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Operation Enduring Freedom

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) is the official name used by the U.S. Government for the [War in Afghanistan](#), together with three smaller military actions, under the umbrella of the [Global War on Terror](#) (GWOT). The operation was originally called "Operation Infinite Justice", (often misquoted in news articles and political commentary as "Operation Ultimate Justice"^[4]) but this phrase had previously been restricted to the description of God (among followers of several faiths), and it is believed to have been changed to avoid offense to [Muslims](#).^[5]

The Operation comprises several subordinate operations:

1. [Operation Enduring Freedom - Afghanistan](#) (OEF-A)
2. Operation Enduring Freedom - Philippines (OEF-P) (formerly Operation Freedom Eagle)
3. Operation Enduring Freedom - Horn of Africa (OEF-HOA)
4. Operation Enduring Freedom - Trans Sahara (OEF-TS)^[6]

The term "OEF" typically refers to the war in Afghanistan. Other operations, such as the [Georgia Train and Equip Program](#), are only loosely or nominally connected to OEF, such as through government funding vehicles.^[7] All the operations, however, have a focus on counterterrorism activities.

It should be noted that Operation Enduring Freedom - Afghanistan, which is a joint U.S., UK and Afghan operation, is separate from the [International Security Assistance Force](#) (ISAF), which is an operation of NATO nations including the USA and UK. The two operations run in parallel, and although it has been intended that they merge for some time, this has not yet happened.

Overview

On October 7, 2001, early combat operations including a mix of strikes from land-based [B-1 Lancer](#), [B-2 Spirit](#) and [B-52 Stratofortress](#) bombers; carrier-based [F-14 Tomcat](#) and [F/A-18 Hornet](#) fighters; and [Tomahawk cruise missiles](#) launched from both U.S. and [British](#) ships and submarines signaled the start of Operation Enduring Freedom - Afghanistan (OEF-A).

The initial military objectives of OEF-A, as articulated by Former President [George W. Bush](#) in his Sept. 20th Address to a Joint Session of Congress and his Oct. 7th address to the country, included the destruction of terrorist training camps and [infrastructure](#) within [Afghanistan](#), the capture of [al-Qaeda](#) leaders, and the cessation of terrorist activities in Afghanistan."^{[8][9][10]}

In January 2002, over 1,200 soldiers from the [United States Special Operation Command Pacific](#) (SOC PAC) deployed to [Philippines](#) to support the [Armed Forces of the Philippines](#) (AFP) in their push to uproot terrorist forces on the island of [Basilan](#). Of those groups included are [Abu Sayyaf Group](#) (ASG), [al-Qaeda](#) and [Jemaah Islamiyah](#).^[11] The operation consisted of training the AFP in counter-terrorist operations as well as supporting the local people with humanitarian aid in Operation Smiles.^[12]

In October 2002, the [Combined Task Force 150](#) and United States military Special Forces established themselves in [Djibouti](#) at Camp Le Monier. The stated goals of the operation were to provide humanitarian aid and patrol the [Horn of Africa](#) to reduce the abilities of terrorist organizations in the region. Similar to OEF-P, the goal of humanitarian aid was highlighted in order to prevent terrorist organizations from being able to take hold amongst the population as well as reemerge after being removed.

The military aspect involves coalition forces searching and boarding ships entering the region for illegal cargo as well as providing training and equipment to the armed forces in the region. The humanitarian aspect involves building schools, clinics and water wells to enforce the confidence of the local people.

Since 2001, the cumulative expenditure by the U.S. government on Operation Enduring Freedom has exceeded \$150 Billion. [7]

The operation continues, with military direction mostly coming from [United States Central Command](#).

Operation Enduring Freedom - Afghanistan (OEF-A)

The Taliban

Seizing upon a [power vacuum](#) after the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan after their invasion, the [Taliban](#) assumed the role of government from 1996-2001. Their extreme interpretation of Islamic law prompted them to ban music, television, sports, and dancing, and enforce harsh judicial penalties (See [Human rights in Afghanistan](#)). Amputation was an accepted form of punishment for stealing [8][9], and public executions could often be seen at the Kabul football stadium.[10][11] Women's rights groups around the world were frequently critical as the Taliban banned women from appearing in public or holding many jobs outside the home. They drew further criticism when they destroyed the [Buddhas of Bamiyan](#), historical statues nearly 1500 years old, because the buddhas were considered idols.

In 1996, Saudi [dissident Osama bin Laden](#) moved to Afghanistan upon the invitation of the Northern Alliance leader Abdur Rabb ur Rasool Sayyaf. When the Taliban came to power, bin Laden was able to forge an alliance between the Taliban and his [al-Qaeda](#) organization. It is understood that al-Qaeda-trained fighters known as the [055 Brigade](#) were integrated with the Taliban army between 1997 and 2001. It has been suggested that the Taliban and bin Laden had very close connections.[12]

U.S.-led coalition action

Main article: [War in Afghanistan \(2001–present\)](#)

On September 20, 2001, the U.S. stated that Osama bin Laden was behind the [September 11 attacks](#) in 2001, and made a five point ultimatum to the Taliban: [13].

1. Deliver to the U.S. all of the leaders of al-Qaeda
2. Release all imprisoned foreign nationals
3. Close immediately every terrorist training camp
4. Hand over every terrorist and their supporters to appropriate authorities
5. Give the United States full access to terrorist training camps for inspection

On September 21, 2001, the Taliban rejected this ultimatum, stating there was no evidence in their possession linking bin Laden to the September 11 attacks ^[13].

On September 22, 2001 the [United Arab Emirates](#) and later [Saudi Arabia](#) withdrew their recognition of the Taliban as the legal government of Afghanistan, leaving neighboring [Pakistan](#) as the only remaining country with diplomatic ties.

On October 4, 2001, it is believed that the Taliban covertly offered to turn bin Laden over to Pakistan for trial in an international tribunal that operated according to Islamic shar'ia law ^[14]. On October 7, 2001, the Taliban proposed to try bin Laden in Afghanistan in an Islamic court ^[15]. This proposition was immediately rejected by the U.S. Shortly afterward, the same day, United States and British forces initiated military action against the Taliban, bombing Taliban forces and al-Qaeda terrorist training camps ^[16].

On October 14, 2001, the Taliban proposed to hand bin Laden over to a third country for trial, but only if they were given evidence of bin Laden's involvement in the events of September 11, 2001 ^[17]. The U.S. rejected this proposal and continued with military operations.

The UN Security Council, on January 16, 2002, unanimously established an arms embargo and the freezing of identifiable assets belonging to bin Laden, al-Qaeda, and the remaining Taliban.

Combat operations start

On Sunday October 7, 2001, [American](#) and [British](#) forces began an [aerial bombing](#) campaign targeting Taliban forces and al-Qaeda.

The Northern Alliance, fighting against a Taliban weakened by U.S. bombing and massive defections, captured Mazari Sharif on November 9. It rapidly gained control of most of northern Afghanistan and took control of Kabul on November 13 after the Taliban unexpectedly fled the city. The Taliban were restricted to a smaller and smaller region, with [Kunduz](#), the last Taliban-held city in the north, captured on November 26. Most of the Taliban fled to Pakistan.

The war continued in the south of the country, where the Taliban retreated to [Kandahar](#). After Kandahar fell in December, remnants of the Taliban and al-Qaeda continued to [mount resistance](#). Meanwhile, in November 2001 the U.S. military and its allied forces established their first ground base in Afghanistan to the south west of [Kandahar](#), known as [FOB Rhino](#).

The [Battle of Tora Bora](#), involving U.S., British and Northern Alliance forces took place in December 2001 to further destroy the Taliban and suspected al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. In early March 2002 the United States military, along with allied Afghan military forces, conducted a large operation to destroy al-Qaeda in an operation code-named [Operation Anaconda](#).

The operation was carried out by elements of the [United States 10th Mountain Division](#), [101st Airborne Division](#), the U.S. special forces groups TF 11, TF Bowie, and TF Dagger, [British Royal Marines](#), the [Norwegian Forsvarets Spesialkommando \(FSK\)](#), [Hærens Jegerkommando](#) and [Marinejegerkommandoen](#), [Canada's 3rd Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry](#), the [Afghan National Army](#), the German [KSK](#), and elements of the [Australian Special Air Service Regiment](#) and of the New Zealand Special Air Service.

After managing to evade U.S. forces throughout the summer of 2002, the remnants of the Taliban gradually began to regain their confidence. A Canadian and U.S. led operation (supported by British and Dutch forces), [Operation Mountain Thrust](#) was launched in May 2006 to counter renewed Taliban insurgency.

Since January 2006, the [NATO International Security Assistance Force](#) undertook combat duties from Operation Enduring Freedom in southern Afghanistan, the NATO force chiefly made up of British, Canadian and [Dutch](#) forces (and some smaller contributions from [Denmark](#), [Romania](#) and [Estonia](#) and air support from [Norway](#) as well as air and artillery support from the U.S.) (see the article [Coalition combat operations in Afghanistan in 2006](#)). The United States military also conducts military operations separate from NATO as part of Operation Enduring Freedom in other parts of Afghanistan, in areas such as Kandahar, Bagram, and Kabul (including [Camp Eggers](#) and [Camp Phoenix](#).)

International Support

Main article: [Operation Enduring Freedom - Afghanistan: Allies](#)

The United States was supported by several nations during Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan in 2001-2003 and in subsequent coalition operations directly or indirectly in support of OEF. See the article [Afghanistan War order of battle](#) for the current disposition of coalition forces in Afghanistan. For coalition forces involved in NATO combat operations in southern Afghanistan in 2006, see the article [Coalition combat operations in Afghanistan in 2006](#). For coalition forces involved in NATO operations in 2007, see the article [Coalition combat operations in Afghanistan in 2007](#). And the article [International Security Assistance Force](#) for coalition forces in Afghanistan as part of ISAF.

Result

The U.S.-led Coalition is credited with removing the [Taliban](#) from power and seriously crippling [al-Qaeda](#) and associated militants in both [Afghanistan](#) and neighboring [Pakistan](#).

On October 9, 2004, [Afghanistan](#) elected [Hamid Karzai](#) President in its first direct elections. The following year, Afghans conducted the [Afghan parliamentary election, 2005](#) on September 18, 2005. Since the invasion, hundreds of schools and mosques have been constructed, millions of dollars in aid have been distributed, and the occurrence of violence has been greatly reduced.

While military forces interdict [insurgents](#) and assure security, Provincial reconstruction teams are tasked with infrastructure building, like constructing roads and bridges, assisting during floods, and providing food and water to [refugees](#). Many warlords have participated in an allegiance program, recognizing the legitimacy of the Government of Afghanistan, and surrendering their soldiers and weapons, though some of their subsequent actions have led to serious questions about their true loyalties.

The newly activated [Afghan National Army](#), [Afghan National Police](#), and [Afghan Border Police](#) are being trained to assume the task of securing their nation. However, the Taliban still wields strong influence in many regions, and Karzai's government is believed to hold little real power outside the capital city of [Kabul](#).

Criticism

Main article: [Criticism of the War on Terror](#)

AFP, reporting on a news story in the Sunday, April 3, 2004, issue of *The New Yorker*, wrote that retired Army Colonel Hy Rothstein, "who served in the Army Special Forces for more than 20 years, ... commissioned by [The Pentagon](#) to

examine the war in Afghanistan concluded the conflict created conditions that have given 'warlordism, banditry and opium production a new lease on life'"

The conduct of U.S. forces was criticised in a report entitled Enduring Freedom - Abuses by U.S. Forces in Afghanistan by U.S.-based human rights group, [Human Rights Watch](#) in 2004.

For more criticism of OEF in Afghanistan, see PDA monograph (<http://www.comw.org/pda/0201strangevic.html>).

For one U.S. Army response, see The Human Terrain System: A CORDS for the 21st Century.

Operation Enduring Freedom - Philippines (OEF-P)

Main article: Operation Enduring Freedom - Philippines

Abu Sayyaf Group

Main article: [Abu Sayyaf](#)

The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) Al Harakat Al Islamiyya, is deemed a "foreign terrorist organization" by the [United States](#) government. Specifically, it is an Islamist separatist group based in and around the southern islands of the Republic of the Philippines, primarily [Jolo](#), [Basilan](#), and [Mindanao](#).

Since inception in the early 1990s, the group has carried out bombings, [assassinations](#), [kidnappings](#), and [extortion](#) in their fight for an independent Islamic state in western [Mindanao](#) and the [Sulu Archipelago](#), with a claimed overarching goal of creating a Pan-Islamic superstate across the *Malay* portions of [Southeast Asia](#), spanning, from east to west, the large island of Mindanao, the Sulu Archipelago (Basilan and Jolo islands), the large island of [Borneo](#) ([Malaysia](#) and [Indonesia](#)), the [South China Sea](#), and the [Malay Peninsula](#) ([Peninsular Malaysia](#), [Thailand](#) and Myanmar).

Jemaah Islamiyah

Main article: [Jemaah Islamiyah](#)

Jemaah Islamiyah is a militant Islamic [terrorist](#) organization dedicated to the establishment of a fundamentalist Islamic [theocracy](#) in [Southeast Asia](#), in particular [Indonesia](#), [Singapore](#), [Brunei](#), [Malaysia](#), the south of [Thailand](#) and the [Philippines](#).

Financial links between Jemaah Islamiyah and other terrorist groups, such as [Abu Sayyaf](#) and [al-Qaeda](#), have been found to exist. [14] Jemaah Islamiyah means "Islamic Group" or "Islamic Community" and is often abbreviated JI.

Jemaah Islamiyah is thought to have killed hundreds of [civilians](#) and is suspected of having executed the Bali car bombing on October 12, 2002 in which suicide bombers killed 202 people, mostly Australian tourists, and wounded many in a [nightclub](#). After this attack, the [U.S. State Department](#) designated Jemaah Islamiyah as a [Foreign Terrorist Organization](#). Jemaah Islamiyah is also suspected of carrying out the Zamboanga bombings, the [Metro Manila](#) bombings, the 2004 Australian embassy bombing and the [2005 Bali terrorist bombing](#).

U.S. action

In January 2002, 1,200 members of [United States Special Operations Command, Pacific](#) (SOCPAC) were deployed to the Philippines to assist the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in uprooting al-Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiyah and Abu Sayyaf. The members of SOCPAC were assigned to assist in military operations against the terrorist forces as well as humanitarian operations for the island of Basilan, where most of the conflict was expected to take place.

The United States Special Forces (SF) unit trained and equipped special forces and scout rangers of the AFP, creating the Light Reaction Company (LRC). The LRC and elements of SOCPAC deployed to Basilan on completion of their training. The stated goals of the deployment were denying the ASG sanctuary, surveiling, controlling, and denying ASG routes, surveiling supporting villages and key personnel, conducting local training to overcome AFP weaknesses and sustain AFP strengths, supporting operations by the AFP "strike force" (LRC) in the area of responsibility (AOR), conducting and supporting civil affairs operations in the AOR.[15]

Result

The desired result was for the AFP to gain sufficient capability to locate and destroy the ASG, to recover hostages and to enhance the legitimacy of the Philippine government. Much of the operation was a success; the ASG was driven from Basilan, and one U.S. hostage was recovered. [16] The Abu Sayyaf Group's ranks, which once swelled above 800+ a man and some operatives, has been reduced to less than 100. The humanitarian portion of the operation, Operation Smiles, has created 14 schools, 7 clinics, 3 hospitals and provided medical care to over 18,000 residents of Basilan. Humanitarian groups were able to continue their work without fear of further kidnappings and terrorists attacks by the Abu Sayyaf Group. [17] [18]

Operation Enduring Freedom - Horn of Africa (OEF-HOA)

Main article: Operation Enduring Freedom - Horn of Africa

Unlike other operations contained in Operation Enduring Freedom, OEF-HOA does not have a specific terrorist organization as a target. OEF-HOA instead focuses its efforts to disrupt and detect terrorist activities in the region and to work with host nations to deny the reemergence of terrorist cells and activities. In October 2002, the Combined Joint Task Force, Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) was established in [Djibouti](#) at Camp Le Monier containing approximately 2,000 personnel including U.S. military and Special Operations Forces (SOF), and coalition force members, [Combined Task Force 150](#) (CTF-150). The coalition force consists of ships from [Australia](#), [Canada](#), [France](#), [Germany](#), [Netherlands](#), [Italy](#), [Pakistan](#), [New Zealand](#), [Spain](#), [Turkey](#) and the [United Kingdom](#). The primary goal of the coalition forces is to monitor, inspect, board and stop suspected shipments from entering the Horn of Africa region.

CJTF-HOA has devoted the majority of its efforts to train selected armed forces units of the countries of Djibouti, [Kenya](#) and [Ethiopia](#) in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency tactics. Humanitarian efforts conducted by CJTF-HOA include the rebuilding of schools and medical clinics, as well as providing medical services to those countries whose forces are being trained. The program expands as part of the Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Initiative as CJTF personnel also assist in training the forces of [Chad](#), [Niger](#), [Mauritania](#) and [Mali](#). [19]

U.S. Action

Anti piracy operations were undertaken by the coalition throughout 2006 with a battle fought in March of that year when U.S. vessels were attacked by pirates. In January 2007, during the war in Somalia, an AC-130 airstrike was conducted against [al-Qaeda](#) members embedded with forces of the [Islamic Courts Union](#) (ICU) operating in southern Somalia near [Ras Kamboni](#). U.S. naval forces, including the [aircraft carrier](#) *USS Dwight D. Eisenhower*, were positioned off the coast of Somalia to provide support and to prevent any al-Qaeda forces escaping by sea. Actions against pirates also occurred in June and October 2007 with varying amounts of success.

Military decorations

Since 2002, the United States military has created military awards and decorations related to Operation Enduring Freedom:

[Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal](#)

[Afghanistan Campaign Medal](#)

[NATO](#) also created a military decoration related to Operation Enduring Freedom:

Non-Article 5 [ISAF NATO Medal](#)

See also

Coalition Casualties in Afghanistan

[International Security Assistance Force](#)

[War on Terror](#)

Afghanistan Orbat

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External links

Special Operations Forces in Operation "Enduring Freedom"

The Enduring Freedom Foundation

Stephen Walt Takes on Obama's Justification for Escalating the Afghanistan War - video report by [Democracy Now!](#)

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