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War in Afghanistan (2001–present)

The **War in Afghanistan** is an ongoing coalition conflict which began on October 7, 2001,[24] as the US military's Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) that was launched, along with the British military, in response to both the September 11, 2001 attacks on the US. The UK has, since 2002, led its own military operation, Operation Herrick, as part of the same war in Afghanistan. The character of the war evolved from a violent struggle against Al-Qaeda and its Taliban supporters to a complex counterinsurgency effort.

The first phase of the war was the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, when the United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom, to remove the safe haven to Al-Qaeda and its use of the Afghan territory as a base of operations for terrorist activities. In that first phase, U.S. and coalition forces, working with the Afghan opposition forces of the Northern Alliance, quickly ousted the Taliban regime. During the following Karzai administration, the character of the war shifted to an effort aimed at smothering insurgency, in which the insurgents preferred not to directly confront the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops, but blended into the local population and mainly used improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and suicide bombings.

The stated aim of the invasion was to find Osama bin Laden and other high-ranking Al-Qaeda members to be put on trial, to destroy the whole organization of Al-Qaeda, and to remove the Taliban regime which supported and gave safe harbor to Al-Qaeda. The Bush administration stated that, as policy, it would not distinguish between terrorist organizations and nations or governments that harbor them. The United Nations did not authorize the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan.[25]

The second operation is the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which was established by the UN Security Council at the end of December 2001 to secure Kabul and the surrounding areas. NATO assumed control of ISAF in 2003. By July 23, 2009, ISAF had around 64,500 troops from 42 countries, with NATO members providing the core of the force. The NATO commitment is particularly important to the United States because it gives international legitimacy to the war.[26] The United States has approximately 29,950 troops in ISAF.[27]

The US and UK led the aerial bombing, in support of ground forces supplied primarily by the Afghan Northern Alliance. In 2002, American, British and Canadian infantry were committed, along with special forces from several allied nations, including Australia. Later, NATO troops were added.

The initial attack removed the Taliban from power, but Taliban forces have since regained some strength.[28][29] Since 2006, Afghanistan has seen threats to its stability from increased Taliban-led insurgent activity, record-high levels of illegal drug production,[30][31] and a fragile government with limited control outside of Kabul.[32]

By the end of 2008, the Taliban had severed any remaining ties with al-Qaeda.[33] According to senior U.S. military intelligence officials, there are perhaps fewer than 100 members of Al-Qaeda remaining in Afghanistan.[34] The Taliban can sustain itself indefinitely, according to a December 2009 briefing by the top U.S. intelligence officer in Afghanistan.[35]

On December 1, 2009, U.S. President Barack Obama announced that he would escalate U.S. military involvement by deploying an additional 30,000 soldiers over a period of six months.[36] He also proposed to begin troop withdrawals 18 months from that date.[37][38] The following day, the American commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, cautioned that the timeline was flexible and "is not an absolute"[39] and Defense Secretary Robert Gates, when asked by a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee if it is possible that no soldiers would be withdrawn in July 2011, responded, "The president, as commander in chief, always has the option to adjust his decisions."[40]

On January 26, 2010, at the International Conference on Afghanistan in London which brought together some 70 countries and organizations,[41] Afghan President Hamid Karzai told world leaders that he intends to reach out to the top echelons of the Taliban within a few weeks with a peace initiative.[42] Karzai set the framework for dialogue with Taliban leaders when he called on the group's leadership to take part in a "loya jirga" -- or large assembly of elders—to initiate peace talks.[43]

Afghan Civil War: 1992–2001

After Soviet troops withdrew in 1989, the Kabul government fell to the mujahideen in 1992. In the years that followed, various factions of the mujahedeen fought each other for control. In 1996 the Taliban, an Islamic fundamentalist movement formed in 1994, captured the capital Kabul and subsequently overran approximately 90% of the country, leaving only a small corner in the northeast under control of the Northern Alliance.

Although members of the international community, including the United States, initially viewed the Taliban as a potential source of stability for the war-ravaged country,[44] their tolerance for hosting Islamic extremists combined with their reluctance to negotiate with their enemies soon soured this. In 1996, Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda organization began using Taliban-controlled Afghanistan as a base of operations. Under the Taliban, al-Qaeda was able to use Afghanistan as a place to train and indoctrinate fighters, import weapons, coordinate with other jihadists, and plot terrorist actions.[45] While Al-Qaeda maintained its own establishments in Afghanistan, it also supported training camps belonging to other organisations. 10,000 to 20,000 people passed through these facilities before 9/11, most of whom were sent to fight for the Taliban against the Northern Alliance but a smaller number were inducted into al-Qaeda.[46]

After the August 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings were linked to bin Laden, President Bill Clinton ordered missile strikes on militant training camps in Afghanistan. U.S. officials pressed the Taliban to surrender bin Laden, and the international community imposed sanctions of the Taliban in 1999 calling for bin Laden to be surrendered to U.S. custody. The Taliban repeatedly rebuffed the demands, however.

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Special Activities Division paramilitary teams were active in Afghanistan in the 1990s in clandestine operations to locate and kill or capture Osama Bin Laden. These teams planned several operations, but did not receive the order to execute from President Bill Clinton.[47] These efforts did however build many of the relationships that would prove essential in the 2001 U.S. Invasion of Afghanistan.[47]

A formal National Security Presidential Directive submitted on September 9, 2001, had outlined essentially the same war plan that the White House, the CIA and the Pentagon put into action after the September 11 attacks. The plan dealt with all aspects of a war against al-Qaeda, ranging from diplomatic initiatives to military operations in Afghanistan, including outlines to persuade Afghanistan's Taliban government to turn bin Laden over to the United States, with provisions to use military force if it refused. [48]

One day before the September 11, 2001 attacks, the Bush administration agreed on a plan to oust the Taliban regime in Afghanistan by force if it refused to hand over Osama bin Laden. At that September 10 meeting of the Bush administration's top national security officials, it was agreed that the Taliban would be presented with a final ultimatum to hand over bin Laden. Failing that, covert military aid would be channeled by the U.S. to anti-Taliban groups. If both those options failed, "the deputies agreed that the United States would seek to overthrow the Taliban regime through more direct action." [49]

The BBC News reported that Niaz Naik, a former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, claimed that he had been told by senior American officials in mid-July 2001 that military action against Afghanistan would begin by the middle of October at the latest. The message was conveyed during a meeting on Afghanistan between senior U.S., Russian, Iranian, and Pakistani diplomats. The meeting was the third in a series of meetings on Afghanistan, with the previous meeting having been held in March 2001. During the July 2001 meeting, Naik was told that Washington would launch its military operation from bases in Tajikistan – where American advisers were already in place – and that the wider objective was to topple the Taliban regime and install another government in place. [50][51]

September 11, 2001 attacks

Main articles: September 11 attacks, 9/11 Commission, and Planning of the September 11 attacks

In 1999, Al-Qaeda leadership in Kandahar approved of what eventually became known as the September 11 attacks. [52] Bin Laden personally selected two future hijackers who had fought on behalf of the Taliban to attend a special training program at Mes Aynak camp. [53] Later that year, four members of what became known as the Hamburg cell of hijacker pilots arrived in Kandahar, Afghanistan where they conferred with Al-Qaeda leadership for the first time and they received instructions on the plot. [54] Another pilot that arrived al Faruq camp in 2000 was soon selected for participation as well. Thirteen "muscle hijackers" were selected by bin Laden from al-Qaeda training camps from 2000 to early 2001. [55] By July 2001 all the hijackers had arrived in the United States.

On September 11 nearly 3,000 people were killed in the coordinated attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon by hijacked civilian airliners. The attacks were quickly linked to bin Laden and Al-Qaeda. Less than one week after the events of September 11, 2001, U.S. President George W. Bush identified Osama Bin Laden as the 'prime suspect' in the attacks. [56] Osama bin Laden was understood to be in Afghanistan at the time. On September 20, 2001, in an address to a joint session of Congress, President Bush issued an ultimatum [57] demanding that the Taliban government of Afghanistan:

> deliver al-Qaeda leaders located in Afghanistan to the United States authorities

release all imprisoned foreign nationals, including American citizens [58]

protect foreign journalists, diplomats, and aid workers in Afghanistan

close terrorist training camps in Afghanistan and "hand over every terrorist and every person and their support structure to appropriate authorities"

give the United States full access to terrorist training camps to verify their closure

"They will hand over the terrorists or they will share in their fate," said Bush. No specifics were attached to the threat, though there followed a statement suggesting military action: "Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there." Yet many noted that of the 19 men who hijacked planes on September 11, none were Afghans (fifteen of the hijackers were from Saudi Arabia, two from the United Arab Emirates, one from Egypt, and one from Lebanon). [59] None were resident in Afghanistan at that time (Several lived in Hamburg). None went to flight school in Afghanistan (that training occurred in the United States). [60]

The Taliban government responded through their embassy in Pakistan, asserting that there was no evidence in their possession linking bin Laden to the September 11 attacks. They also stressed that bin Laden was a guest in their country. Pashtun and Taliban codes of behavior require that guests be granted hospitality and asylum. [61] Later, on September 22, 2001, the United Arab Emirates, and on the following day, 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. Before the onset of military hostilities, on October 7, 2001, the Taliban offered to try bin Laden in Afghanistan in an Islamic court. [62] This offer was rejected by the U.S., and the bombing of targets within Afghanistan by U.S. and British forces commenced the same day. On October 14, 2001, seven days into the U.S./British bombing campaign, the Taliban offered to surrender bin Laden to a third country for trial, if the bombing halted and they were shown evidence of his involvement in the September 11 terrorist attacks. This offer was also rejected by Bush, who declared "There's no need to discuss innocence or guilt. We know he's guilty." [63]

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) did not authorize the U.S.-led military campaign in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom). There is some debate whether UNSC authorization was required, centered on the question of whether the invasion was an act of collective self-defense provided for under Article 51 of the UN Charter, or an act of aggression. [64] The Bush administration did not declare war, and labeled Taliban troops as supporters of terrorists rather than soldiers, denying them the protections of the Geneva Convention and due process of law. This position has been successfully challenged in the U.S. Supreme Court [65] and questioned even by military lawyers responsible for prosecuting affected prisoners. [66] On December 20, 2001, the UNSC did authorize the creation of an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) with authority to take all measures necessary to fulfill its mandate of assisting the Afghan Interim Authority in maintaining security. [67] Command of the ISAF passed to NATO on August 11, 2003. [68]

2001: Initial attack

Further information: 2001 in Afghanistan

After the refusal of the Taliban regime to cease harbouring al Qaeda, on October 7, 2001, the U.S. government launched military operations in Afghanistan. The purpose of these operations was stated as disrupting the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations and attacking the military capability of the Taliban regime.

The operations were preceded and complemented by work by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and special operations forces (SOF) with Afghan opposition groups on the ground, in particular the Northern Alliance. The United Kingdom and Australia also deployed forces and many other countries provided basing, access and overflight permission.

Teams from the CIA's Special Activities Division (SAD) were the first U.S. forces to enter Afghanistan and begin combat operations. They were soon joined by U.S. Army Special Forces from the 5th Special Forces Group and other units from USSOCOM. These combined forces led the Northern Alliance to overthrow the Taliban in Afghanistan with minimal loss to American lives. They did this without the need for U.S. Military conventional forces.[69][70][71]

On October 7, 2001, strikes were reported in the capital, Kabul (where electricity supplies were severed), at the airport and military nerve-center of Kandahar (home of the Taliban's Supreme Leader Mullah Omar), and in the city of Jalalabad. CNN released exclusive footage of Kabul being bombed to all the American broadcasters at approximately 5:08 p.m. October 7, 2001.[72]

At 17:00 UTC, President Bush confirmed the strikes on national television and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Tony Blair also addressed the UK. Bush stated that at the same time as Taliban military and terrorists' training grounds would be targeted, food, medicine, and supplies would be dropped to "the starving and suffering men, women and children of Afghanistan".[73]

A pre-recorded videotape of Osama bin Laden had been released before the attack in which he condemned any attacks against Afghanistan. Al Jazeera, the Arabic satellite news channel, reported that these tapes were received shortly before the attack. In this recording bin Laden claimed that the United States would fail in Afghanistan and then collapse, just as the Soviet Union did.

Air campaigns

Bombers operating at high altitudes well out of range of anti-aircraft fire bombed the Afghan training camps and Taliban air defenses. U.S. aircraft, including Apache helicopter gunships, operated with impunity throughout the campaign with no losses due to Taliban air defenses.

The strikes initially focused on the area in and around the cities of Kabul, Jalalabad, and Kandahar. Within a few days, most Taliban training sites were severely damaged and the Taliban's air defenses were destroyed. The campaign then focused on command, control, and communication targets which weakened the ability of the Taliban forces to communicate. However, the line facing the Afghan Northern Alliance held, and no tangible battlefield successes had yet occurred on that front. Two weeks into the campaign, the Northern Alliance demanded the air campaign focus more on

the front lines. Meanwhile, thousands of Pashtun tribal men from Pakistan poured into the country, reinforcing the Taliban against the U.S. led forces.

The next stage of the campaign began with carrier based F/A-18 Hornet fighter-bombers hitting Taliban vehicles in pinpoint strikes, while other U.S. planes began cluster bombing Taliban defenses. For the first time in years, Northern Alliance commanders finally began to see the substantive results that they had long hoped for on the front lines.

At the beginning of November, the Taliban front lines were bombed with daisy cutter bombs, and by AC-130 gunships. The Taliban fighters had no previous experience with American firepower, and often even stood on top of bare ridgelines where Special Forces could easily spot them and call in close air support. By November 2, Taliban frontal positions were devastated, and a Northern Alliance march on Kabul seemed possible for the first time.

Foreign fighters from al-Qaeda took over security in the Afghan cities, demonstrating the instability of the Taliban regime. Meanwhile, the Northern Alliance and their Central Intelligence Agency/Special Forces advisors planned the next stage of their offensive. Northern Alliance troops would seize Mazari Sharif, thereby cutting off Taliban supply lines and enabling the flow of equipment from the countries to the north, followed by an attack on Kabul itself.

In October 2008, the *Washington Post* ran an editorial by former Navy Secretary John Lehman:

What made the Afghan campaign a landmark in the U.S. Military's history is that it was prosecuted by Special Operations forces from all the services, along with Navy and Air Force tactical power, operations by the Afghan Northern Alliance and the CIA were equally important and fully integrated. No large Army or Marine force was employed. [74]

Areas most targeted

During the early months of the war the U.S. military had a limited presence on the ground. The plan was that Special Forces, and intelligence officers with a military background, would serve as liaisons with Afghan militias opposed to the Taliban, would advance after the cohesiveness of the Taliban forces was disrupted by American air power. [75][76][77]

The Tora Bora Mountains lie roughly east of Afghanistan's capital Kabul, which is itself close to the border with Pakistan. American intelligence analysts believed that the Taliban and al Qaeda had dug in behind fortified networks of well-supplied caves and underground bunkers. The area was subjected to a heavy continuous bombardment by B52 bombers. [75][76][77][78]

The U.S. forces and the Northern Alliance also began to diverge in their objectives. While the U.S. was continuing the search for Osama bin Laden, the Northern Alliance was pressuring for more support in their efforts to finish off the Taliban and control the country.

Scott Peterson, writing in the *Christian Science Monitor*, quoted a defector he described as the Taliban deputy interior minister, and "highest ranking Taliban defector to date". [79] According to Peterson this defector described the American bombardment as very effective, "Kabul city has seen many rockets, but this was a different thing" and "the American bombing of Taliban trenches, cars, and troops caused us to be defeated. All ways were blocked, so there was no way to carry food or ammunition to the front. All trenches of the Taliban were destroyed, and many people were killed."

The Battle of Mazar-i Sharif

Further information: Fall of Mazar-i-Sharif

The battle for Mazari Sharif was considered important, not only because it is the home of the Shrine of Hazrat Ali or "Blue Mosque", a sacred Muslim site, but also because it is the location of two main airports and a major road that leads into Uzbekistan.[80] On November 9, 2001, Northern Alliance forces, under the command of generals Abdul Rashid Dostum and Ustad Atta Mohammed Noor, swept across the Pul-i-Imam Bukhri bridge, meeting some resistance,[81][82] and seized the city's main military base and airport.

U.S. Special Operation Forces (namely ODA 595, CIA paramilitary officers and Air Force Combat Control Teams)[83][84][85] on horseback and using Close Air Support platforms, took part in the push into the city of Mazari Sharif in Balkh Province by the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan ("Northern Alliance"). After a bloody 90-minute battle, Taliban forces, who had held the city since 1998, withdrew from the city, triggering jubilant celebrations among the townspeople whose ethnic and political affinities are with the Northern Alliance.[86][87]

The Taliban had spent three years fighting the Northern Alliance for Mazar-i-Sharif, precisely because its capture would confirm them as masters of all Afghanistan.[86] The fall of the city was a "body blow"[86] to the Taliban and ultimately proved to be a "major shock",[83] since the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) had originally believed that the city would remain in Taliban hands well into the following year,[88] and any potential battle would be "a very slow advance".[89]

Mazar-i-Sharif had a significant strategic import, as its capture, almost immediately opening up a land corridor from the Uzbek border, would allow the U.S. to ship tons of military hardware to the Northern Alliance, and begin deploying its own forces in larger numbers inside Afghanistan.[86] It would also enable humanitarian aid to alleviate Afghanistan's looming food crisis, which had threatened more than six million people with starvation. Many of those in most urgent need lived in rural areas to the south and west of Mazar-i-Sharif.[80][87]

Following rumors that Mullah Dadullah was headed to recapture the city with as many as 8,000 Taliban fighters, a thousand American 10th Mountain Soldiers were airlifted into the city, which provided the first solid foothold from which Kabul and Kandahar could be reached.[90][91] While prior military flights had to be launched from Uzbekistan or Aircraft carriers in the Arabian Sea, now the Americans held their own airport in the country which allowed them to fly more frequent sorties for resupply missions and humanitarian aid. These missions allowed massive shipments of humanitarian aid to be immediately shipped to hundreds of thousands of Afghans facing starvation on the northern plain.[86][92]

It was revealed that the airfield had been boobytrapped by the Taliban as they left, with explosives planted around the property, as well as being badly damaged by their own Air Interdiction missions in order to prevent it being used by the enemy.[81] The destroyed runways on the airfield were patched by the U.S. Air Force Red Horse personnel and local

Afghans hired to fill bomb craters with asphalt and tar by hand, and the first cargo plane was able to land ten days after the battle.[81] The airbase wasn't declared operational until December 11.[93]

The American-backed forces now controlling the city began immediately broadcasting from *Radio Mazar-i-Sharif*, the former Taliban *Voice of Sharia* channel on 1584 kHz,[94] including an address from former President Burhanuddin Rabbani.[95] Music was also broadcast over Kabul radio for the first time in five years, and the songs were introduced by a female announcer—another major breakthrough for a city where women had been banned from education, work, and many other civil liberties since 1996.[96]

The fall of Kabul

On the night of November 12, Taliban forces fled from the city of Kabul, leaving under cover of darkness. By the time Northern Alliance forces arrived in the afternoon of November 13, only bomb craters, burned foliage, and the burnt-out shells of Taliban gun emplacements and positions were there to greet them. A group of about twenty hardline Arab fighters hiding in the city's park were the only remaining defenders. This Taliban group was killed in a 15-minute gun battle, being heavily outnumbered and having had little more than a telescope to shield them. After these forces were neutralized Kabul was in the hands of the U.S./NATO forces and the Northern Alliance.[97]

The fall of Kabul marked the beginning of a collapse of Taliban positions across the map. Within 24 hours, all the Afghan provinces along the Iranian border, including the key city of Herat, had fallen. Local Pashtun commanders and warlords had taken over throughout northeastern Afghanistan, including the key city of Jalalabad. Taliban holdouts in the north, mainly Pakistani volunteers, fell back to the northern city of Kunduz to make a stand. By November 16, the Taliban's last stronghold in northern Afghanistan was besieged by the Northern Alliance. Nearly 10,000 Taliban fighters, led by foreign fighters, refused to surrender and continued to put up resistance. By then, the Taliban had been forced back to their heartland in southeastern Afghanistan around Kandahar.[98]

By November 13, al-Qaeda and Taliban forces, with the possible inclusion of Osama bin Laden, had regrouped and were concentrating their forces in the Tora Bora cave complex, on the Pakistan border 50 kilometers (30 mi) southwest of Jalalabad, to prepare for a stand against the Northern Alliance and U.S./NATO forces. Nearly 2,000 al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters fortified themselves in positions within bunkers and caves, and by November 16, U.S. bombers began bombing the mountain fortress. Around the same time, CIA and Special Forces operatives were already at work in the area, enlisting and paying local warlords to join the fight and planning an attack on the Tora Bora complex.[99]

The fall of Kunduz

Just as the bombardment at Tora Bora was stepped up, the siege of Kunduz that began on November 16 was continuing. Finally, after nine days of heavy fighting and American aerial bombardment, Taliban fighters surrendered to Northern Alliance forces on November 25-November 26. Shortly before the surrender, Pakistani aircraft arrived ostensibly to evacuate a few hundred intelligence and military personnel who had been in Afghanistan before the U.S. invasion to aid the Taliban's ongoing fight against the Northern Alliance. However, during this airlift, it is alleged that up to five thousand people were evacuated from the region, including Taliban and al-Qaeda troops allied to the Pakistanis in Afghanistan, see Airlift of Evil.[100][101][102]

The battle of Qala-i-Jangi

On November 25, the day that Taliban fighters holding out in Kunduz surrendered and were being herded into the Qala-I-Janghi fortress near Mazar-I-Sharif, a few Taliban attacked some Northern Alliance guards, taking their weapons and opening fire. This incident soon triggered a widespread revolt by 300 prisoners, who soon seized the southern half of the complex, once a medieval fortress, including an armory stocked with small arms and crew-served weapons. One American CIA paramilitary operative who had been interrogating prisoners, Johnny Micheal Spann, was killed, marking the first American combat death in the war.

The revolt was finally put down after seven days of heavy fighting between an SBS unit along with some US Army Special Forces and Northern Alliance, AC-130 gunships and other aircraft took part providing strafing fire on several occasions, as well as a bombing airstrikes. [103] A total of 86 of the Taliban prisoners survived, and around 50 Northern Alliance soldiers were killed. The quashing of the revolt marked the end of the combat in northern Afghanistan, where local Northern Alliance warlords were now firmly in control.

Consolidation: the taking of Kandahar

By the end of November, Kandahar, the Taliban's birthplace, was its last remaining stronghold, and was coming under increasing pressure. Nearly 3,000 tribal fighters, led by Hamid Karzai, a loyalist of the former Afghan king, and Gul Agha Sherzai, the governor of Kandahar before the Taliban seized power, pressured Taliban forces from the east and cut off the northern Taliban supply lines to Kandahar. The threat of the Northern Alliance loomed in the north and northeast.

Meanwhile, the first significant numbers of U.S. combat troops had arrived. Nearly 1,000 Marines, ferried in by CH-53E Super Stallion helicopters and C-130s, set up a Forward Operating Base known as Camp Rhino in the desert south of Kandahar on November 25. This was the coalition's first strategic foothold in Afghanistan, and was the stepping stone to establishing other operating bases. The first significant combat involving U.S. ground forces occurred a day after Rhino was captured when 15 armored vehicles approached the base and were attacked by helicopter gunships, destroying many of them. Meanwhile, the airstrikes continued to pound Taliban positions inside the city, where Mullah Omar was holed up. Omar, the Taliban leader, remained defiant although his movement only controlled 4 out of the 30 Afghan provinces by the end of November and called on his forces to fight to the death.

As the Taliban teetered on the brink of losing their last bastion, the U.S. focus increased on the Tora Bora. Local tribal militias, numbering over 2,000 strong and paid and organized by Special Forces and CIA SAD paramilitary operations officers, continued to mass for an attack as heavy bombing continued of suspected al-Qaeda positions. 100-200 civilians were reported killed when 25 bombs struck a village at the foot of the Tora Bora and White Mountains region.

On December 2, a group of 20 U.S. commandos was inserted by helicopter to support the operation. On December 5, Afghan militia wrested control of the low ground below the mountain caves from al-Qaeda fighters and set up tank positions to blast enemy forces. The al-Qaeda fighters withdrew with mortars, rocket launchers, and assault rifles to higher fortified positions and dug in for the battle. The CIA paramiltary officers inserted with a highly trained Afghan force and were engaged by friendly fire, but stayed in the fight despite taking significant casualties. [104]

On December 6, the U.S. government rejected any amnesty for Omar or any Taliban leaders. Shortly thereafter on December 7, Omar slipped out of the city of Kandahar with a group of his hardcore loyalists and moved northwest into

the mountains of Uruzgan Province, reneging on the Taliban's promise to surrender their fighters and their weapons. He was last reported seen driving off with a group of his fighters on a convoy of motorcycles.

Other members of the Taliban leadership fled into Pakistan through the remote passes of Paktia and Paktika Provinces. Nevertheless, Kandahar, the last Taliban-controlled city, had fallen, and the majority of the Taliban fighters had disbanded. The border town of Spin Boldak was surrendered on the same day, marking the end of Taliban control in Afghanistan. The Afghan tribal forces under Gul Agha seized the city of Kandahar while the Marines took control of the airport outside and established a U.S. base.

Battle of Tora Bora

Main article: Battle of Tora Bora

Al-Qaeda fighters were still holding out in the mountains of Tora Bora, however, while an anti-Taliban tribal militia steadily pushed bin Laden back across the difficult terrain, backed by UK Special Forces and withering air strikes by the U.S. Facing defeat, the al-Qaeda forces agreed to a truce to give them time to surrender their weapons. In retrospect, however, many believe that the truce was a ruse to allow important al-Qaeda figures, including Osama bin Laden, to escape. On December 12, the fighting flared again, probably initiated by a rear guard buying time for the main force's escape through the White Mountains into the tribal areas of Pakistan. Again, tribal forces backed by British and U.S. special operations troops and air support pressed ahead against fortified al-Qaeda positions in caves and bunkers scattered throughout the mountainous region.

By December 17, the last cave complex had been taken and their defenders overrun. A search of the area by U.S. and UK forces continued into January, but no sign of bin Laden or the al-Qaeda leadership emerged. It is almost unanimously believed that they had already slipped away into the tribal areas of Pakistan to the south and east. It is estimated that around 200 of the al-Qaeda fighters were killed during the battle, along with an unknown number of anti-Taliban tribal fighters. No U.S. or UK deaths were reported.

Diplomatic efforts

After the Taliban fled Kabul in November 2001 and left their stronghold, the southern city of Kandahar, in December 2001, it was generally understood that by then major Al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders had fled across the border into Pakistan.

To fill the political void, in December 2001 the United Nations hosted the Bonn Conference in Germany. The meetings of various Afghan leaders here were organized by the United Nations Security Council. The Taliban were not included. Participants included representatives of four Afghan opposition groups. Observers included representatives of neighbouring and other involved major countries, including the United States.

The result was the Bonn Agreement which created the Afghan Interim Authority that would serve as the “repository of Afghan sovereignty” and outlined the so-called Petersberg Process, a political process towards a new constitution and choosing a new Afghan government.

The UN Security Council resolutions of November 14, 2001, included "Condemning the Taliban for allowing Afghanistan to be used as a base for the export of terrorism by the Al-Qaeda network and other terrorist groups and for providing

safe haven to Osama bin Laden, Al-Qaeda and others associated with them, and in this context supporting the efforts of the Afghan people to replace the Taliban regime". [105]

To help provide security to support this Afghan Interim Authority, the United Nations authorized an international force—the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)—with a mandate to help the Afghans maintain security in Kabul and surrounding areas.

Humanitarian efforts

Before the U.S.-led invasion, there were fears that the invasion and resultant disruption of services would cause widespread starvation and refugees.

The United Nations World Food Programme temporarily suspended activities within Afghanistan at the beginning of the bombing attacks but resumed them after the fall of the Taliban.

The International Security Assistance Force

Main article: International Security Assistance Force

Operating under U.S. Army General Stanley A. McChrystal who commands all coalition forces in Afghanistan, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) includes soldiers from 42 countries with U.S. troops making up about half its force. [27] ISAF had initially been established as a stabilization force by the United Nations Security Council on December 20, 2001, to secure Kabul. Its mandate did not extend beyond this area for the first few years. [106] On August 11, 2003, NATO assumed political command and coordination of ISAF. [106] On July 31, 2006, ISAF assumed command of the south of the country, and by October 5, 2006, of the east. [107]

Summary of major troop contributions (as of July 23, 2009): [27]

2002: Operation Anaconda

Main article: 2002 in Afghanistan

Further information: Operation Anaconda and Tarnak Farm incident

Following Tora Bora, U.S. forces and their Afghan allies consolidated their position in the country. Following a Loya jirga or grand council of major Afghan factions, tribal leaders, and former exiles, an interim Afghan government was established in Kabul under Hamid Karzai. U.S. forces established their main base at Bagram airbase just north of Kabul. Kandahar airport also became an important U.S. base area. Several outposts were established in eastern provinces to hunt for Taliban and al-Qaeda fugitives. The number of U.S-led coalition troops operating in the country would eventually grow to over 10,000.

Meanwhile, the Taliban and al-Qaeda had not given up. Al-Qaeda forces began regrouping in the Shahi-Kot mountains of Paktia province throughout January and February 2002. A Taliban fugitive in Paktia province, Mullah Saifur Rehman, also began reconstituting some of his militia forces in support of the anti-U.S. fighters. They totalled over 1,000 by the beginning of March 2002. The intention of the insurgents was to use the region as a base area for launching guerrilla attacks and possibly a major offensive in the style of the Mujahideen who battled Soviet forces during the 1980s.

U.S. allied to Afghan militia intelligence sources soon picked up on this buildup in Paktia province and prepared a massive push to counter it. On March 2, 2002, U.S. and Afghan forces launched an offensive on al-Qaeda and Taliban forces entrenched in the mountains of Shahi-Kot southeast of Gardez. The Mujahideen forces, who used small arms, rocket-propelled grenades, and mortars, were entrenched into caves and bunkers in the hillsides at an altitude that was largely above 10,000 feet (3,000 m).

They used "hit and run" tactics, opening fire on the U.S. and Afghan forces and then retreating back into their caves and bunkers to weather the return fire and persistent U.S. bombing raids. To compound the situation for the coalition troops, U.S. commanders initially underestimated the Taliban and al-Qaeda forces as a last isolated pocket numbering fewer than 200. It turned out that the guerrillas numbered between 1,000-5,000 according to some estimates and that they were receiving reinforcements.[108]

By March 6, eight Americans and seven Afghan soldiers had been killed and reportedly 400 opposing forces had also been killed in the fighting. The coalition casualties stemmed from a friendly fire incident that killed one soldier, the downing of two helicopters by rocket-propelled grenades and small arms fire that killed seven soldiers, and the pinning down of U.S. forces being inserted into what was coined as "Objective Ginger" that resulted in dozens of wounded.[109] However, several hundred guerrillas escaped the dragnet heading to the Waziristan tribal areas across the border in Pakistan.

During Operation Anaconda and other missions during 2002 and 2003, special forces from several western nations were also involved in operations. These included the Australian Special Air Service Regiment, the Canadian Joint Task Force 2, the German KSK, the New Zealand Special Air Service and Norwegian Marinejegerkommandoen.

Post-Anaconda operations

Following the battle at Shahi-Kot, it is believed that the al-Qaeda fighters established sanctuaries among tribal protectors in Pakistan, from which they regained their strength and later began launching cross-border raids on U.S. forces by the summer months of 2002. Guerrilla units, numbering between 5 and 25 men, still regularly crossed the border from their sanctuaries in Pakistan to fire rockets at U.S. bases and ambush American convoys and patrols, as well as Afghan National Army troops, Afghan militia forces working with the U.S-led coalition, and non-governmental organizations. The area around the U.S. base at Shkin in Paktika province saw some of the heaviest activity.

Meanwhile, Taliban forces remained in hiding in the rural regions of the four southern provinces that formed their heartland, Kandahar, Zabul, Helmand Province, and Uruzgan. In the wake of Operation Anaconda The Pentagon requested that British Royal Marines who are highly trained in mountain warfare, be deployed. They conducted a number of missions over several weeks with varying results. The Taliban, who during the summer of 2002 numbered in the hundreds, avoided combat with U.S. forces and their Afghan allies and melted away into the caves and tunnels of remote Afghan mountain ranges or across the border into Pakistan during operations.[110]

2003–2005: Renewed Taliban insurgency

Main article: Taliban insurgency

Further information: War in North-West Pakistan, 2003 in Afghanistan, 2004 in Afghanistan, and 2005 in Afghanistan

After managing to evade U.S. forces throughout mid-2002, the remnants of the Taliban gradually began to regain their confidence and started to begin preparations to launch the insurgency that Mullah Muhammad Omar had promised during the Taliban's last days in power.[111] During September, Taliban forces began a recruitment drive in Pashtun areas in both Afghanistan and Pakistan to launch a renewed "jihad" or holy war against the Afghan government and the U.S-led coalition. Pamphlets distributed in secret during the night also began to appear in many villages in the former Taliban heartland in southeastern Afghanistan that called for jihad.[112]

Small mobile training camps were established along the border with Pakistan by al-Qaeda and Taliban fugitives to train recruits in guerrilla warfare and terrorist tactics, according to Afghan sources and a United Nations report.[113] Most of the recruits were drawn from the madrassas or religious schools of the tribal areas of Pakistan, from which the Taliban had originally arisen. Major bases, a few with as many as 200 men, were created in the mountainous tribal areas of Pakistan by the summer of 2003. The will of the Pakistani paramilitaries stationed at border crossings to prevent such infiltration was called into question, and Pakistani military operations proved of little use.[114]

The Taliban gradually reorganized and reconstituted their forces over the winter, preparing for a summer offensive. They established a new mode of operation: gathered into groups of around 50 to launch attacks on isolated outposts and convoys of Afghan soldiers, police, or militia and then breaking up into groups of 5-10 men to evade subsequent offensives. U.S. forces in the strategy were attacked indirectly, through rocket attacks on bases and improvised explosive devices.

To coordinate the strategy, Omar named a 10-man leadership council for the resistance, with himself at the head.[114]

Five operational zones were created, assigned to various Taliban commanders such as the key Taliban leader Mullah Dadullah, in charge of Zabul province operations.[114] Al-Qaeda forces in the east had a bolder strategy of concentrating on the Americans and catching them when they could with elaborate ambushes.

The first sign that Taliban forces were regrouping came on January 27, 2003, during Operation Mongoose, when a band of fighters allied with the Taliban and Hezb-i-Islami were discovered and assaulted by U.S. forces at the Adi Ghar cave complex 15 miles (24 km) north of Spin Boldak.[115] 18 rebels were reported killed and no U.S. casualties reported.

The site was suspected to be a base to funnel supplies and fighters from Pakistan. The first isolated attacks by relatively large Taliban bands on Afghan targets also appeared around that time.

As the summer continued, the attacks gradually increased in frequency in the "Taliban heartland." Dozens of Afghan government soldiers, non-governmental organization and humanitarian workers, and several U.S. soldiers died in the raids, ambushes, and rocket attacks. Besides using guerrilla attacks, Taliban fighters began building up their forces in the district of Dai Chopan, a district in Zabul Province that also straddles Kandahar and Uruzgan and is at the very center of the Taliban heartland.

Dai Chopan district is a remote and sparsely populated corner of southeastern Afghanistan composed of towering, rocky mountains interspersed with narrow gorges. Taliban fighters decided it would be the perfect area to make a stand against the Afghan government and the coalition forces. Over the course of the summer, perhaps the largest concentration of Taliban militants gathered in the area since the fall of the regime, with up to 1,000 guerrillas regrouping. Over 220 people, including several dozen Afghan police, were killed in August 2003 as Taliban fighters gained strength.

Coalition response

As a result, coalition forces began preparing offensives to root out the rebel forces. In late August 2005, Afghan government forces backed by U.S troops and heavy American aerial bombardment advanced upon Taliban positions within the mountain fortress. After a one-week battle, Taliban forces were routed with up to 124 fighters (according to Afghan government estimates) killed. Taliban spokesmen, however, denied the high casualty figure and U.S estimates were somewhat lower.

2006: NATO in southern Afghanistan

Main article: Coalition combat operations in Afghanistan in 2006

Further information: 2006 in Afghanistan

From January 2006, a NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) started to replace the U.S. troops of Operation Enduring Freedom in southern Afghanistan. The British 16th Air Assault Brigade (later reinforced by Royal Marines) formed the core of the force in Southern Afghanistan, along with troops and helicopters from Australia, Canada and the Netherlands. The initial force consisted of roughly 3,300 British, [116] 2,300 Canadian, [117] 1,963 from the Netherlands, [118] 300 from Australia, [119] 290 from Denmark, [120] and 150 from Estonia. [121] Air support was provided by U.S., British, Dutch, Norwegian and French combat aircraft and helicopters.

In January 2006, NATO's focus in southern Afghanistan was to form Provincial Reconstruction Teams with the British leading in Helmand Province while the Netherlands and Canada would lead similar deployments in Orūzgān Province and Kandahar Province respectively. Local Taliban figures voiced opposition to the incoming force and pledged to resist it. [122]

Southern Afghanistan faced in 2006 the deadliest spate of violence in the country since the ousting of the Taliban regime by U.S.-led forces in 2001, as the newly deployed NATO troops battled resurgent militants. NATO operations have been led by British, Canadian and Dutch commanders. Operation Mountain Thrust was launched on May 17, 2006, with the purpose of rooting out Taliban forces. In July, Canadian Forces, supported by U.S., British, Dutch and Danish forces, launched Operation Medusa in an attempt to clear the areas of Taliban fighters.

Further NATO operations included the Battle of Panjwaii, Operation Mountain Fury and Operation Falcon Summit. The fighting for NATO forces was intense throughout the second half of 2006. NATO has been successful in achieving tactical victories over the Taliban and denied areas to them, but the Taliban were not completely defeated, and NATO had to continue operations into 2007.

2007: Coalition offensive

Main article: Coalition combat operations in Afghanistan in 2007

Further information: 2007 in Afghanistan

In January and February 2007, British Royal Marines mounted Operation Volcano to clear insurgents from firing points in the village of Barikju, north of Kajaki.[123] This was followed by Operation Achilles, a major sweeping offensive that started in March and ended in late May. The UK ministry of defence announced its intention to bring British troop levels in the country up to 7,700 (committed until 2009).[124] Further operations, such as Operation Silver and Operation Silicon, were conducted to keep up the pressure on the Taliban in the hopes of blunting their expected spring offensive.[125][126]

On March 4, 2007, at least 12 civilians were killed and 33 were injured by U.S. Marines in Shinwar district in Nangrahar province of Afghanistan[127] as the Americans reacted to a bomb ambush. The event has become known as the Shinwar Massacre.[128] The 120 member Marine unit responsible for the attack was asked to leave the country because the incident damaged the unit's relations with the local Afghan population.[129]

On May 12, 2007, ISAF forces killed Mullah Dadullah, a Taliban commander in charge of leading operations in the south of the country; eleven other Taliban fighters were killed in the same firefight.

Operation Achilles ended on May 30, 2007, and was immediately followed by Operation Lastay Kulang that night. During the summer, NATO forces achieved tactical victories over the Taliban at the Battle of Chora in Orūzgān Province, where Dutch and Australian ISAF forces are deployed. On August 28, 2007, at least 100 Taliban fighters and one Afghan National Army soldier were killed in several skirmishes in Shah Wali Kot district in Kandahar province.[130]

On October 28, 2007, about 80 Taliban fighters were killed in a 24 hour battle with forces from the U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan's Helmand province.[131] During the last days of October, Canadian forces surrounded around 300 militants near Arghandab and killed at least 50 of them. This was said to have stopped a potential Taliban offensive on Kandahar.

The strength of Taliban forces was estimated by Western officials and analysts at about 10,000 fighters fielded at any given time, according to an October 30 report in *The New York Times*. Of that number, "only 2,000 to 3,000 are highly motivated, full-time insurgents", the *Times* reported. The rest are part-timers, made up of alienated, young Afghan men angry at bombing raids or fighting to get money. In 2007, more foreign fighters were showing up in Afghanistan than ever before, according to Afghan and United States officials. Approximately 100 to 300 full-time combatants are foreigners, usually from Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Chechnya, various Arab countries and perhaps even Turkey and western China. They tend to be more fanatical and violent, and they often bring skills such as the ability to post more sophisticated videos on the Internet or bombmaking expertise.[132]

On November 2, 2007, Afghan security forces killed a top-ranking militant, Mawlawi Abdul Manan, after he was caught trying to cross into Afghanistan from neighboring Pakistan. The Taliban confirmed his death.[133] On November 10, 2007, the Taliban ambushed a patrol in eastern Afghanistan, killing six American and three Afghan soldiers while losing

only one insurgent. This attack brought the U.S. death toll for 2007 to 100, making it the deadliest year for Americans in Afghanistan.[134]

Security operations were conducted in the north by ISAF and Afghan forces, including Operation Harekate Yolo I & II. The exact death toll had not been disclosed at the time, but according to Norwegian news reports "between 20 and 25 insurgents" were killed in action,[135] the German MoD verified further 14 hostile fighters killed in action (Norwegian and German forces taking part in the operation). The operation ended on November 6/7.

The Battle of Musa Qala took place in December 2007. Afghan units were the principal fighting force, supported by British forces.[136] Taliban forces were forced to pull out of Musa Qala.

2008: Reassessment and renewed commitment

Main article: Coalition combat operations in Afghanistan in 2008

Further information: 2008 in Afghanistan

Admiral Mike Mullen, Staff Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that while the situation in Afghanistan is "precarious and urgent," the 10,000 additional troops needed there would be unavailable "in any significant manner" unless withdrawals from Iraq are made. However, Mullen stated that "my priorities . . . given to me by the commander in chief are: Focus on Iraq first. It's been that way for some time. Focus on Afghanistan second."[137]

In the first five months of 2008, the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan increased by over 80% with a surge of 21,643 more troops, bringing the total number of U.S troops in Afghanistan from 26,607 in January to 48,250 in June.[4] In September, 2008, President Bush announced the withdrawal of over 8,000 troops from Iraq in the coming months and a further increase of up to 4,500 U.S. troops in Afghanistan.[138]

In June 2008, British prime minister Gordon Brown announced the number of British troops serving in Afghanistan would increase to 8,030 - a rise of 230 personnel.[139] The same month, the UK lost its 100th serviceman killed in the war since 2001.[140]

On June 13, Taliban fighters demonstrated their ongoing strength, liberating all prisoners in Kandahar jail. The well-planned operation freed 1200 prisoners, 400 of whom were Taliban prisoners of war, causing a major embarrassment for NATO in one of its operational centres in the country.[141]

On July 13, 2008, a coordinated Taliban attack was launched on a remote NATO base at Wanat in Kunar province. On August 19, French troops suffered their worst losses in Afghanistan in an ambush.[142] Later in the month, an airstrike which targeted a Taliban commander in Herat province killed 90 civilians.

Late August saw one of the largest operations by NATO forces in Helmand province, Operation Eagle's Summit, with the aim bringing electricity to the region.[143]

On September 3, the war spilled over on to Pakistani territory for the first time when heavily armed commandos, believed to be US Army Special Forces, landed by helicopter and attacked three houses in a village close to a known Taliban and Al-Qaeda stronghold. The attack killed between seven and twenty people. According to local residents,

most of the dead were civilians. Pakistan responded furiously, condemning the attack. The foreign ministry in Islamabad called the incursion "a gross violation of Pakistan's territory".[144][145]

On September 6, in an apparent reaction to the recent cross-border attack, the federal government announced disconnection of supply lines to the allied forces stationed in Afghanistan through Pakistan for an indefinite period.[146]

On September 11, militants killed two U.S. troops in the eastern part of the country. This brought the total number of US losses to 113, making 2008 the deadliest year for American troops in Afghanistan since the start of the war.[147] The year was also the deadliest for several European countries in Afghanistan, particularly for the UK, who suffered a similar level of casualities to the USA with the loss of 108 personnel.

Taliban attacks on supply lines through Pakistan

In November and December 2008, there were multiple incidents of major theft, robbery, and arson attacks against NATO supply convoys in Pakistan.[148][149][150] Transport companies south of Kabul have also been reported to pay protection money to the Taliban.[150][151] In an attack on November 11, 2008, Taliban fighters in Peshawar hijacked a convoy carrying NATO supplies from Karachi to Afghanistan. The militants took two military Humvees and paraded them in front of the media as trophies.[149]

The coalition forces bring 70 per cent of supplies through Pakistan every month, of a total of 2,000 truckloads in all.[151]

The area east of the Khyber pass in Pakistan has seen very frequent attacks. Cargo trucks and Humvees have been set ablaze by Taliban militants.[152] A half-dozen raids on depots with NATO supplies near Peshawar destroyed 300 cargo trucks and Humvees in December 2008.[152] The Taliban destroyed an iron bridge on the highway between Peshawar and the Khyber pass in February 2009.[153]

The other supply route through Pakistan, by way of Chaman, was briefly shut down in early 2009. On Jan 10, tribesmen used vehicles to block the road to protest a raid by Pakistani counter-narcotics forces that left one villager dead. The protesters withdrew on January 14 after police promised to take their complaints to provincial authorities.[154]

Coalition issues with Pakistan

An unnamed senior Pentagon official told the BBC that at some point between July 12 and September 12, 2008, President George W. Bush issued a classified order to authorize U.S. raids against militants in Pakistan. Pakistan however said it would not allow foreign forces onto its territory and that it would vigorously protect its sovereignty.[155]

In September, the Pakistan military stated that it had issued orders to "open fire" on American soldiers who crossed the Pakistan border in pursuit of militant forces.[156]

On September 25, 2008, Pakistani troops shot towards ISAF helicopters, which belonged to American troops. This caused confusion and anger in the Pentagon, which asked for a full explanation into the incident, and they denied that American choppers were in Pakistani airspace. Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari was quick to deny that shots were fired but instead insisted that the Pakistani troops shot flares to warn the Americans that they were in Pakistani airspace.

This has added to the doubts that have been expressed by certain Pentagon and Bush Administration officials about the capabilities of the Pakistani Armed Forces to confront the militant threat.

This has all added to the split that occurred when American troops apparently landed on Pakistani soil to carry out an operation against militants in the North-West Frontier Province but 'Pakistan reacted angrily to the action, saying 20 innocent villagers had been killed by US troops'.[157] On October 1, 2008, a suspected U.S. drone fired a missile against militants inside Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province near the Afghan border. It is believed that six people died in the incident. Attacks of such have drawn a stiff response from Islamabad, accusing the United States of violating their airspace, although Americans have expressed frustration at the lack or failure of action by the Pakistani side against the militants held up on Pakistani soil.[158] However, despite tensions between Pakistan and the U.S., the United States has continued to increase the use of remotely piloted drone aircraft in Pakistan's border regions, in particular the Federally Administered Tribal Regions (FATA) and Baluchistan; as of early 2009, drone attacks were up 183% since 2006.[159]

A poll by Gallup Pakistan in the summer of 2008 found only 9 percent of Pakistanis in favor of the U.S. drone attacks and 67 percent against, with a majority ranking the United States as a greater threat to Pakistan than its archrival, India, or the Pakistani Taliban.[160]

By the end of 2008, the Taliban had severed any remaining ties with al-Qaeda.[33]

In January, 2010, American officials said privately that the Pakistanis are reluctant to go after the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network because they see them as a future proxy against Indian interests in Afghanistan when the Americans leave.[161] However, U.S. officials had previously praised Pakistan's Military effort against the militants during it's offensive in South Waziristan in November 2009.[162]. Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari claims that Pakistan has lost over 35 billion U.S. dollars during the previous eight years as a result of the fight against militancy.[163]

In a meeting with General McChrystal, Pakistani military officials urged international forces to keep their fight on the Afghan side of the border in order to prevent militants from fleeing into Pakistan. Pakistan noted that it has 140,000 Pakistani soldiers on its side of the border with Afghanistan to monitor and address militant activities, while the Coalition only has 100,000 soldiers to police the Afghanistan side of the border.[164]

2009: U.S. in southern Afghanistan

Further information: Military operations of the War in Afghanistan (2001–present)#2009 Operations and Khyber Border Coordination Center

Northern Distribution Network

In response to the increased risk of sending supplies through Pakistan, work began on the establishment of a Northern Distribution Network (NDN) through Russia and several Central Asian republics. Initial permission for the U.S. military to move troop supplies through the region was given on January 20, 2009, after a visit to the region by General Petraeus.[165] The first shipment along the NDN route left on February 20 from Riga, Latvia, then traveled 3,212 miles

(5,169 km) to the Uzbek town of Termez on the Afghanistan border. U.S. commanders have stated their hope that 100 containers a day will be shipped along the NDN.[166] By comparison, currently 140 containers a day are shipped through the Khyber Pass.[167]

On May 11, 2009, Uzbekistan president Islam Karimov announced that the airport in Navoi, Uzbekistan was being used to transport non-lethal cargo into Afghanistan. Due to the still unsettled relationship between Uzbekistan and the United States following the 2005 Andijon massacre and subsequent expulsion of U.S. forces from Karshi-Khanabad airbase, U.S. forces were not involved in the shipment of supplies. Instead, South Korea's Korean Air, which is currently involved in overhauling Navoi's airport, officially handles logistics at the site.[168]

Originally only non-lethal resources were allowed on the NDN. In July 2009, however, shortly before a visit by President Obama to Moscow, Russian authorities announced that U.S. troops and weapons could use the country's airspace to reach Afghanistan.[169]

Some analysts worry that use of the NDN will come at the cost of increased Russian demands concerning missile defense and NATO enlargement, while others see no problems if the missile defense shield was scrapped. Additionally, human rights advocates are concerned that the U.S. is again working with the government of Uzbekistan, which is often accused of violating human rights.[170] Nevertheless, U.S. officials have promised increased cooperation with Uzbekistan, including further assistance to turn the Navoi airport into a major regional distribution center for both military and civilian ventures.[171][172]

Increase in US troops

In January, about 3,000 U.S. soldiers from the 3rd Brigade Combat Team of the 10th Mountain Division moved into the provinces of Logar and Wardak. The troops were the first wave of an expected surge of reinforcements originally ordered by George W. Bush and increased by Barack Obama.[173]

In mid-February, it was announced that 17,000 additional troops would be deployed to the country in two brigades and additional support troops; the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade of about 3,500 from the 7,000 Marines, and the 5th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division, a Stryker Brigade with about 4,000 of the 7,000 US Army soldiers.[174] The U.S. commander in Afghanistan, General David McKiernan, had called for as many as 30,000 additional troops, effectively doubling the number of troops currently in the country.[175] In October 2009, there were 72 American deaths, 8 on October 28 alone. There have been 255 American deaths in 2009, a 43% increase of last year.

On September 23, NBC News reported that a classified assessment of the war in Afghanistan by General McChrystal included his conclusion that a successful counterinsurgency strategy would require 500,000 troops and five years of fighting.[176]

In November, the U.S. ambassador in Kabul sent two classified cables to Washington expressing deep concerns about sending more U.S. troops to Afghanistan until President Hamid Karzai's government demonstrates that it is willing to tackle the corruption and mismanagement that has fueled the Taliban's rise. Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry, a retired

three-star general who in 2006-2007 commanded U.S. troops in Afghanistan, also expressed frustration with the relative paucity of funds set aside for spending on development and reconstruction in Afghanistan.[177]

In subsequent cables, Ambassador Eikenberry repeatedly cautioned that deploying sizable American reinforcements would result in “astronomical costs” — tens of billions of dollars — and would only deepen the dependence of the Afghan government on the United States. On November 6, 2009, he wrote Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, “Sending additional forces will delay the day when Afghans will take over, and make it difficult, if not impossible, to bring our people home on a reasonable timetable. An increased U.S. and foreign role in security and governance will increase Afghan dependence, at least in the short-term.”[178]

On November 26, 2009, Afghan President Hamid Karzai made a public plea to the United States to engage in direct negotiations with the Taliban leadership. In an interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour, Karzai said there is an "urgent need" for negotiations with the Taliban, and made it clear that the Obama administration had opposed such talks. There was no formal American response.[179][180]

On December 1, 2009 President Barack Obama announced at The United States Military Academy at Westpoint that the U.S will be sending 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan. Antiwar organizations in the United States responded quickly, and cities throughout the U.S. saw protests on December 2 in response.[181] Many protesters compared the decision to deploy more troops in Afghanistan to the expansion of the Vietnam War under the Johnson administration.[182]

In early December, 2009, the Taliban offered to give the U.S. "legal guarantees" that they will not allow Afghanistan to be used for attacks on other countries. There was no formal American response.[183]

On December 7, Afghan President Karzai said it may be five years before his army is ready to take on the insurgents.[184] Karzai also said that Afghanistan's security forces will need U.S. support for another 15 to 20 years.[185]

In late January, 2010, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner explained that France will not send any more combat troops to Afghanistan, reinforcing his country's opposition to joining the U.S.-led surge there.[186]

Dozens of organizations across the U.S. have planned a national march for peace in Washington, D.C. on March 20, 2010.[187]

Kunduz Province campaign

Main article: Kunduz Province Campaign

In April, German forces stepped up their efforts to retake some rebellious areas of Kunduz province, considered to be the most dangerous part of Northern Afghanistan by ISAF commander McChrystal. The fighting centres upon the areas to the west and south of the city of Kunduz with a main focus on an area between the town of Chahar Dara in the West and the Kunduz river in the east. Up to now this campaign consisted of several large offensives linked by countless skirmishes and gunfights. Operations of German, Afghan and Belgian troops were still ongoing as of December 2009 with American forces eventually joining them in early November. Insurgent militias suffered more than 650 casualties in this period. At least 86 coalition troops were wounded or killed.

Operation Khanjar and Operation Panther's Claw

Main articles: Operation Strike of the Sword and Operation Panther's Claw

On June 25, 2009, American officials announced the launch of Operation Khanjar ("strike of the sword").[189] About 4000 US Marines from the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade[188] and 650 Afghan soldiers[190] are currently involved in Operation Khanjar, which will be staged on the Helmand River. It is the biggest push since the Pentagon moved additional troops into the conflict earlier in 2009. Khanjar follows a British-led operation named Operation Panther's Claw in the same region[191] and is the first big push since US Gen. Stanley McChrystal took over as Allied commander. Officials call it the Marines' largest operation since the 2004 invasion of Fallujah, Iraq.[188] Operation Panther's Claw was aimed to secure various canal and river crossings to establish a permanent International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) presence in the area.[192]

Initially, Afghan and American soldiers have been moving into towns and villages along the Helmand River[188] to secure the civilian population from the Taliban. The main objective of the operation is to push troops into insurgent strongholds along the river. After the United States takes and holds captured areas, security responsibilities will be transferred to the Afghan soldiers. A secondary aim was to bring security to the Helmand Valley in time for presidential elections, set to take place on August 20.

The first aggressive phase will last 36 hours, where the secondary aim will be achieved first. Key targets of the assault include the districts of Garmsir and Nawa, which are towards the southern border with Pakistan.

Taliban's gains

The Taliban can sustain itself indefinitely, according to a December 22, 2009 briefing by Major General Michael T. Flynn, the top U.S. intelligence officer in Afghanistan. He wrote, “The Taliban retains [the] required partnerships to sustain support, fuel legitimacy and bolster capacity.”[35] The 23-page briefing states that "Security incidents [are] projected to be higher in 2010." Those incidents are already up by 300 percent since 2007 and by 60 percent since 2008, according to the briefing.[193]

On August 10, 2009, Stanley McChrystal, the newly appointed U.S. commander in Afghanistan, said that the Taliban has presently gained the upper hand and that the ISAF is not winning in the eight-year-old war. In a continuation of the Taliban's usual strategy of summer offensives,[194] the militants have aggressively spread their influence into the north and west Afghanistan, and stepped up their attack in an attempt to disrupt August 20 presidential polls.[195] Calling the Taliban a "very aggressive enemy", he added that the U.S. strategy in the months to come is to stop their momentum and focusing on protecting and safeguarding the Afghan civilians, while also calling it "hard work".[196]

The Taliban's claim of disrupting August 20 elections is largely disputed, claiming over 135 incidents of violence; media was asked to not report on any violent incidents, however,[197] causing many outlets to hail the elections as a success, even though some estimates give the voter turn out as much less than the expected 70 percent.[198] In southern Afghanistan where the Taliban holds the most sway, there was a low voter turnout and sporadic violence

directed at voters and security personnel. The chief observer of the European Union election mission, General Philippe Morillon, said the election was "generally fair" but "not free".[199]

Western groups and election observers had difficulty accessing the southern regions of Afghanistan, where at least 9 Afghan civilians and 14 security forces were killed in attacks intended to intimidate voters.[200] The Taliban released a video days after the elections, filming just up the road between Kabul and Kandahar, a major route in Afghanistan on election day, stopping buses, cars, and asking to see their fingers. The video went on to showing ten men who had voted, being talked to by a Taliban militant, they went on to say they may pardon the voters because of the Holy month of Ramadan[201] The Taliban also attacked towns with rockets and other means of indirect fire. Amid claims of widespread fraud, both of the top contenders, Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah, claimed victory in the election. Reports also suggest that the turnout was lower than the last election, and there are fears that a results dispute can turn violent, even though both candidates vowed not to incite violence in case of a loss.[202]

After Karzai's alleged win of 54 per cent, which would prevent a run off with his rival, Abdullah Abdullah, over 400,000 votes had to be discounted for Karzai, and many more with hundreds of thousands of votes and polling ballots being accused of fraud. Making the real turnout of the elections much lower than the official numbers, many nations criticizing the elections as "free but not fair".[203]

In September, the International Council on Security and Development released a map showing that the Taliban had a "permanent presence" in 80% of the country, with "permanent presence" defined by provinces that average one (or more) insurgent attack (lethal and non-lethal) per week.[204][205]

In December, an attack on Forward Operating Base Chapman, used by the Central Intelligence Agency to gather information and to coordinate drone attacks against Taliban leaders, killed at least six CIA officers and was a major setback for the agency's operations in the region.

2010: US offensive

Peace Initiatives

In early January, Taliban commanders held secret exploratory talks with a United Nations special envoy to discuss peace terms. Regional commanders on the Taliban's leadership council, the Quetta Shura, sought a meeting with the UN special representative in Afghanistan, Kai Eide, and it took place in Dubai on January 8. It was the first such meeting between the UN and senior members of the Taliban.[206]

On January 26, 2010, at a major conference in London which brought together some 70 countries and organizations,[41] Afghan President Hamid Karzai told world leaders that he intends to reach out to the top echelons of the Taliban within a few weeks with a peace initiative.[42] Karzai set the framework for dialogue with Taliban leaders when he called on the group's leadership to take part in a "loya jirga" -- or large assembly of elders—to initiate peace talks.[43] Karzai also asked for creation of a new peacemaking organization, to be called the National Council for Peace, Reconciliation and Reintegration.[42] It remains unclear whether the insurgents, who have spread to 33 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, are ready to negotiate, or would prefer to simply await the departure of western

troops.[207] A Taliban spokesman declined to talk in detail about Karzai's plans and only said the militants would make a decision "soon" about his offer.[43] Karzai's top adviser on the reconciliation process with the insurgents said that the country must learn to forgive the Taliban.[208]

Marja offensive

Main article: Operation Moshtarak

In early February Coalition and Afghan forces began highly visible plans for an offensive, codenamed Operation Moshtarak, on the Taliban stronghold near the village of Marja.[209] It began on 13 February and, according to US and Afghan officials, was the first operation where Afgan forces lead the coalition.[210] The offensive involves 15,000 US, British and Afghan troops. It is the biggest joint operation since the 2001 invasion that ousted the Taliban. The troops are fighting over an area of less than 100 square miles, with a population of 80,000.[211]

Risk of a failed state

In November 2006, the U.N. Security Council warned that Afghanistan may become a failed state due to increased Taliban violence, growing illegal drug production, and fragile State institutions.[32] In 2006, Afghanistan was rated 10th on the failed states index, up from 11th in 2005. From 2005 to 2006, the number of suicide attacks, direct fire attacks, and improvised explosive devices all increased.[212] Intelligence documents declassified in 2006 suggested that Al Qaeda, Taliban, Haqqani Network and Hezb-i-Islami sanctuaries had by then increased fourfold in Afghanistan.[212]

The campaign in Afghanistan successfully unseated the Taliban from power, but has been significantly less successful at achieving the primary policy goal of ensuring that Al-Qaeda can no longer operate in Afghanistan.[29]

In 2006, the U.S. Foreign Policy magazine and the U.S.-based "Fund for Peace" think-tank ranked Afghanistan in 10th place on their "failed state index". The authors said their index was based on "tens of thousands of articles" from various sources that they had gathered over several months in 2005. The score was based on 12 criteria that included: "uneven economic development along group lines", "legacy of vengeance - seeking group grievance", "widespread violation of human rights", "rise of factionalised elites", and "intervention of other states or external actors".[213]

In a recent interview, former head of U.S. troops in Iraq and now the head of U.S. Central Command, General David H. Petraeus, insisted that the Taliban are gaining strength. He cited the recent uptick in attacks in Afghanistan and in neighboring Pakistan. Petraeus also insisted that the challenges faced in Afghanistan are more complicated than the ones that were faced in Iraq during his tour and in order to turn around the recent events this would require removing militant sanctuaries and strongholds, which are widespread inside Afghanistan.[214]

On October 1, 2008, the top American general in Afghanistan, David McKiernan, warned that the situation in Afghanistan could get a lot worse. The international forces within Afghanistan have not been able to hold territory they have cleared because of the lack of troops. For this reason the general called for an extra three combat brigades (roughly 20,000 troops). Without this urgent rush of troops the Taliban would be able to get back into the communities that were once cleared by international troops. The general went on to say that things could get a lot worse before they get better.[215]

Observers also have argued that the mission in Afghanistan is hampered by a lack of agreement on objectives, a lack of resources, lack of coordination, too much focus on the central government at the expense of local and provincial governments, and too much focus on Afghanistan instead of the region.[216]

The CIA from a request by General Stanley McChrystal, the commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, is planning to increase teams of operatives, including their elite paramilitary officers from Special Activities Division, with U.S. military special operations forces. This combination worked well in Iraq and is largely credited with the success of that surge.[217] The CIA is also increasing its campaign using Predator missile strikes on Al Qaeda in Pakistan. The number of strikes so far this year, 37, already exceeds the 2008 total, according to data compiled by the Long War Journal, which tracks strikes in Pakistan.[217]

In November, 2009, Malalai Joya, a former member of the Afghan Parliament and the author of "Raising My Voice," expressed opposition to an expansion of the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and concern about the future of her country. “Eight years ago, the U.S. and NATO — under the banner of women’s rights, human rights, and democracy — occupied my country and pushed us from the frying pan into the fire. Eight years is enough to know better about the corrupt, mafia system of President Hamid Karzai. My people are crushed between two powerful enemies. From the sky, occupation forces bomb and kill civilians … and on the ground, the Taliban and warlords continue their crimes. It is better that they leave my country; my people are that fed up. Occupation will never bring liberation, and it is impossible to bring democracy by war.”[218]

According to a November, 2009 UNICEF report, eight years after the U.S.-led invasion ousted the Taliban, Afghanistan is the most dangerous place in the world for a child to be born. Afghanistan has the highest infant mortality rate in the world—257 deaths per 1,000 live births, and 70 percent of the population lacks access to clean water, the agency said.[219]

In November, 2009, Afghanistan slipped three places in Transparency International's annual index of corruption perceptions, becoming the world's second most-corrupt country ahead of Somalia.[220]

Capacity of Afghan security forces

The plan to transfer security responsibility to Afghan forces is the centerpiece of U.S. President Barack Obama's revised Afghanistan strategy.[221] Current U.S. policy calls for boosting the Afghan National Army to 134,000 soldiers by October, 2010. The army currently numbers about 95,000 troops.[222]

This increase in Afghan troops would allow the U.S. to begin withdrawing American forces in July, 2011, as now planned.[223]

The transfer of security responsibilities cannot happen unless the Afghan government and the coalition can recruit, train and retain soldiers.[224]

At present, the Afghan National Army has severely limited fighting capacity.[225] Even the best Afghan units lack training, discipline and adequate reinforcements. In one new unit in Baghlan Province, soldiers have been found cowering in ditches rather than fighting.[226] Some are suspected of collaborating with the Taliban against the

Americans.[225] “They don’t have the basics, so they lay down,” said Capt. Michael Bell, who is one of a team of U.S. and Hungarian mentors tasked with training Afghan soldiers. “I ran around for an hour trying to get them to shoot, getting fired on. I couldn’t get them to shoot their weapons.”[225] In addition, 9 out of 10 soldiers in the Afghan National Army cannot read.[227]

The Afghan Army is plagued by inefficiency and endemic corruption.[228] U.S. training efforts have been drastically slowed by the corruption, widespread illiteracy, vanishing supplies, and lack of discipline.[229] U.S. trainers report missing vehicles, weapons and other military equipment, and outright theft of fuel provided by the U.S.[225] Death threats have been leveled against U.S. officers who try to stop Afghan soldiers from stealing. Afghan soldiers often find improvised explosive devices and snip the command wires instead of marking them and waiting for U.S. forces to come to detonate them. The Americans say this just allows the insurgents to return and reconnect them.[225] U.S. trainers frequently must remove the cell phones of Afghan soldiers hours before a mission for fear that the operation will be compromised.[230] American trainers often spend large amounts of time verifying that Afghan rosters are accurate — that they are not padded with “ghosts” being “paid” by Afghan commanders who quietly collect the bogus wages.[231]

In multiple firefights during the February, 2010 NATO offensive in Helmand Province, many Afghan soldiers did not aim — they pointed their American-issued M-16 rifles in the rough direction of the incoming small-arms fire and pulled their triggers without putting rifle sights to their eyes. Their rifle muzzles were often elevated several degrees high.[232]

Desertion also is a significant problem in the Afghan Army. One in every four combat soldiers quit the Afghan Army during the 12-month period ending in September, 2009, according to data from the U.S. Defense Department and the Inspector General for Reconstruction in Afghanistan.[233]

The Afghan National Police provides support to the Afghan army. Police officers in Afghanistan are largely illiterate. Approximately 17 percent of them test positive for illegal drugs. They are widely accused of demanding bribes.[234]

Attempts to build a credible Afghan police force are faltering badly, according to NATO officials, even as they acknowledge that the force will be a crucial piece of the effort to have Afghans manage their own security so American forces can begin leaving.[235] Taliban infiltration is a constant worry; incompetence an even bigger one.[235] A quarter of the officers quit every year, making the Afghan government’s goals of substantially building up the police force even harder to achieve.[235]

Possible long-term U.S. role and military presence

Many of the thousands of U.S. troops in Afghanistan are positioned in what experts say are large, permanent bases.[236]

In mid-March, 2005, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Richard Myers told reporters in Kabul that the U.S. Defense Department was studying the feasibility of such permanent military bases. At the end of March, the U.S. military

announced that it was spending $83-million on its two main air bases in Afghanistan, Bagram Air Base north of Kabul and Kandahar Air Field in the south of the country.[237]

As of July 2008, hundreds of millions of dollars were being spent on permanent infrastructure for foreign military bases in Afghanistan, including a budget of $780-million to further develop the infrastructure at just the Kandahar Air Field base, described as "a walled, multicultural military city that houses some 13,000 troops from 17 different countries - the kind of place where you can eat at a Dutch chain restaurant alongside soldiers from the Royal Netherlands Army."[238]

The Bagram Air Base, run by the U.S. military, was also expanding according to military officials, with the U.S military buying land from Afghan locals in different places for further expansion of the base.[238]

As of January 2009, the U.S. had begun work on $1.6 billion of new, permanent military installations at Kandahar.[239]

In February 2009, The Times reported that the U.S. will build two large new military bases in southern Afghanistan.[240] One will be built in Kandahar province near the Helmand border, at Maiwand - a place famous as the site of the destruction of a British army during the Second Anglo-Afghan War. The other new U.S. military base will be built in Zabul, a province now largely controlled by the Taliban and criminal gangs.[240]

In an article in Time Magazine, the U.S. base in Shkin in the Paktika province was described as:

> "a Wild West cavalry fort, ringed with coils of razor wire. A U.S. flag ripples above the 3-ft.-thick mud walls, and in the watchtower a guard scans the expanse of forested ridges, rising to 9,000 ft., that mark the border. When there's trouble, it usually comes from that direction."[241]

Geo-strategic military build-up

The dramatic build-up of an indefinite American/American-led military presence in Afghanistan has unsettled some regional powers, including Russia. Russia has agreed to let the United States and NATO use its airspace for logistical purposes, however.[238]

"Is it all to fight a number of Taliban - 10,000, 12,000 Taliban?" Zamir Kabulov, Russia's ambassador to Kabul, has proposed. "Maybe this infrastructure, military infrastructure, [is] not only for internal purposes but for regional also."[238]

Russia views the large and indefinite military build-up as a potential threat "because Afghanistan's geographical location is a very strategic one," Kabulov said. "It's very close to three main world basins of hydrocarbons: Persian Gulf, Caspian Sea, Central Asia."[44][238][242][243] [244]

Other observers have also noted that through a stronger military presence in Afghanistan, the U.S. may be seeking to strengthen its own position in the region to counter increasingly warm relations among India, China and Russia.[245]

Along with its proximity to the vast Central Asian and Caspian Sea energy sources and being in the midst of the regional powers of India, China, and Russia, Afghanistan also holds strategic significance given its border with Iran.[237][246]

International reactions

Main article: International public opinion on the war in Afghanistan

Public opinion in 2001

When the invasion began in October 2001, polls indicated that about 88% of Americans and about 65% of Britons backed military action in Afghanistan.[247]

A large-scale 37-nation poll of world opinion carried out by Gallup International in late September 2001 found that large majorities in most countries favored a legal response, in the form of extradition and trial, over a military response to 9/11: Only in three countries out of the 37 surveyed - the United States, Israel, and India - did majorities favor military action in Afghanistan. In the other 34 countries surveyed, the poll found many clear majorities that were in favor of extradition/trial instead of military action: in the United Kingdom (75%), France (67%), Switzerland (87%), Czech Republic (64%), Lithuania (83%), Panama (80%), Mexico (94%), and other countries.[248][249]

An Ipsos-Reid poll conducted between November and December 2001 showed that majorities in Canada (66%), France (60%), Germany (60%), Italy (58%), and the U.K. (65%) approved of U.S. airstrikes while majorities in Argentina (77%), China (52%), South Korea (50%), Spain (52%), and Turkey (70%) opposed them.[247]

Current public opinion

In a December, 2009 Pew Research Center poll, only 32 percent of Americans favored increasing U.S. troops in Afghanistan, while 40 percent favored decreasing them. Almost half of Americans, 49 percent, believed that the U.S. should "mind its own business" internationally and let other countries get along the best they can. That figure was an increase from 30 percent who said that in December 2002.[250]

In a November, 2009 Gallup poll, a record 66% of Americans said things were going badly for the U.S. in Afghanistan, up from 61% in early September. 36% said U.S. involvement was a mistake, unchanged from views over the summer. Opinion was more closely divided over whether or not further involvement was worth it. Between 42%-47% favored at least some troop increases to satisfy the military's requests, 39%-44% wanted to begin reducing troops, and 7-9% wanted no changes in troop levels. Just 29% of Democrats favor any troop increases while 57% want to begin reducing troops. 36% of Americans approved of Obama's handling of Afghanistan, including 19% of Republicans, 31% of independents, and 54% of Democrats.[251]

In a 47-nation June 2007 survey of global public opinion, the Pew Global Attitudes Project found considerable opposition to the war. Out of the 47 countries surveyed, 4 had a majority that favoured keeping foreign troops: the U.S. (50%), Israel (59%), Ghana (50%), and Kenya (60%).[252] In 41 of the 47 countries, pluralities want U.S. and NATO troops out of Afghanistan as soon as possible.[252] In 32 out of 47 countries, clear majorities want this war over as soon as possible. Majorities in 7 out of 12 NATO member countries say troops should be withdrawn as soon as possible.[252][253]

A 24-nation Pew Global Attitudes survey in June 2008 similarly found that majorities or pluralities in 21 of 24 countries want the U.S. and NATO to remove their troops from Afghanistan as soon as possible. Only in three out

of the 24 countries - the United States (50%), Australia (60%), and Britain (48%) - did public opinion lean more toward keeping troops there until the situation has stabilized.[254][255]

Since that June 2008 global survey, however, public opinion in Australia and Britain has also diverged from that in the U.S., and a majority of Australians and Britons now want their troops to be brought home from Afghanistan. A September 2008 poll found that 56% of Australians oppose the continuation of their country's military involvement in Afghanistan, while 42% support it.[256][257][258] A November 2008 poll found that 68% of Britons want their troops withdrawn within the next 12 months.[259][260][261] In the United States, a September 2008 Pew survey found that 61% of Americans wanted U.S. troops to stay until the situation has stabilized, while 33% wanted them removed as soon as possible.[262]

Afghan opinions

Recent polls of Afghans have found strong opposition to the Taliban and significant, albeit diminished support of the American military presence.

According to a May 2009 BBC poll, 69% of Afghans surveyed thought it was at least mostly good that the U.S. military came in to remove the Taliban – a decrease from 87% of Afghans surveyed in 2005. 24% thought it was mostly or very bad – up from 9% in 2005. The poll indicated that 63% of Afghans were at least somewhat supportive of a U.S. military presence in the country – down from 78% in 2005. Just 18% supported increasing the U.S. military's presence, while 44% favored reducing it. 90% of Afghans surveyed opposed the presence of Taliban fighters, including 70% who were strongly opposed. By an 82%-4% margin, people said they preferred the current government to Taliban rule.[263]

In a June 2009 Gallup survey, about half of Afghan respondents felt that additional U.S. forces would help stabilize the security situation in the southern provinces. But opinions varied widely across Afghanistan at the time; residents in the troubled South were mostly mixed or uncertain, while those in the West largely disagreed that more U.S. troops would help the situation.[264]

In December, 2009, many Afghan tribal heads and local leaders from the Pashtun south and east—the heartland of the Taliban insurgency—called for U.S. troop withdrawals. "I don't think we will be able to solve our problems with military force," said Muhammad Qasim, a tribal elder from the southern province of Kandahar. "We can solve them by providing jobs and development and by using local leaders to negotiate with the Taliban."[265] "If new troops come and are stationed in civilian areas, when they draw Taliban attacks civilians will end up being killed," said Gulbadshah Majidi, a lawmaker and close associate of Mr. Karzai. "This will only increase the distance between Afghans and their government."[265]

In late January, 2010, Afghan protesters took to the streets for three straight days and blocked traffic on a highway that links Kabul and Kandahar. The Afghans were demonstrating in response to the deaths of four men in a NATO-Afghan raid in the village of Ghazni. Ghazni residents insisted that the dead were civilians.[266]

Afghan resistance to permanent U.S. military bases

The idea of permanent U.S. military bases vexes many people in Afghanistan, which has a long history of resisting foreign invaders.[246]

In May 2005, riots and protests that had started over a false report in Newsweek of U.S. interrogators desecrating the Koran and turned into the biggest anti-U.S. protests in Afghanistan since the 2001 invasion included demands that the Kabul government reject U.S. intentions to create a permanent military presence in Afghanistan.[237]

Protests, demonstrations and rallies

Further information: Opposition to the War in Afghanistan (2001–present) and Protests against the War in Afghanistan (2001–present)

The war has repeatedly been the subject of large protests around the world starting with the large-scale demonstrations in the days leading up to the official launch of U.S. Operation Enduring Freedom under George W. Bush in October 2001 and every year since. Many protesters consider the bombing and invasion of Afghanistan to be unjustified aggression.[267][268] The deaths of thousands of Afghan civilians caused directly and indirectly by the U.S. and NATO bombing campaigns is also a major underlying focus of the protests.[269][270] New organizations have arisen to oppose the war; for example, in January 2009, Brave New Foundation launched Rethink Afghanistan, a national campaign for non-violent solutions in Afghanistan built around a documentary film by director and political activist Robert Greenwald.[271]

When the 30,000 U.S. troop increase was announced on December 1, 2009, cities across the U.S. saw protests.[181] MoveOn.org, a liberal public policy advocacy group that supported the presidential candidacy of Barack Obama, came out against Obama's strategy.[272]

Others expressing opposition to the Obama escalation include "Peace Mom" activist Cindy Sheehan;[273] former Marine officer and current Rep. John Murtha (D-PA);[274] newly converted Democratic Senator Arlen Specter (D-PA);[275] former Republican congressman, military intelligence officer and CIA officer Rob Simmons;[276] Scott Ritter, U.N. weapons inspector in Iraq from 1991 to 1998;[277] Christopher Preble, director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute;[278] Graham Fuller, former CIA station chief in Kabul and former vice-chairman of the CIA's National Intelligence Council;[279] 2008 Republican Party presidential candidate Rep. Ron Paul (R-TX);[280] Rep. John Conyers Jr. (D-MI), the first member of the Congressional Black Caucus to endorse Obama over then-Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) for the 2008 Democratic nomination for president;[281] Alan Khazei, co-founder of the AmeriCorps program City Year;[282] Rabbi Arthur Waskow, whom Newsweek named one of the fifty most influential American rabbis;[283] Ron Kovic, author of the memoir Born on the Fourth of July;[284] and conservative columnist George Will.[285]

Dozens of organizations have planned a national march for peace in Washington, D.C. on March 20, 2010.[187]

Civilian Casualties

Main article: Civilian casualties of the War in Afghanistan (2001–present)

There is no single official figure for the overall number of civilians killed by the war since 2001, but estimates for specific years or periods have been published by a number of organizations.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported that 2,118 Afghan civilians were killed by armed conflict in 2008, the highest number since the end of the initial 2001 invasion. This represented an increase of about 40% over UNAMA's figure of 1,523 Afghan civilians killed in 2007.[286]

On March 15, 2009, in an interview with Margaret Warner of *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, General David D. McKiernan, then commander of all foreign military forces in Afghanistan, claimed that 80% of civilian casualties in Afghanistan were caused by the Taliban. He added that "by the very nature of an insurgency", it "mixes in on purpose with the civilian population."[287] In contrast to that, UNAMA attributed 55% of the civilian deaths it tracked in 2008 to anti-government forces, 39% to international-led military forces, while the remaining 6% could not be attributed because they died in crossfire or were killed by unexploded ordnance, for example.[286]

On May 11, 2009, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates abruptly replaced McKiernan with U.S. Army General Stanley A. McChrystal as the new U.S. commander of all foreign military forces in Afghanistan.[288] One of General McChrystal's first announcements was a sharp restrictriction on the use of airstrikes to reduce civilian casualties. Afghan leaders have long pleaded that foreign troops end airstrikes and nighttime raids of Afghan homes.[289]

Very few people in Afghanistan have been unaffected by the armed conflict there. Those with direct personal experience make up 60% of the population, and most others also report suffering a range of serious hardships. In total, almost everyone (96%) has been affected in some way – either personally or due to the wider consequences of armed conflict.[290]

The issue of civilian casualties is recognized as a problem at the highest levels of ISAF command. In a September 2009 report, Gen. Stanley McChrystal wrote "Civilian casualties and collateral damage to homes and property resulting from an over-reliance on firepower and force protection have severely damaged ISAF's legitimacy in the eyes of the Afghan people."[291]

Drug trade

Further information: Opium production in Afghanistan

In 2000, the Taliban had issued a ban on opium production, which led to reductions in Pashtun Mafia opium production by as much as 90%.[292] Soon after the 2001 U.S. led invasion of Afghanistan, however, opium production increased markedly.[293] By 2005, Afghanistan had regained its position as the world's #1 opium producer and was producing 90% of the world's opium, most of which is processed into heroin and sold in Europe and Russia.[294] Afghan opium kills 100,000 people every year worldwide.[295]

While U.S. and allied efforts to combat the drug trade have been stepped up, the effort is hampered by the fact that many suspected drug traffickers are now top officials in the Karzai government.[294] In fact, recent estimates by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimate that 52% of the nation's GDP, amounting to $2.7 billion annually, is generated by the drug trade.[296] The rise in production has been linked to the deteriorating security situation, as production is markedly lower in areas with stable security.[297]

The poppy eradication policy propagated by the international community and in particular the United States, as part of their War on Drugs, has been a failure, exacerbated by the lack of alternative development projects to replace livelihoods lost as a result of poppy eradication. Rather than stemming poppy cultivation, poppy eradication has succeeded only in adding to the extreme poverty in rural areas and general discontent, especially in the south of Afghanistan.

The extermination of the poppy crops is not seen as a viable option because the sale of poppies constitutes the livelihood of Afghanistan's rural farmers. Some 3.3 million Afghans are involved in producing opium.[298] Opium is more profitable than wheat and destroying opium fields could possibly lead to discontent or unrest among the indigent population.[299] Several alternatives to poppy eradication have been proposed, including controlled opium licensing for poppy for medicine projects.

Human rights abuses

Main article: Human rights in Afghanistan

There have been multiple accounts of human rights violations in Afghanistan.[300] The fallout of the U.S. led invasion, including a resurgence in Taliban forces, record-high drug production, and re-armed warlords, has led to a threat to the well-being and rights of hundreds of thousands of innocent Afghan citizens, according to Human Rights Watch.[301]

History of human rights abuses in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has suffered extensive human rights violations over the last twenty years. The subsequent civil war brought extensive abuses by the armed factions vying for power.[302] The Taliban rose to power in 1996 and ruled Afghanistan for five years until the U.S. attacks in 2001. They were notorious for their human rights abuses against women.[303]

Women and girls today in Afghanistan suffer high levels of violence and discrimination and have poor access to justice and education, Human Rights Watch concluded in a December, 2009 report.[304] One recent nationwide survey of levels of violence against Afghan women found that 52 percent of respondents experienced physical violence, and 17 percent reported sexual violence. Yet because of social and legal obstacles to accessing justice, few women and girls report violence to the authorities. These barriers are particularly formidable in rape cases.[305] UNICEF estimates that more than 80 percent of females lack access to education centers.[306] Female literacy is 10%.[306]

Taliban

Main article: Taliban

The increase in Taliban power has led to increased human rights violations against women in Afghanistan, according to the U.S. State Department.[307] According to Amnesty International, the Taliban commit war crimes by targeting civilians, including killing teachers, abducting aid workers and burning school buildings. Amnesty International said that up to 756 civilians were killed in 2006 by bombs, mostly on roads or carried by suicide attackers belonging to the Taliban.[308]

During the conflict, NATO has alleged that the Taliban have used civilians as human shields. As an example, NATO pointed to the victims of NATO air strikes in Farah province in May 2009, during which the Afghan government claims up to 150 civilians were killed. NATO stated that it had evidence that the Taliban forced civilians into buildings likely to be targeted by NATO aircraft involved in the battle. US Lieutenant Colonel Greg Julian, a spokesman for General David D. McKiernan, NATO's Afghanistan commander, said of the Taliban's tactics, "This was a deliberate plan by the Taliban to create a civilian casualty crisis. These were not human shields; these were human sacrifices. We have intelligence that points to this."[309]

Former Afghan warlords

Former Afghan warlords and political strongmen were responsible for numerous human rights violations in 2003 including kidnapping, rape, robbery, and extortion.[310]

Controversy over torture

In March 2002, ABC News claimed top officials at the CIA authorized controversial, harsh interrogation techniques.[311] The Bush administration declared that al-Qaeda members captured on the battlefield were not subject to the Geneva Conventions as it was not a conventional war, and al-Qaeda members do not wear uniforms, as set by the convention. Amnesty International stated on April 26, 2007, that a new deal to let Canadian officials visit enemy detainees in Afghanistan is aimed more at saving political face than keeping prisoners safe. The possible interrogation techniques included shaking and slapping, shackling prisoners in a standing position, keeping the prisoner in a cold cell and dousing them with water, and water boarding.[311] The U.S. operated a secret prison in Kabul where these techniques are claimed to have been employed.

Weapons controversies

White phosphorus

Main article: White phosphorus

White phosphorus has been condemned by human rights organizations as cruel and inhumane because it causes severe burns. There are cases that have been confirmed of white phosphorus burns on the bodies of civilians wounded in Afghanistan caused by clashes between U.S. and Taliban forces near Bagram. The United States claims at least 44 instances in which militants have used white phosphorus in weapons or attacks.[312] In May 2009, Colonel Gregory Julian, a spokesman for General David McKiernan, the overall commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, confirmed that Western military forces in Afghanistan use white phosphorus in order

to illuminate targets or as an incendiary to destroy bunkers and enemy equipment.[313][314] The Afghan government later launched an investigation into the use of white phosphorus munitions.[315]

Depleted uranium controversy

Reports of high uranium concentration in Afghani urine in 2003 fueled speculation that the coalition used depleted uranium weapons in Afghanistan.[316] However, further research in 2005 showed the isotope ratios to be more consistent with a natural (not depleted) uranium source.[317]

See also

- Afghan Civil War (1978-present)
- Criticism of the War on Terrorism
- Drone attacks in Pakistan
- Foreign hostages in Afghanistan
- International public opinion on the war in Afghanistan
- List of civilian casualties of the War in Afghanistan (2001–present)
- List of Coalition aircraft losses in Afghanistan
- Military operations of the War in Afghanistan (2001–present)
- Special Activities Division
- U.S. government response to the September 11, 2001 attacks
- US Army Special Forces
- Wars in Afghanistan
- War in North-West Pakistan

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