

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MARCH / APRIL 2002



A Flawed Masterpiece

Michael E. O'Hanlon

Volume 81 • Number 3

A Flawed Masterpiece

Michael E. O'Hanlon

ASSESSING THE AFGHAN CAMPAIGN

THROUGHOUT most of the twentieth century, the U.S. armed forces were seen as an overmuscled giant, able to win wars through brute strength but often lacking in daring and cleverness. This basic strategy worked during the two world wars, making the United States relatively tough to challenge. But it failed in Vietnam, produced mediocre results in Korea, and worked in the Persian Gulf War largely because the terrain was ideally suited to American strengths.

What a difference a new century makes. Operation Enduring Freedom has been, for the most part, a masterpiece of military creativity and finesse. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) head General Tommy Franks, and Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet devised a plan for using limited but well-chosen types of American power in conjunction with the Afghan opposition to defeat the Taliban and al Qaeda. Secretary of State Colin Powell helped persuade Pakistan to sever its ties with the Taliban, work with Afghanistan's Northern Alliance, provide the bases and overflight rights needed by U.S. forces, and contribute to the general war effort. Besides pushing his national security team to develop an innovative and decisive war-fighting strategy, President George W. Bush rallied the American people behind the war effort and established a close relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin, making it far easier for the United States to work militarily in Central Asia. The U.S. effort to overthrow the Taliban deprived

MICHAEL E. O'HANLON is Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies at the Brookings Institution. His most recent book is *Defense Policy Choices for the Bush Administration, 2001–2005*.

al Qaeda of its sanctuary within Afghanistan and left its surviving leaders running for their lives.¹

At their peak, the U.S. forces involved in the war effort numbered no more than 60,000 (about half of which were in the Persian Gulf), and Western allies added no more than 15,000. But the U.S.-led military campaign has hardly been small in scale. By the end of January, the United States had flown about 25,000 sorties in the air campaign and dropped 18,000 bombs, including 10,000 precision munitions. The number of U.S. sorties exceeded the number of U.S. sorties flown in the 1999 Kosovo war, and the United States dropped more smart bombs on Afghanistan than NATO dropped on Serbia in 1999. In fact, the total number of precision munitions expended in Afghanistan amounted to more than half the number used in Operation Desert Storm. (In addition, more than 3,000 U.S. and French bombs were dropped on surviving enemy forces in March during Operation Anaconda, in which some 1,500 Western forces and 2,000 Afghans launched a major offensive against about 1,000 enemy troops in the mountainous region of eastern Afghanistan.)

If the U.S. strategy has had many virtues, however, it has also had flaws. Most important, it has apparently failed to achieve a key war goal: capturing or killing Osama bin Laden and other top enemy leaders. Such hunts are inherently difficult, but the prospects for success in this case were reduced considerably by U.S. reliance on Pakistani forces and Afghan militias for sealing off enemy escape routes and conducting cave-to-cave searches during critical periods. If most al Qaeda leaders stay at large, the United States and other countries will remain more vulnerable to terrorism than they would be otherwise—perhaps significantly so.

But on balance, Operation Enduring Freedom has been very impressive. It may wind up being more notable in the annals of American military history than anything since Douglas MacArthur's invasion at Inchon in Korea half a century ago. Even Norman Schwarzkopf's famous "left hook" around Iraqi forces in Operation

¹Bob Woodward and Dan Balz, "At Camp David, Advise and Dissent," *The Washington Post*, January 31, 2002, p. A1; Bill Keller, "The World According to Powell," *The New York Times Magazine*, November 25, 2001, pp. 61–62.

Desert Storm was less bold; had it been detected, U.S. airpower still could have protected coalition flanks, and American forces could have outrun Iraqi troops toward most objectives on the ground. By contrast, Operation Enduring Freedom's impressive outcome was far from preordained. Too much American force (e.g., a protracted and punishing strategic air campaign or an outright ground invasion) risked uniting Afghan tribes and militias to fight the outside power, angering the Arab world, destabilizing Pakistan, and spawning more terrorists. Too little force, or the wrong kind of force, risked outright military failure and a worsening of Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis—especially given the limited capabilities of the small militias that made up the anti-Taliban coalition.

ZEROING IN

BEGINNING on October 7, Afghans, Americans, and coalition partners cooperated to produce a remarkable military victory in Afghanistan. The winning elements included 15,000 Northern Alliance fighters (primarily from the Tajik and Uzbek ethnic groups), 100 combat sorties a day by U.S. planes, 300–500 Western special operations forces and intelligence operatives, a few thousand Western ground forces, and thousands of Pashtun soldiers in southern Afghanistan who came over to the winning side in November. Together they defeated the Taliban forces, estimated at 50,000 to 60,000 strong, as well as a few thousand al Qaeda fighters.

Various Western countries, particularly several NATO allies and Australia, played important roles as well. A formal NATO role in the war was neither necessary nor desirable, given the location of the conflict and the need for a supple and secretive military strategy. Still, NATO allies stood squarely by America's side, invoking the alliance's Article V mutual-defense clause after September 11, and demonstrated that commitment by sending five AWACS aircraft to help patrol U.S. airspace. Forces from the United Kingdom, Australia, France, and Canada appear to have frequently contributed to the effort in Afghanistan; forces from Denmark, Norway, and Germany also participated in Operation Anaconda in March. Allied aircraft flew a total of some 3,000 sorties on relief, reconnaissance, and other missions. As noted,

France dropped bombs during Operation Anaconda, and the United Kingdom fired several cruise missiles on the first day of battle as well. Numerous countries, including the Netherlands, Italy, and Japan, deployed ships to the Arabian Sea. The cooperation continues today, as major Western allies constitute the backbone of the UN-authorized stability force in Kabul.

The short war has had several phases. The first began on October 7 and lasted a month; the second ran through November and saw the Taliban lose control of the country; the third was characterized by intensive bombing of suspected al Qaeda strongholds in the Tora Bora

The war's first month had many analysts worried about the basic course of the campaign.

mountain and cave complex in December; the fourth began with the inauguration of Hamid Karzai as interim prime minister and continues to date.

During the first part of the war, Taliban forces lost their large physical assets such as radar, aircraft, and command-and-control systems, but they hung on to power in most

regions. Most al Qaeda training camps and headquarters were also destroyed. Although Taliban forces did not quickly collapse, they were increasingly isolated in pockets near the major cities. Cut off from each other physically, they were unable to resupply or reinforce very well and had problems communicating effectively.

In the first week of the war, U.S. aircraft averaged only 25 combat sorties a day, but they soon upped that total to around 100. (Some 70 Tomahawk cruise missiles were fired in the early going; a total of about 100 had been used by December.) The United States comparably increased the number of airlift, refueling, and other support missions. U.S. air strikes by B-52 and B-1 bombers operating out of Diego Garcia typically involved six sorties a day; other land-based aircraft, primarily F-15Es and AC-130 gunships from Oman, flew about as much. Planes from the three U.S. aircraft carriers based in the Arabian Sea provided the rest of the combat punch. Reconnaissance and refueling flights originated from the Persian Gulf region and Diego Garcia. Some air support and relief missions also came from, or flew over, Central Asia, where U.S. Army soldiers from the Tenth Mountain Division helped protect airfields.

Most air attacks occurred around Afghanistan's perimeter, because the rugged central highlands were not a major operating area for the Taliban or al Qaeda. By the middle of October, most fixed assets worth striking had already been hit, so combat sorties turned to targeting Taliban and al Qaeda forces in the field. Aircraft continued to fly at an altitude of at least 10,000 feet, because the Pentagon was fearful of anti-aircraft artillery, Soviet SA-7 and SA-13 portable anti-aircraft missiles, and some 200–300 Stinger anti-aircraft missiles presumed to be in Taliban or al Qaeda possession. But most precision-guided weapons are equally effective regardless of their altitude of origin, provided that good targeting information is available—as it was in this case, thanks to U.S. troops on the ground.

The first month of the war produced only limited results and had many defense and strategic analysts worried about the basic course of the campaign. Some of those critics began, rather intemperately and unrealistically, to call for a ground invasion; others opposed an invasion but thought that a substantial intensification of efforts would prove necessary.

In phase two, beginning in early November, that intensification occurred. But it was due not so much to an increased number of airplanes as to an increase in their effectiveness. By then, 80 percent of U.S. combat sorties could be devoted to directly supporting opposition forces in the field; by late November, the tally was 90 percent. In addition, the deployment of more unmanned aerial vehicles and Joint Surveillance and Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) aircraft to the region helped the United States maintain continuous reconnaissance of enemy forces in many places. Most important, the number of U.S. special operations forces and CIA teams working with various opposition elements increased greatly. In mid-October, only three special operations "A teams," each consisting of a dozen personnel, were in Afghanistan; in mid-November, the tally was 10; by December 8, it was 17. This change meant the United States could increasingly call in supplies for the opposition, help it with tactics, and designate Taliban and al Qaeda targets for U.S. air strikes using global positioning system (GPS) technology and laser range finders. The Marine Corps also began to provide logistical support for these teams as the war advanced.

Three Air Campaigns in Comparison

Operation	Total sorties flown	Total bombs delivered	Precision-guided bombs delivered
Enduring Freedom <i>(Afghanistan)</i>	38,000	22,000 <i>(est.)</i>	12,500 <i>(est.)</i>
Allied Force 1999 <i>(Kosovo)</i>	37,500	23,000	8,050
Desert Storm 1991 <i>(Persian Gulf)</i>	118,700	265,000	20,450

NOTES: In Operation Allied Force, the United States flew 60 percent of the sorties and delivered 80 percent of the precision-guided bombs. In Operation Desert Storm, those contributions were 85 percent and 89 percent, respectively; in Operation Enduring Freedom, they were 92 percent and 99 percent, respectively.

SOURCES: Enduring Freedom (all data as of March 14, 2002): U.S. Air Force, March 15, 2002; Rear Adm. John Stufflebeem, Department of Defense news briefing, January 25, 2002; Eric Schmitt, "After January Raid, Gen. Franks Promises to Do Better," *New York Times*, February 8, 2002, p. A10; William M. Arkin, "Old-Timers Prove Invaluable in Afghanistan Air Campaign," *Los Angeles Times*, February 10, 2002, p. A12. Allied Force: Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), pp. 150, 307. Desert Storm: U.S. General Accounting Office, *Operation Desert Storm* (Washington: GAO, 1997), p. 178; Thomas A. Keaney and Eliot A. Cohen, "Summary Report," *Gulf War Air Power Survey* (Washington: Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, 1993), pp. 184–85.

As a result, enemy forces collapsed in northern cities such as Mazar-i-Sharif and Taloqan over the weekend of November 9–11. Taliban fighters ran for their lives, provoking their leader, Mullah Muhammad Omar, to broadcast a demand that his troops stop "behaving like chickens." Kabul fell soon afterward. By November 16, Pentagon officials were estimating that the Taliban controlled less than one-third of the country, in contrast to 85 percent just a week before. Reports also suggested that Muhammad Atef, a key al Qaeda operative, was killed by U.S. bombs in mid-November. Kunduz, the last northern stronghold of enemy forces where several

thousand Taliban and al Qaeda troops apparently remained, fell on November 24–25.

In late November, more than 1,000 U.S. marines of the 15th and 26th Marine Expeditionary Units established a base about 60 miles southwest of Kandahar, which the Taliban continued to hold. They deployed there directly from ships in the Arabian Sea, leapfrogging over Pakistani territory at night (to minimize political difficulties for the government of President Pervez Musharraf) and flying 400 miles inland to what became known as Camp Rhino. Their subsequent resupply needs were largely met using Pakistani bases. Once deployed, they began to interdict some road traffic and carry out support missions for special operations forces.

Meanwhile, Pashtun tribes had begun to oppose the Taliban openly. By November, they were accepting the help of U.S. special forces, who had previously been active principally in the north of the country. Two

groups in particular—one led by Hamid Karzai, the other by another tribal leader, Gul Agha Shirzai—closed in on Kandahar. Mullah Omar offered to surrender in early December but in the end fled with most of his fighters, leaving the city open by December 8–9. Pockets of Taliban and al Qaeda resistance, each with hundreds of fighters or more, remained in areas near Mazar-i-Sharif, Kabul, Kandahar, and possibly elsewhere, but the Taliban no longer held cities or major transportation routes.

Why this part of the campaign achieved such a rapid and radical victory remains unclear. Taliban forces presumably could have held out longer if they had hunkered down in the cities and put weapons near mosques, hospitals, and homes, making their arsenal hard to attack from the air. Opposition fighters were too few to defeat them in street-to-street fighting in most places, and starving out the Taliban would have required the unthinkable tactic of starving local civilian populations as well.

Most likely, the Taliban got caught in positions outside major cities that they could neither easily escape nor defend. Once the Afghan opposition began to engage the enemy seriously in November

The Taliban got caught in positions outside major cities that they could neither escape nor defend.

and Taliban forces returned fire, they revealed their positions to American special operations personnel who could call in devastating air strikes. Sometimes they were tricked into revealing their locations over the radio. Even trench lines were poor defenses against 2-ton bombs delivered within 10 to 15 meters of their targets. Just what Taliban fighters could have done differently, once stranded in that open terrain, is unclear. They might have been better advised either to go on the offensive or to try to escape back into urban settings under cover of night or poor weather, although many U.S. reconnaissance assets work well under such conditions. But both approaches would have been difficult and dangerous, especially for a relatively unsophisticated military force such as the Taliban.

The third main phase of the war began in early December. By this time, U.S. intelligence had finally pinpointed much of al Qaeda's strength near Jalalabad, in eastern Afghanistan. In particular, al Qaeda forces, including Osama bin Laden, were supposedly holed up in the mountain redoubts of Tora Bora. Traveling with perhaps 1,000 to 2,000 foreign fighters, most of them fellow Arabs, bin Laden could not easily evade detection from curious eyes even if he might elude U.S. overhead reconnaissance. Thus, once Afghan opposition fighters, together with CIA and special operations forces, were deployed in the vicinity, U.S. air strikes against the caves could become quite effective. By mid-December, the fight for Tora Bora was over. Most significant cave openings were destroyed and virtually all signs of live al Qaeda fighters disappeared. Sporadic bombing continued in the area, and it was not until mid-January that a major al Qaeda training base, Zawah Kili, was destroyed. But most bombing ended by late 2001.

So why did bin Laden and other top al Qaeda leaders apparently get away? The United States relied too much on Pakistan and its Afghan allies to close off possible escape routes from the Tora Bora region. It is not clear that these allies had the same incentives as the United States to conduct the effort with dogged persistence. Moreover, the mission was inherently difficult. By mid-December, the Pentagon felt considerably less sure than it had been of the likely whereabouts of bin Laden, even though it suspected that he and most of his top lieutenants were still alive.

A Flawed Masterpiece

Although estimates remain rough, Taliban losses in the war were considerable. According to *New York Times* correspondent Nicholas Kristof, as many as 8,000 to 12,000 were killed—roughly 20 percent of the Taliban's initial fighting capability. Assuming conservatively at least two wounded for every person killed, Taliban losses could have represented half their initial fighting strength, a point at which most armies have traditionally started to crumble. Another 7,000 or more were taken prisoner. Kristof's tally also suggests that Afghan civilian casualties totaled only about 1,000, a mercifully low number despite several wrongly targeted U.S. bombings and raids during the war. Although a couple of those U.S. mistakes probably should have been prevented, they do not change the basic conclusion that the war caused relatively modest harm to innocents.

U.S. forces had lost about 30 personnel by the middle of March: about a dozen on the battlefield (8 during Operation Anaconda) and the rest in and around Afghanistan through accidents. Most were Marine Corps and Army troops, but other personnel were lost as well, including a CIA operative. The casualty total was 50 percent greater than those of the invasions of Grenada and Haiti in the 1980s but less than the number of troops killed in Somalia in 1992–93.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

ON THE WHOLE, Operation Enduring Freedom has been masterful in both design and execution. Using specially equipped CIA teams and special operations forces in tandem with precision-strike aircraft allowed for accurate and effective bombing of Taliban and al Qaeda positions. U.S. personnel also contributed immensely to helping the Northern Alliance tactically and logistically. By early November, the strategy had produced mass Taliban retreats in the north of the country; it had probably caused many Taliban casualties as well.

More notably, the U.S. effort helped quickly galvanize Pashtun forces to organize and fight effectively against the Taliban in the south, which many analysts had considered a highly risky proposition and CENTCOM had itself considered far from certain. Had these Pashtun forces decided that they feared the Northern Alliance and the United States more than the Taliban, Afghanistan might have become effec-

tively partitioned, with al Qaeda taking refuge exclusively in the south and the war effort rendered largely futile. Convincing these Pashtun to change sides and fight against the Taliban required just the right mix of diplomacy, military momentum and finesse, and battlefield assistance from CIA and special operations teams.

Yet despite the overall accomplishments, mistakes were made. The Pentagon's handling of the al Qaeda and Taliban detainees at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, was one of them. Whether these men should have been designated as prisoners of war can be debated. Neither group fought for a recognized government, and al Qaeda fighters satisfied virtually none of the standard criteria associated with soldiers. The Bush administration's decision not to designate the detainees as POWs is thus understandable, particularly since it did not want to be forced to repatriate them once hostilities in Afghanistan ended. But it probably would have been wiser to accord the detainees POW rights initially, until a military tribunal could determine them ineligible for POW status, as the Geneva Conventions stipulate.

The POW issue aside, the administration's initial reluctance to guarantee the basic protections of the Geneva Conventions to Taliban soldiers and its continued refusal to apply them to al Qaeda were unwise. These decisions fostered the impression that the detainees were not being treated humanely. This perception was wrong, but it became prevalent. Rumsfeld had to go on the defensive after photos circulated around the world showing shackled prisoners kneeling before their open-air cells; Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Richard Myers talked somewhat hyperbolically about how the detainees might gnaw through hydraulic cables on airplanes if not forcibly restrained; and some Pentagon officials even suggested that the detainees did not necessarily deserve Geneva treatment, given the crimes of al Qaeda on September 11. But Rumsfeld's comments came too late, and America's image in the Arab world in particular took another hit.

The big U.S. mistake, however, concerned the hunt for top al Qaeda leaders. If Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Zubaydah, and other top al Qaeda officials are found to have survived, the war will have failed to achieve a top objective. Rather than relying on Afghan and Pakistani forces to do the job in December near Tora Bora, Rumsfeld and Franks should have tried to prevent al

Qaeda fighters from fleeing into Pakistan by deploying American forces on or near the border. U.S. troops should also have been used in the pursuit of Mullah Omar and remnants of the Taliban, even though this mission was less important than the one against al Qaeda leaders.

Admittedly, there were good reasons not to put many Americans in Afghanistan. First, Washington feared a possible anti-American backlash, as Rumsfeld made clear in public comments. Complicating matters, the United States would have had a hard time getting many tens of thousands of troops into Afghanistan, since no neighboring country except Pakistan would have been a viable staging base—and Pakistan was not willing to play that role.

But even though Rumsfeld's reasoning was correct in general, it was wrong for Tora Bora. Putting several thousand U.S. forces in that mountainous, inland region would have been difficult and dangerous. Yet given the enormity of the stakes in this war, it would have been appropriate. Indeed, CENTCOM made preparations for doing so. But in the end, partly because of logistical challenges but perhaps partly because of the Pentagon's aversion to casualties, the idea was dropped. It is supremely ironic that a tough-on-defense Republican administration fighting for vital national security interests appeared almost as reluctant to risk American lives in combat as the Clinton administration had been in humanitarian missions—at least until Operation Anaconda, when it may have been largely too late.

Furthermore, local U.S. allies were just not up to the job in Tora Bora. Pakistan deployed about 4,000 regular army forces along the border itself. But they were not always fully committed to the mission, and there were too few well-equipped troops to prevent al Qaeda and Taliban fighters from outflanking them, as many hundreds of enemy personnel appear to have done. Afghan opposition forces were also less than fully committed, and they were not very proficient in fighting at night.

What would have been needed for the United States to perform this mission? To close off the 100 to 150 escape routes along the 25-mile stretch of the Afghan-Pakistani border closest to Tora Bora would have required perhaps 1,000 to 3,000 American troops. Deploying such a force from the United States would have required several hundred airlift flights, followed by ferrying the troops and supplies to frontline positions via helicopter. According to CENTCOM, a new airfield might have had to be

created, largely for delivering fuel. Such an operation would have taken a week or more. But two Marine Corps units with more than 1,000 personnel were already in the country in December and were somewhat idle at that time. If redeployed to Tora Bora, they could have helped prevent al Qaeda's escape themselves. They also could have been reinforced over subsequent days and weeks by Army light forces or more marines, who could have closed off possible escape routes into the interior of Afghanistan. Such an effort would not have assured success, but the odds would have favored the United States.

How much does it matter if bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, and their cohorts go free? Even with its top leaders presumably alive, al Qaeda is weaker without its Afghan sanctuary. It has lost training bases, secure meeting sites, weapons production and storage facilities, and protection from the host-country government. But as terrorism expert Paul Pillar has pointed out, the history of violent organizations with charismatic leaders, such as the Shining Path in Peru and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey, suggests that they are far stronger with their leaders than without them. The imprisonment of Abimael Guzmán in 1992 and Abdullah Öcalan in 1999 did much to hurt those organizations, just as the 1995 assassination of Fathi Shikaki of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad weakened that group significantly. Some groups may survive the loss of an important leader or become more violent as a result—for example, Hamas flourished after the Israelis killed “the Engineer” Yahya Ayyash in 1996. But even they may have a hard time coming up with new tactics and concepts of operations after such a loss.

If bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, and other top al Qaeda leaders continue to evade capture, they may have to spend the rest of their lives on the run. And their access to finances may be sharply curtailed. But they could still inspire followers and design future terrorist attacks. If successful, their escape would be a major setback.

EVOLUTION IN MILITARY AFFAIRS

EVEN THOUGH advocates of the famous “revolution in military affairs” have generally felt frustrated over the past decade, a number of important military innovations appeared in Operation Enduring Freedom. They may not be as revolutionary as blitzkrieg, aircraft-carrier

war, and nuclear weapons, but they are impressive nonetheless. Advocates of radical change have tended to underestimate the degree to which the U.S. military can and does innovate even without dramatic transformation.

Several developments were particularly notable. First, there was the widespread deployment of special operations forces with laser rangefinders and GPS devices to call in extremely precise air strikes. Ground spotters have appeared in the annals of warfare for as long as airplanes themselves, but this was the first time they were frequently able to provide targeting information accurate to within several meters and do so quickly.

Second, U.S. reconnaissance capabilities showed real improvement. Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), together with imaging satellites and JSTARS, maintained frequent surveillance of much of the battlefield and continuous coverage of certain specific sites—providing a capability that General Myers described as “persistence.”

Also notable were advances in battlefield communications. The networks established between UAVs, satellites, combat aircraft, and command centers were faster than in any previous war, making “persistence” even more valuable. The networks were not always fast enough, especially when the political leadership needed to intercede in specific targeting decisions. Nor were they available for all combat aircraft in the theater; for example, the Air Force’s “Link 16” data links are not yet installed on many strike aircraft. But they did often reduce the time between detecting a target and destroying it to less than 20 minutes.

Perhaps most historic was the use of CIA-owned Predator UAVs to drop weapons on ground targets. Aside from cruise missiles, this was the first time in warfare that an unmanned aircraft had dropped bombs in combat, in the form of “Hellfire” air-to-ground missiles. There were also further milestones in the realm of precision weapons, which for the first time in major warfare constituted the majority of bombs dropped. They were dropped from a wide range of aircraft, including carrier-based jets, ground-based attack aircraft, and B-52 as well as B-1 bombers. The bombers were used effectively as close-air support platforms, loitering over the battlefield for hours until targets could be identified. They delivered about 70 percent of the war’s total ordnance.

In addition to the laser-guided bomb, the weapon of choice for the United States quickly became the joint direct attack munition (JDAM). First used in Kosovo, it is a one-ton iron bomb furnished with a \$20,000 kit that helps steer it to within 10 to 15 meters of its target using GPS and inertial guidance. It is not quite as accurate as a laser-guided bomb but is much more resistant to the effects of weather. In the Kosovo war, only the B-2 could deliver it, but now the JDAM can be dropped by most U.S. attack aircraft. By the end of January, the United States had dropped more than 4,000 laser-guided bombs and more than 4,000 JDAMs as well.

Other ordnance was also important. Up to 1,000 cluster bombs were used, with accuracy of about 30 meters once outfitted with a wind-correcting mechanism. Although controversial because of their dud rate, cluster bombs were devastating against Taliban and al Qaeda troops unlucky enough to be caught in the open. A number of special-purpose munitions were used in smaller numbers, including cave-busting munitions equipped with nickel-cobalt steel-alloy tips and special software; these could penetrate up to 10 feet of rock or 100 feet of soil.

The ability to deliver most U.S. combat punch from the air kept the costs of war relatively modest. Through January 8, the total had reached \$3.8 billion, while the military costs of homeland security efforts in the United States had reached \$2.6 billion. The bills in Afghanistan included \$1.9 billion for deploying troops, \$400 million for munitions, \$400 million for replacing damaged or destroyed equipment, and about \$1 billion for fuel and other operating costs.

LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

WHAT BROAD LESSONS emerge from this conflict? First, military progress does not always depend on highly expensive weapons platforms. Many important contemporary trends in military technology and tactics concern information networks and munitions more than aircraft, ships, and ground vehicles. To take an extreme example, B-52 bombers with JDAM were more useful in Operation Enduring Freedom than were the stealthy B-2s. Second, human skills remain important in war, as demonstrated best by the performance of special operations forces

and CIA personnel. The basic infantry skills, foreign language abilities, competence and care in using and maintaining equipment, and physical and mental toughness of U.S. troops contributed to victory every bit as much as did high-tech weaponry.

Third, military mobility and deployability should continue to be improved. The Marine Corps did execute an impressive ship-to-objective maneuver, forgoing the usual ship-to-shore operation and moving 400 miles inland directly. But most parts of the Army still cannot move so quickly and smoothly. Part of the solution may be the Army's long-term plans for new and lighter combat equipment. (The Marine Corps' v-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft may be useful, too, at least in modest numbers and once proven safe.) But the Army could also emulate the Marine Corps' organization, training, and logistics where possible—and soon. The task is hardly hopeless; Army forces were tactically quite mobile and impressive in Operation Anaconda.

Finally, the war showed that more joint-service experimentation and innovation are highly desirable, given that the synergies between special operations forces on the ground and Air Force and Navy aircraft in the skies were perhaps the most important keys to victory.

How do these lessons match up with the Bush administration's Quadrennial Defense Review of September 30, 2001, and its long-term budget plan of February 4, 2002? The administration has basically preserved the force structure and weapons modernization plan that it inherited from the Clinton administration, added missile defense and one or two other priorities—and thrown very large sums of money into the budget. The Bush administration envisions a national security budget (Pentagon spending plus nuclear weapons budgets for the Department of Energy) that will grow to \$396 billion in 2003 and \$470 billion in 2007. (It was \$300 billion when Bush took office and is \$350 billion in 2002.) The war on terrorism cannot explain this growth; its annual costs are currently expected to be less than \$10 billion after 2003. That \$470 billion figure for 2007 is a whopping \$100 billion more than the Clinton administration envisioned for the same year in its last budget plan.

The administration proposes replacing most combat systems with ones costing about twice as much.

For many critics who tend to focus on weapons procurement, the problem with Bush's plan is that it protects the traditional weapons priorities of the military services without seeking a radical enough transformation of the U.S. armed forces. But this common criticism is only half right. The Bush administration has an aggressive program for so-called defense transformation, principally in research, development, and experimentation, where it envisions spending an additional \$100 billion between 2002 and 2007. If anything, these plans are slightly too generous and ambitious.

In fact, the problem is the traditional one: the unwillingness to set priorities and to challenge the military services to do so as well, especially in the procurement accounts. Despite the lack of a superpower rival, the administration proposes replacing most major combat systems with systems often costing twice as much, and doing so throughout the force structure. This plan would drive up the procurement budget to \$99 billion by 2007 from its present level of \$60 billion.

A more prudent modernization agenda would begin by canceling at least one or two major weapons, such as the Army's Crusader artillery system. But the more important change in philosophy would be to modernize more selectively in general. Only a modest fraction of the armed forces need to be equipped with the most sophisticated and expensive weaponry. That high-end or "silver bullet" force would be a hedge against possible developments such as a rapidly modernizing Chinese military. The rest of the force should be equipped primarily with relatively inexpensive, but highly capable, existing weaponry carrying better sensors, munitions, computers, and communications systems. For example, rather than purchase 3,000 joint-strike fighters, the military would buy only 1,000 of those and then add aircraft such as new F-16 Block 60 fighters to fill out its force structure.

Other parts of the proposed Bush plan deserve scrutiny, too. After several successive years of increases, military pay is now in fairly good shape. In most cases, compensation is no longer poor by comparison with private-sector employment; as such, the administration's plans for further large increases go too far. The proposed research and development budgets, meanwhile, exceed the already hefty increases promised by Bush during his presidential campaign; given that research and development were not severely cut during the 1990s,

such growth seems excessive now. Finally, the Pentagon needs to reform the way it provides basic services such as military health care, housing, and various base operations. Unfortunately, if budgets get too big, the Pentagon's incentives to look for efficiencies often weaken. On balance, the planned increases in defense spending are roughly twice as much as necessary for the years ahead.

A final assessment of Operation Enduring Freedom depends on whether bin Laden and his top lieutenants have escaped Afghanistan. It could be a while before anyone knows; indeed, Rumsfeld has speculated that U.S. troops could remain in Afghanistan into 2003. A verdict will also have to await a better sense of where Afghanistan is headed. Whatever the stability of the post-Taliban government, it is doubtful that the Taliban and al Qaeda will ever control large swaths of the country again. But if pockets of terrorists remain in the country, or if Afghanistan again descends into civil war, the victory will be incomplete. In the former case, Afghanistan could still be an important if diminished asset for al Qaeda; in the latter, the U.S. image throughout the Islamic world may take another blow as critics find more fuel for their claims that Americans care little about the fate of Muslim peoples.

To prevent such outcomes, Washington needs to work hard with other donors to make reconstruction and aid programs succeed in Afghanistan. The Bush administration also needs to rethink its policy on peacekeeping. Its current unwillingness to contribute to a stability force for Afghanistan is a major mistake that U.S. allies may not be able to redress entirely on their own. A force of 20,000 to 30,000 troops is clearly needed for the country as a whole; several thousand troops in Kabul will probably not suffice.

That said, the situation in Afghanistan has improved enormously since October 7—and so has U.S. security. The Afghan resistance, the Bush administration, its international coalition partners, the U.S. armed forces, and the CIA have accomplished what will likely be remembered as one of the greater military successes of the twenty-first century. 🌐