Historians Files, CMH.

20. Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Field Manual (FM) 3–24, Counterinsurgency (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2006), 13.

21. Thomas E. Ricks, "Inside an Afghan Battle Gone Wrong: What Happened at Wanat?" *Foreign Policy*, 28 Jan 2009, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/01/28/inside-an-afghan-battle-gone-wrong-what-happened-at-wanat-i/>, Historians Files, CMH.

22. Neumann and Williams, *Operation ENDURING FREEDOM*, 78.

23. Interv, Neumann and Stark, with McKiernan, 11 Mar 2015, 147; Interv, Col. E. J. Degen and Lt. Col. John R. Stark, with Gen. (Ret). David H. Petraeus, 29 Jan 2016, 3, Historians Files, OEF Study Gp, CMH.

24. "Number of Afghan Civilian Deaths in 2008 Highest Since Taliban Ouster, Says, UN," *UN News*, 17 Feb 2009, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2009/02/291342->



number-afghan-civilian-deaths-2008-highest-taliban-ouster-says-un, Historians Files, CMH.

25. Eric Schmidt, “30 Civilians Died in Afghan Raid, U.S. Inquiry Finds” *New York Times*, 7 Oct 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/08/washington/08inquiry.html>, Historians Files, CMH.

26. Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2014), 222.

27. General David D. McKiernan, Tactical Dir, HQ ISAF/COM/08, 30 Dec 2008, [https://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/official\\_texts/Tactical\\_Directive\\_090114.pdf](https://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/official_texts/Tactical_Directive_090114.pdf), Historians Files, CMH.

28. Bob Woodward, *Obama’s Wars* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 63.

29. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary of War*, 341.

30. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 197.

31. John Crosby, “Obama’s Civilian-Surge Plan Comes to Life at Camp Atterbury National Deployment Center May Follow Success,” 15 Mar 2010, <https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/Article/576823/civilian-surge-comes-to-life-at-camp-atterbury/>, Historians Files, CMH.

32. Tom Engelhardt, “The Nine Surges of Obama’s War,” CBSNews, 10 Dec 2009, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-nine-surges-of-obamas-war/>, Historians Files, CMH.

33. Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Little America: The War within the War for Afghanistan* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 179.

34. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary of War*, 342.

35. Barack Obama, “Remarks on United States Military and Diplomatic Strategies for Afghanistan and Pakistan, March 27, 2009” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Barack Obama, Book I—January 20 to June 30, 2009* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), 366.

36. “White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group’s Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan,” 1, <https://www.hSDL.org/?view&did=38004>, Historians Files, CMH.

37. “U.S. Airstrikes in Pakistan called ‘Very Effective’” CNN Politics, <https://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/05/18/cia.pakistan.airstrikes/>, Historians Files, CMH.

38. Micah Zenko, *Reforming U.S. Drone Strike Policies*, Council Special Report no. 65, (Council on Foreign Relations, 2013), 8, 13.

39. Alan W. Dowd, “Drone Wars: Risks and Warnings,” *The U.S. War College Quarterly: Parameters*, 43, no. 1 (2013): 14.

40. Interv, Neumann and Stark, with McKiernan, 11 Mar 2015, 15–16.
41. Sten Rynning, *NATO in Afghanistan: The Liberal Disconnect* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Security Studies, 2012), 161–62.
42. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 206.
43. Interv, Neumann and Stark, with McKiernan, 11 Mar 2015, 47.
44. Bfg, RC(E)/CJTF 101 Campaign Plan Briefing, sub: Operation Enduring Freedom 07-09, slides 18–20, 22, Historians Files, OEF Study Gp, CMH.
45. For Order of Battle information, see Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in an Ancient Land*, vol 2, 211–13, and Institute for the Study of War, Afghanistan, February 2009.
46. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 211–12.
47. 1st Lt. Christopher Stachura and 1st Lt. Eric Thomsett, “Catamount Soldiers Visit Villages of Wardak, Establish Relationships,” 7 Apr 2009, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100829184108/http://www.cjtf82.com/regional-command-east-news-mainmenu-401/1635-catamount-soldiers-visit-villages-of-wardak-establish-relationships.html>, Historians Files, CMH.
48. Jimmy Blackmon, *Pale Horse: Hunting Terrorists and Commanding Heroes with 101st Airborne Division* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2016), 85.
49. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 213.
50. Gen. (Ret.) Jeffrey Schloesser, *Marathon War: Leadership in Combat in Afghanistan* (New York: Knox Press, 2021), 296.
51. DoD, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2009*, Rpt to Cong., June 2009, 26, [https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/1230\\_June-2009Final.pdf](https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/1230_June-2009Final.pdf), Historians Files, CMH.
52. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 216.
53. Schloesser, *Marathon War*, 306.
54. See Blackmon, *Pale Horse*, 117–153.
55. Anthony Bell, David Witter, and Michael Whittaker, *Reversing the Northern Insurgency* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, April 2011), 9–10.
56. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 334.
57. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2009: Summary Findings* (Sep 2009), [https://nps.edu/documents/105988371/107571254/Afghanistan\\_opium\\_survey\\_2009.pdf/0723ca81-15c0-41e2-903f-51b188aaf017](https://nps.edu/documents/105988371/107571254/Afghanistan_opium_survey_2009.pdf/0723ca81-15c0-41e2-903f-51b188aaf017), Historians Files, CMH.

58. Dexter Filkins, "Taliban Fill NATO's Big Gaps in Afghan South," *New York Times*, 21 Jan 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/22/world/asia/22taliban.html?ref=asia>, Historians Files, CMH.

59. Sgt. Scott A. Whittington, "Special Purpose Air-Ground Task Force Afghanistan: Bridge to Marine Corps' Future in Afghanistan," in *U.S. Marines in Afghanistan, 2001–2009: Anthology and Annotated Bibliography* (Quantico, VA: History Division, United States Marine Corps, 2014), 198–199; Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force (SPMAGTF) Navy Unit Commendation, 23 Oct 2022, MARADMIN 616/12, <https://www.marines.mil/News/Messages/Messages-Display/Article/895104/spmagtf-navy-unit-commendation/>, Historians Files, CMH.

60. Jennifer Hlad, "Nicholson Assumes Command of 2nd MEB," *ENC Today*, 9 Mar 2009, [https://web.archive.org/web/20090314220903/http://www.enctoday.com/news/2nd\\_62892\\_jdn\\_article.html/meb\\_expeditionary\\_html](https://web.archive.org/web/20090314220903/http://www.enctoday.com/news/2nd_62892_jdn_article.html/meb_expeditionary_html), Historians Files, CMH. Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 152 also sent two KC 130Js as Detachment A.

61. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 220.

62. Stephen M. Grenier, "United States: Examining America's Longest War" in *Coalition Challenges in Afghanistan: The Politics of Alliance*, eds., Gale A. Mattox and Stephen M. Grenier (Stanford, CA: Stanford Security Studies, 2015), 58.

63. Craig Whitlock, *The Afghanistan Papers: A Secret History of the War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2021), 147.

64. Ann Scott Tyson, "Gen. David McKiernan Ousted as Top U.S. Commander in Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, 12 May 2009, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/11/AR2009051101864.html>, Historians Files, CMH.

65. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary of War*, 345.

66. Interv, Degen and Stark, with Petraeus, 29 Jan 2016, 3.

67. Frank James, "Won't Measure Afghan Success By 'Enemy Killed': McChrystal" NPR, 2 Jun 2009. [https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2009/06/wont\\_measure\\_afghan\\_success\\_by.html](https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2009/06/wont_measure_afghan_success_by.html), Historians Files, CMH.

68. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 219.

69. Gen. (Ret.) Stanley McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 294.

70. United Nations Assistance Mission–Afghanistan, *Afghanistan: Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2009* (UNAMA, 2010), <http://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports>, Historians Files, CMH.

71. McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*, 308.
72. Carter Malkasian, *The American War in Afghanistan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 224.
73. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 353.
74. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 231.
75. ISAF Headquarters, "Tactical Directive, 6 July 2009," [https://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/official\\_texts/Tactical\\_Directive\\_090706.pdf](https://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/official_texts/Tactical_Directive_090706.pdf), Historians Files, CMH.
76. ISAF Headquarters, "Tactical Directive, 6 July 2009."
77. McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*, 318.
78. "UK Forces in Major Afghan Assault," BBC News, 23 Jun 2009, [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/8114054.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/8114054.stm), Historians Files, CMH.
79. Matthew Hickley, "Operation Panther's Claw and a Victory Which Comes at a High Price in Helmand," *UK Daily Mail*, 28 Jul 2009, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1202658/Operation-Panthers-Claw-victory-comes-high-price-Helmand.html>, Historians Files, CMH.
80. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 244.
81. U.S. Central Command Press Release, "Operation Khanjar Restores Government Control of Khan Neshin," 6 Jul 2009, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/903765/operation-khanjar-restores-government-control-in-khan-neshin/>, Historians Files, CMH.
82. Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Taliban Insurgents Step Up Attacks on Marines in Southern Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, 4 Jul 2009, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/03/AR2009070300877.html>, Historians Files, CMH.
83. "U.S. Opens 'Major Afghan Offensive'" BBC News, 2 Jul 2009, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/8129789.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8129789.stm), Historians Files, CMH.
84. Donna Miles, "Operation Aims to Secure Southern Afghanistan for Elections" Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs, 12 Aug 2009, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/37420/operation-aims-secure-southern-afghanistan-elections>, Historians Files, CMH.
85. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 244.
86. DoD, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, October 2009*, Rpt to Cong., October 2009, 14, [https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/October\\_2009.pdf](https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/October_2009.pdf), Historians Files, CMH.
87. Kevin M. Hymel, *Stryker in Afghanistan: 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment in Kandahar Province, 2009* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2014), 7–12.

88. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 246.
89. Interv, Lt. Col. John R. Stark with Col. (Ret.) Harry D. Tunnell IV, frmr 5th Stryker Bde Combat Team, 2d Inf Div Cdr, 24 Nov 2015, 2, Historians Files, OEF Study Grp, CMH.
90. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 247.
91. Interv, Stark with Tunnell, 24 Nov 2015, 4.
92. HQDA, Field Manual 3–24.4, *Tactics in Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2009), ix.
93. Operations Order (OPORD) 09–07, RC South, 1 Jun 2009, 1–5, Historians Files, OEF Study Grp, CMH.
94. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 250–1.
95. Interv, Lt. Col. John R. Stark, with Lt. Gen. Mart de Kruif, former ISAF RC South Cdr, 14 Oct 2015, 27–28, 31, Historians Files, OEF Study Grp, CMH.
96. Hymel, *Stryker in Afghanistan*, 24.
97. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 252.
98. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 299.
99. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 229.
100. Larry Shaughnessy, “All Out Effort to Find Missing Soldier, Documents Show,” CNN, 27 Jul 2010, <http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/07/27/afghanistan.wikileaks.bergdahl.search/index.html>, Historians Files, CMH.
101. Malkasian, *The American War in Afghanistan*, 228.
102. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 329.
103. Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, 355.
104. Sean D. Taylor, “SOCOM Directive Announces Major Changes,” *Special Forces: 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne)* 1, no. 7 (Sep 2009): 5.
105. Michael E. Krivdo, “Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A): A Short History, 2002–2014” *Veritas*, 12, no. 2 (2016).
106. Malkasian, *The American War in Afghanistan*, 230–31.
107. Jon Boone and Peter Beaumont, “Afghanistan Poll Legitimacy Fears as Taliban Violence Keeps Voters Away,” *The Guardian*, 20 Aug 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/aug/20/afghanistan-elections-taliban-attack-voters>, Historians Files, CMH.
108. “Afghan Fraud Fear Despite UK Push,” BBC News, 11 Sep 2009, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/8249983.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8249983.stm) (accessed 20 Nov 2021).

109. Jason Straziuso and Heidi Vogt, "Afghan Recount Ordered Because of Fraud Charges," *Seattle Times*, 9 Sep 2009, <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/afghan-recount-ordered-because-of-fraud-charges/>, Historians Files, CMH.
110. Col. Matthew C. Brand, *General McChrystal's Strategic Assessment: Evaluating the Operating Environment in Afghanistan in the Summer of 2009* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 2011), 1-1.
111. Whitlock, *The Afghanistan Papers*, 150-1.
112. Malkasian, *The American War in Afghanistan*, 234.
113. Bob Woodward, "McChrystal: More Forces or Mission Failure," *Washington Post*, 21 Sep 2009, 1.
114. Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 193.
115. Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, 193-4.
116. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 237.
117. Jack D. Kem, *NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan: Perspectives of the First Two Years, 2009-2011* (Leavenworth, KS: Command and General Staff College, 2012), 1. This is an unpublished draft provided by the author.
118. Interv, Contemporary Operations Study Team, Combat Studies Institute, with Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell IV and Col. Daniel Klippstein, 20 and 27 February 2013, 7-8.
119. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 310.
120. Martin Loicano and Craig C. Felker, *No Moment of Victory: The NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan, 2009-2011* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 2021), 47, 51.
121. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, 141.
122. Wesley Morgan, *The Hardest Place: The American Military Adrift in Afghanistan's Pech Valley* (New York: Random House, 2021), 293.
123. Interv, Contemporary Operations Study Team, with Caldwell and Klippstein, 17.
124. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 313.
125. Kem, *NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan*, 48-50.
126. Brand, *General McChrystal's Strategic Assessment*, 2-1.
127. Rynning, *NATO in Afghanistan*, 186; Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 236.
128. Dwight Jon Zimmerman, "Cpl. Dakota Meyer and the Battle of Ganjgal: The Story Behind How a Marine Earned His Medal of Honor," Defense Media Network, 5 Nov 2011, <https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/cpl->

dakota-meyer-and-the-battle-of-ganjgal/#:~:text=A%20deadly%20volley%20of%20RPG%20and%20machine%20gun,a%20group%20of%20insurgents%20trying%20to%20flank%20them, Historians Files, CMH.

129. Dakota Meyer and Bing West, *Into the Fore: A Firsthand Account of the Most Extraordinary Battle in the Afghan War* (New York: Random House, 2012), 78–79.

130. Blackmon, *Pale Horse*, 233.

131. Blackmon, *Pale Horse*, 235.

132. Memo, DoD for the Inspector General, 24 Oct 2013, sub: Oversight Review of United States Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) Investigation Into the Processing of a Medal of Honor (MoH) Recommendation for Captain (CPT) William Swenson, U.S. Army. Report Number: 20130424-013764, Historians Files, CMH.

133. Combined Joint Task Force-82 (CJTF-82) Public Affairs Office (PAO), “Ganjgal Investigation Findings Released,” 18 Feb 2010, Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan, <http://www.dvidshub.net/news/45518/ganjgal-investigation-findings-released>, Historians Files, CMH; Meyer and West, *Into the Fore*, 84–85.

134. MFR, CJTF-82, 25 Nov 2009, sub: AR 15–6 Report of Investigation into Operations in the Ganjgal Valley, Kunar Province, Afghanistan, 8 September 2009 (Executive Summary), 1–3, Historians Files, CMH.

135. Jake Tapper, *The Outpost: An Untold Story of American Valor* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2012), 437.

136. Morgan, *The Hardest Place*, 275.

137. Tapper, *The Outpost*, 437.

138. Romesha, *Red Platoon*, 94.

139. Interv, Col. Donahoe, Maj. Smith, and Lt. Col. Stark, with Gen (Ret.) McChrystal, frmr ISAF Cdr, 3 Nov 2015, 31, Historians Files, OEF Study Grp, CMH.

140. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 253, 257.

141. Rod Norland, “U.S. Military Faults Leaders in Attack on Base,” *New York Times*, 5 Feb 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/06/world/asia/06afghan.html>, Historians Files, CMH.

142. Blackmon, *Pale Horse*, 282–83.

143. Blackmon, *Pale Horse*, 276–77.

144. Tapper, *The Outpost*, 575–76.



145. Yaroslav Trofimov, "Fault Found in Outpost's Fall: U.S. Military Report on Taliban Attack in October Criticizes Chain of Command," *Wall Street Journal*, 6 Feb 2010, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704533204575047192669825292>, Historians Files, CMH.

146. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 260.

147. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 260; Interv, Donahoe, Smith, and Stark, with McChrystal, 31.

148. Exec Sum, 3 Oct 2009, sub: AR 15-6 Investigation re: Complex Attack on COP Keating, 2, <https://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/world/AR15-6Sum.pdf>, Historians Files, CMH.

149. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, 123–25.

150. Cable, Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl W. Eikenberry to Sec State Hillary R. Clinton, 9 Nov 2009, sub: COIN Strategy: Civilian Concerns," <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/documents/eikenberry-s-memos-on-the-strategy-in-afghanistan>, Historians Files, CMH.

151. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 373–75; Barack Obama, *A Promised Land* (New York: Crown, 2020), 442–43.

152. Barack Obama, "Remarks at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York" in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, 2009, Book II: July 1 to December 31, 2009* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013), 1750.

153. Malkasian, *The American War in Afghanistan*, 238.

154. Malkasian, *The American War in Afghanistan*, 249. The 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, deployed in December and was the first of the surge units sent to Afghanistan. The 3d Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, deployed in January 2010.

155. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 280–81.

156. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 272.

157. Malkasian, *The American War in Afghanistan*, 248.

158. DoD, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan and United States Plan for Sustaining the Afghanistan National Security Forces, April 2010, as amended*, Rpt to Cong, 29, [https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/1230\\_Report\\_final.pdf](https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/1230_Report_final.pdf), Historians Files, CMH.

159. Jeffrey Dressler, "Operation Moshtarak: Preparing for the Battle of Marjah," *Backgrounder*, Institute for the Study of War, 11 Feb 2010, 3–4.

160. McChrystal, *My Share of the Task*, 368.

161. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 286.

162. Phillip Walter Wellman, "Soldier Serving Life Sentence for Killing Afghan Civilians and Keeping Body Parts Appeals Conviction," *Stars and Stripes*, 31 Jan 2020, <http://www.stripes.com/news/soldier-serving-life-sentence-for-killing-afghan-civilians-and-keeping-body-parts-appeals-conviction-1.617051>, Historians Files, CMH.

163. "Murder in Afghanistan: Court Sentences 'Kill Team' Soldier to 24 Years in Prison," *Die Spiegel*, 24 Mar 2011, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/murder-in-afghanistan-court-sentences-kill-team-soldier-to-24-years-in-prison-a-752918.html>, Historians Files, CMH.

164. DoD, Report on *Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, November 2010*, Rpt to Cong, 47, [https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/1230\\_Report\\_final.pdf](https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/1230_Report_final.pdf), Historians Files, CMH.

165. Ministry of Defence, "Command and Control Changes in Southern Afghanistan," 21 May 2010, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/command-and-control-changes-in-southern-afghanistan>, Historians Files, CMH. Commanded by Maj. Gen. Richard P. Mills, the I Marine Expeditionary Brigade relieved the 2d MEB in April 2010.

166. Alex Newman, "Dutch Government Collapses Over Afghanistan Withdraw," *New American*, 22 Feb 2010, <https://thenewamerican.com/dutch-government-collapses-over-afghanistan-withdrawal/>, Historians Files, CMH.

167. CNN Wire Staff, "German President Resigns Over Criticism of Comments About Military," *CNN*, 31 May 2010, <http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/europe/05/31/germany.president.resigns/index.html>, Historians Files, CMH.

168. Obama, *A Promised Land*, 577–79.

169. Jim Garamone, "Petraeus Puts Protecting People at Strategy's Center," 3 Aug 2010, [https://www.army.mil/article/43205/petraeus\\_puts\\_protecting\\_people\\_at\\_strategys\\_center](https://www.army.mil/article/43205/petraeus_puts_protecting_people_at_strategys_center), Historians Files, CMH.

170. Sfc. Matthew Chlosta, "Petraeus Assumes Command of ISAF on U.S. Birthday," ISAF HQ Public Affairs, 4 Jul 2010, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/52370/petraeus-assumes-command-isaf-us-birthday>, Historians Files, CMH.

171. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 292.

172. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 292.

173. Interv, Degen and Stark with Petraeus, 19.

174. ISAF Headquarters, "General Petraeus Issues Updated Tactical Directive: Emphasizes Disciplined Use of Force," 4 Aug 2010, <https://reliefweb.int/report/>

afghanistan/afghanistan-general-petraeus-issues-updated-tactical-directive-emphasizes, Historians Files, CMH.

175. HDS Greenway, "General Petraeus's 'Anaconda Plan,'" *Boston Globe*, 28 Apr 2009.

176. See Nicholas J. Schlosser, *The Surge, 2007–2008* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 2017), 90–92.

177. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 295.

178. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 296–97.

179. Carl Forsberg, *Counterinsurgency in Kandahar: Evaluating the 2010 Hamkari Campaign*, Afghan Report 7, (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, Dec 2010), 16.

180. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 297, 299.

181. Forsberg, *Counterinsurgency in Kandahar*, 19.

182. Malkasian, *The American War in Afghanistan*, 283.

183. Forsberg, *Counterinsurgency in Kandahar*, 20.

184. Malkasian, *The American War in Afghanistan*, 288.

185. Carlotta Gall, "Coalition Forces Routing Taliban in Key Afghan Region" *New York Times*, 20 Oct 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/21/world/asia/21kandahar.html>, Historians Files, CMH.

186. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 300.

187. Associated Press, "NATO Bullish, Canadians Wary of Afghan Warlord Raziq," CTVNEWS, 27 Dec 2010, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/mobile/nato-bullish-canadians-wary-of-afghan-warlord-raziq-1.589838>, Historians Files, CMH.

188. Miguel Marquez, "The Surge Moves into High Gear in Kandahar," ABCNews, 25 Sep 2010, <https://abcnews.go.com/News/surge-moves-high-gear-kandahar/story?id=11725660>, Historians Files, CMH.

189. Carter Malkasian, *War Comes to Garmser: Thirty Years of Conflict on the Afghan Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 203–4.

190. Forsberg, *Counterinsurgency in Kandahar*, 27.

191. Forsberg, *Counterinsurgency in Kandahar*, 26.

192. Marquez, "The Surge Moves into High Gear in Kandahar."

193. Forsberg, *Counterinsurgency in Kandahar*, 27

194. Forsberg, *Counterinsurgency in Kandahar*, 28.

195. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 302.

196. Jon Boone, "Afghan Taliban Leadership Splintered by Intense US Military Campaign," *Guardian*, 22 Dec 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/22/us-military-make-taliban-flee>, Historians Files, CMH.
197. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 304.
198. Paul Westermeyer, *The United States Marine Corps: The Expeditionary Force at War* (Philadelphia, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2019), 150–51.
199. Email, Col. (Ret.) Russell S. Lewis to author, 6 Apr 2022, sub: 1-87 Summary, Historians Files, CMH.
200. Anthony Bell, David Witter, and Michael Whittaker, *Reversing the Northern Insurgency*, Afghanistan Report 9, (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, Apr 2011), 11.
201. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 335.
202. Bell, Witter, and Whittaker, *Reversing the Northern Insurgency*, 21–22.
203. Bill Roggio, "49 Taliban Fighters, 6 US Troops Killed in Kunar Operation," *Long War Journal*, 18 Nov 2010, [https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/11/49\\_taliban\\_fighters.php](https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/11/49_taliban_fighters.php), Historians Files, CMH.
204. Morgan, *The Hardest Place*, 314.
205. Airman 1st Class Kyle Johnson, "Guardian Angel Recounts Battle Which Earned Him Silver Star," 8 Feb 2015, <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/565614/guardian-angel-recounts-battle-which-earned-him-silver-star/>, Historians Files, CMH.
206. Roggio, "49 Taliban Fighters, 6 US Troops Killed in Kunar Operation."
207. Associated Press, "NATO details Afghan Clash that Killed Five Americans," *Fox News*, 17 Nov 2014, <https://foxnews.com/world/nato-details-afghan-clash-that-killed-5-americans>, Historians Files, CMH.
208. C. J. Chivers, Alissa J. Rubin, and Wesley Morgan, "U.S. Pulling Back in Afghan Valley It Called Vital to War," *New York Times*, 25 Feb 2011, <https://nytimes.com/2011/02/25/world/asia/25afghanistan.html?hp>, Historians Files, CMH.
209. Morgan, *The Hardest Place*, 334.
210. Morgan, *The Hardest Place*, 336–37.
211. Ryan D. Wadle, *HAMMER DOWN: The Battle for the Watapur Valley, 2011* (Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2014), 33.
212. Obama, *A Promised Land*, 678.
213. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, 540.
214. Morgan, *The Hardest Place*, 361.
215. Wadle, *HAMMER DOWN*, 52–57.

216. Wadle, *HAMMER DOWN*, 98.
217. White House Press Release, “Remarks by the President on the Way Forward in Afghanistan,” 22 Jun 2011, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/06/22/remarks-president-way-forward-Afghanistan>, Historians Files, CMH.
218. Malkasian, *War Comes to Garmser*, 252.
219. Malkasian, *The American War in Afghanistan*, 300.
220. Paula Broadwell, *All In: The Education of General David Petraeus* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 248.
221. NATO, “Inteqal: Transition to Afghan Lead,” 17 Nov 2020, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_87183.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_87183.htm), Historians Files, CMH.
222. Carter Malkasian, *The American War in Afghanistan*, 305.
223. John Rollins, *Osama bin Laden’s Death: Implications and Considerations*, R41809 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 5 May 2011), 14.
224. Interv, Jake Tapper *This Week* ABC News with CIA Director Leon Panetta, 27 Jun 2010, <https://abcnews.go.com/print?id=11025299>, Historians Files, CMH.
225. Interv, Neumann and Stark with McKiernan, 13.
226. Col (Ret.) Gian Gentile, *Wrong Turn: America’s Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency* (New York: The New Press, 2013), 135.
227. Whitlock, *The Afghanistan Papers*, 184.
228. Craig Whitlock, “Consumed By Corruption,” *Washington Post*, 9 Dec 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/afghanistan-war-corruption-government/>, Historians Files, CMH.
229. Interv, Degen and Stark with Petraeus, 19.
230. DoD, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, October 2009*, Rpt to Cong, 27, [https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/October\\_2009.pdf](https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/October_2009.pdf), Historians Files, CMH.
231. DoD, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan, April 2011*, Rpt to Cong, 22.
232. Tom Bowman and Monika Evstatieva, “The Afghan Army Collapsed in Days. Here are the Reason Why,” NPR, 20 Aug 2021, <https://www.npr.org/021/08/20/1029451594/the-afghan-army-collapsed-in-days-here-are-the-reasons-why>, Historians Files, CMH.
233. Helene Cooper, “Afghan Forces Are Praised, Despite Still Relying Heavily on U.S. Help,” *New York Times*, 21 Aug 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/20/world/asia/afghanistan-military-strategy.html>, Historians Files, CMH.
234. Degen and Reardon, *Modern War in An Ancient Land*, vol. 2, 311.

235. Susan G. Chesser, *Afghanistan Casualties: Military Forces and Civilians*, R41084 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 20 Dec 2010), 1–3; Susan G. Chesser, “Afghanistan Casualties: Military Forces and Civilians,” R41084, (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 18 Jan 2012), 1–4, [www.icasualties.org](http://www.icasualties.org), Historians Files, CMH.

## THE AUTHOR

John J. Mortimer Jr. is a contract historian at the U.S. Army Center of Military History where he specializes on the War in Afghanistan. He earned a PhD in history from the University of Southern Mississippi and has published on topics concerning drone and cyber warfare, intelligence, and military history.

## FURTHER READINGS

Degen, Edmund J. and Mark J. Reardon. *Modern War in An Ancient Land: The United States Army in Afghanistan, 2001–2014*, vols. 1 and 2, Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2021.

Malkasian, Carter. *The American War in Afghanistan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Mattox, Gale A. and Stephen M. Grenier, eds. *Coalition Challenges in Afghanistan: The Politics of Alliance*. Stanford: Stanford Security Studies, 2015.

Morgan, Wesley. *The Hardest Place: The American Military Adrift in Afghanistan's Pech Valley*. New York: Random House, 2021.

Rynning, Sten. *NATO in Afghanistan: The Liberal Disconnect*. Stanford: Stanford Security Studies, 2012.

Woodward, Bob. *Obama's Wars*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010.













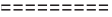







For other titles in the U.S. Army in Afghanistan series published by the U.S. Army Center of Military History, please visit [www.history.army.mil](http://www.history.army.mil).



## ABBREVIATIONS

ANA	Afghan National Army
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
BCT	Brigade Combat Team
CENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CJTF-101	Combined Joint Task Force–101
FM	Field Manual
FOB	Forward Operation Base
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
HiG	Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin
IED	improvised explosive device
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NTM-A	NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan
OEF	Operation ENDURING FREEDOM
OP	operations order
RC	Regional Command
RPGs	rocket propelled grenades
TF	Task Force
USFOR-A	United States Forces–Afghanistan

## GENERAL MAP SYMBOLS

Forest	
Sand	
Swamp/Marsh	
Inundation/Flooding	
Country Capitol	
Provincial/State Capitol	
City/Town	
Built up Area	
Airport/Airbase	
Oil Well	
River	
Primary Road	
Secondary Road	
Tertiary Road	
Trail	
Railroad (single track)	
Railroad (multi-track)	
International Boundary	
Provincial/State Boundary	
District/County Boundary	

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe countless people for their contribution in bringing this project to fruition. Foremost, I want to thank CMH Chief Historian Jon T. Hoffman for his constructive guidance and words of encouragement. A special thanks to Drs. David W. Hogan Jr. and William S. Story, both editorial board members, for their patience and expertise. For his help reviewing sections of this monograph, I thank Dr. Nicholas J. Schloesser. Over the years, Dr. J. Travis Moger took it upon himself to mentor me—I will always be indebted to him. I would also like to thank the CMH OIF and OEF historians for their insightful and stimulating conversations. The final production of this work would not have been possible without the support of the Multimedia and Publications Division. Cheryl L. Bratten edited this volume, Matthew T. Boan created the maps, and Kristina A. Hernandez worked on the cover, pictures, and layout. Col. (Ret.) Russell S. Lewis and Col. (Ret) Robert G. Young, veterans of the Afghan Surge, provided input on sections of the final draft. Thank you. I also want to thank my wife, Rebecca, who supported me during the stressful ups and downs of working on this project.

This monograph is a preliminary history of the Afghan Surge; 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](mailto:usarmy.mcnair.cmh.mbx.answers@army.mil) or via mail to 102 Fourth Ave., Fort McNair, DC 20319.





PIN #: 215495-000