

**The United States Army in Afghanistan**

# **Operation ENDURING FREEDOM**



**May 2005–January 2009**

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*by  
Brian F. Neumann and Colin J. Williams*

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Cover: *Tailgating Over the Valley*, M. Sgt. Martin Cervantez, 2009  
(Army Art Collection)

# Introduction

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

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

With this series of commemorative pamphlets, the U.S. Army Center of Military History aims to provide soldiers and civilians with an overview of operations in Afghanistan and to remember the hundreds of thousands of U.S. Army personnel who served there on behalf of their nation. These publications are dedicated to them.

JON T. HOFFMAN  
Chief Historian



# **The U.S. Army in Afghanistan**

## **Operation ENDURING FREEDOM**

### **May 2005–January 2009**

Between mid-2005 and the beginning of 2009, the United States Army balanced its ongoing commitment to combating terrorist and insurgent activity in post-Taliban Afghanistan—termed Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF)—with the expanding American war in Iraq. As the latter conflict demanded an increasing share of military resources, the George W. Bush administration relegated Afghanistan to an economy-of-force effort and sought to transition responsibility for supporting the fledgling Afghan government to an international coalition. A growing insurgency against coalition forces and the Afghan government threatened to derail these efforts. What resulted was a three-year period defined by the American goal of minimizing its commitment and the difficulty of achieving unity of effort among the coalition partners. In the process, the United States and coalition forces ceded the operational initiative to the insurgents, enabling them to steadily increase their activities across the country. Consequently, despite successes at the tactical level, the United States and the coalition proved unable to maintain momentum at the operational or strategic levels as they worked to support Afghanistan’s government, security, and economic development.

#### *Strategic Setting*

Following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, by mid-2002 coalition forces had soundly defeated—but had not eliminated—Afghanistan’s Taliban government and the al-Qaeda terrorists it had helped to shelter. In order to prevent Afghanistan from again becoming a safe haven for international terrorists, the Bush administration expanded its commitment to help establish a secure, stable, and democratic Afghan government that would be an ally in the ongoing Global War on Terrorism. Establishing a government and implementing fundamental reforms was no small task. Decades of civil war; religious, ethnic, and tribal divisions; and economic dysfunction had left Afghanistan in disarray. Without a stable system of authority or a functioning rule of law, corruption had become endemic to Afghan society. Rampant criminal elements controlled narcotics production and trafficking,

and semiautonomous warlords operated in regions with limited government presence. Finally, Afghanistan's location—bordering Pakistan to the east and south, Iran to the west, China to the northeast, and the former Soviet republics of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan to the north—contributed to its instability.

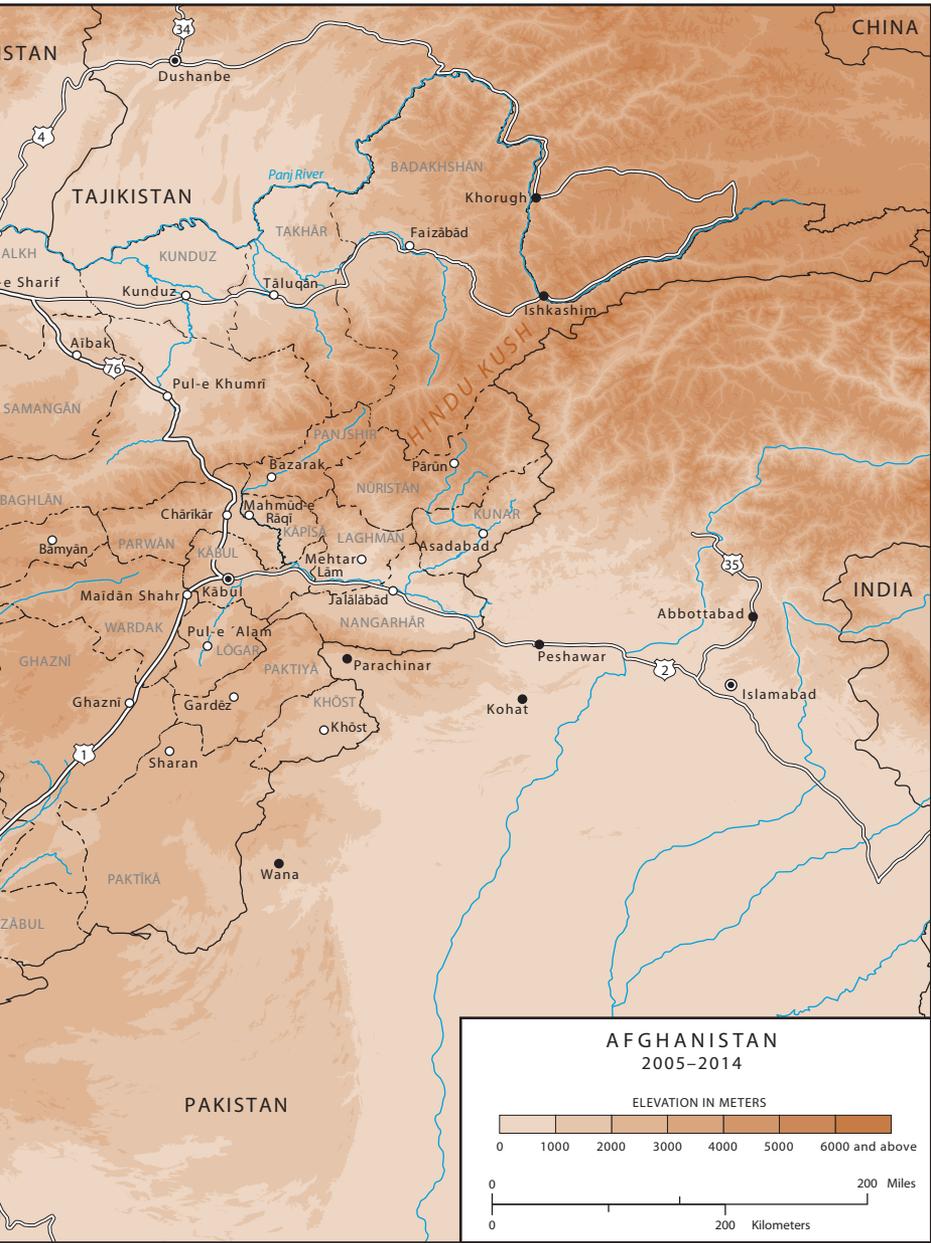
The process of rebuilding Afghanistan began with an international conference in December 2001 in Bonn, Germany. Prominent Afghans, with the support of the international community, approved a plan to establish a six-month Interim Authority, followed by a two-year Transitional Administration. A *loya jirga* (grand assembly) of Afghan political and tribal leaders would meet during the latter period to adopt a new constitution and arrange for national elections. The United Nations also authorized an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) that December to provide security in the capital of Kabul—eventually transferring command of that force to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 2003. By early 2005, this plan, commonly referred to as the Bonn Process, was in its final stages. Afghan leaders approved a constitution in January 2004, and on 9 October the Afghan people elected Hamid Karzai—scion of a prominent Pashtun family, leader of a small group of militia fighters during the Taliban's overthrow, and head of the transitional government—as the president of Afghanistan. The remaining step, elections for the National Assembly and provincial councils, would take place in September 2005.

In conjunction with the Bonn Process, the international community undertook a comprehensive effort to implement security sector reforms in Afghanistan. The core goal was to create capable Afghan security forces that were loyal to the central government rather than to the warlords or militia groups who had controlled parts of the country since the 1980s. A meeting of potential donor nations in Geneva, Switzerland, in early April 2002 established the “lead nations” approach to security reforms. The United States would build the Afghan National Army (ANA). Germany assumed responsibility for the Afghan National Police. The United Kingdom took on counternarcotics efforts and Italy agreed to oversee judicial reform. Lastly, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan would administer a program of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration for armed militia groups not aligned with the Afghan government (Japan took over this effort in 2003). The lead nations approach thus defined the international community's efforts in Afghanistan over the next three years.

Afghanistan's geography and population contributed to the nation's lack of unity. Roughly the size of Texas, Afghanistan is dominated by the Hindu Kush mountain range, which runs from the northeast to the southwest. The country's eastern and northern sections are mountainous and contain long, thin river valleys and relatively arid terrain. Fertile lowlands border Iran to the west, whereas the southern provinces between the Hindu Kush and Pakistan consist of scrublands and desert. This diverse terrain, combined with a lack of good roads, kept Afghans divided. Afghanistan's demographics echo the diversity of its geography. Although its population of twenty-five million is nearly 99 percent Islamic—predominantly Sunni—with small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Christians making up the remainder, its people are divided ethnically and linguistically. The Pashtuns (42 percent), the largest group, dominate the southern and eastern provinces and have strong ethnic and cultural ties to Pakistan's Balochistan Province. The next largest ethnic group, the Tajiks (27 percent), opposed the Taliban from their power base in the northeastern Afghan provinces. The Hazaras (9 percent), followers of Shia Islam, and the nomadic Aimaks (4 percent) inhabit the country's central provinces. Finally, the Uzbeks (9 percent) and Turkmens (3 percent) live in the northern provinces. The majority of the population resides in rural communities, with a minority occupying a few urban centers. The population is divided further among an array of tribes that provide an extended level of familial and communal organization. One of the greatest challenges for Afghan leaders and the international community was building a sense of national identity where none had existed.

Afghanistan's distinct geography dictated the division of the country into five regional commands (*Map 1*). Regional Command (RC) Capital, around the city of Kabul, sat along the southern rim of the Hindu Kush. RCs North and West, ethnically and economically diverse, produced the Afghan forces that overthrew the Pashtun-dominated Taliban in 2001. RCs South and East bordered Pakistan, a country that provided critical support to the Taliban before the American-led invasion and sanctuary after its fall from power. Although American forces operated in each regional command, they focused mainly on the provinces surrounding Kabul and along the Pakistan border. By early 2005, NATO had expanded ISAF's footprint beyond RC Capital and assumed control over RC North. It announced in February that it would move into RC West, where





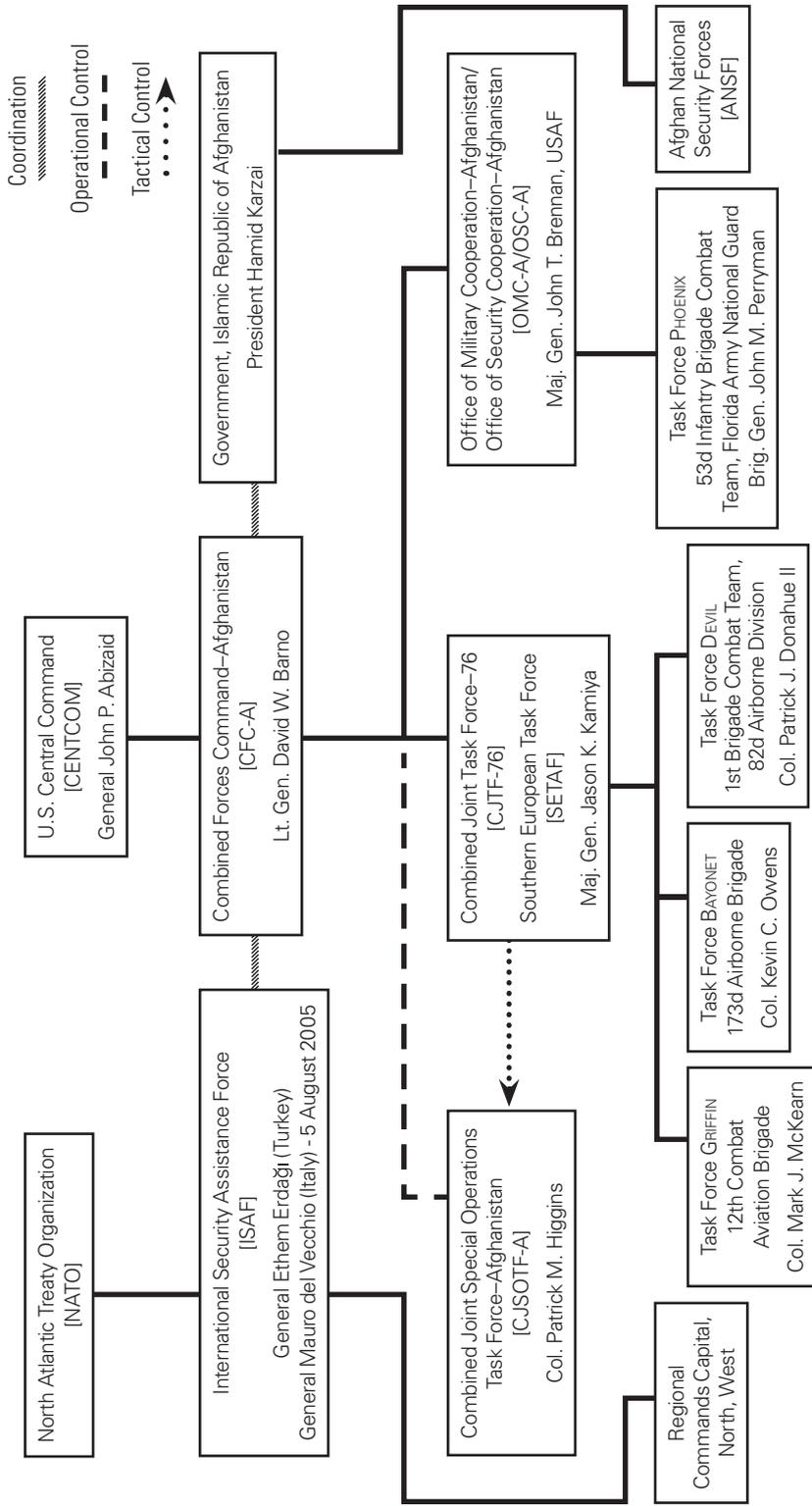
few coalition forces operated, in May as part of a larger effort to replace American forces across the country.

The American military presence in Afghanistan had evolved considerably since Special Forces entered the country in 2001. By early 2005, American forces operated under the Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan (CFC-A) commanded by Lt. Gen. David W. Barno. Created in 2003, CFC-A operated under the U.S. Central Command to provide strategic direction and coordination for the OEF mission in Afghanistan. Although initially focused on counterterrorism operations, mainly directed against al-Qaeda, the effort in Afghanistan had broadened over the ensuing two years. General Barno directed American efforts along five pillars: deny sanctuary to the enemy, hold the ground seized from the enemy, build Afghan security forces, extend the reach of Afghan governance and development to the provinces, and engage Afghanistan’s regional neighbors. With just under 20,000 American personnel operating in Afghanistan in April 2005, Barno sought to employ American forces in the most efficient manner possible.

His maneuver forces consisted of Maj. Gen. Jason K. Kamiya’s Southern European Task Force, which came from U.S. Army, Europe, and began operating as Combined Joint Task Force–76 (CJTF-76) in March 2005. Kamiya employed two brigade-sized task forces: Col. Kevin C. Owens’ 173d Airborne Brigade, which rotated into the theater in March and operated as Task Force BAYONET, and Col. Patrick J. Donahue II’s 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division, which arrived in May. Donahue’s brigade, operating as Task Force DEVIL, assumed responsibility for RC East, and Owens’ Task Force BAYONET conducted operations in RC South. Col. Mark J. McKearn’s Task Force GRIFFIN—built around the Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade—provided air support for both American maneuver task forces (*Chart 1*).

The second element of the OEF mission, training the ANA, fell to the Office of Military Cooperation–Afghanistan (OMC-A) under U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. John T. Brennan. With a staff of more than two hundred, Brennan oversaw a \$7 billion program to train, equip, and sustain the ANA, which stood at just over 20,000 soldiers at the beginning of 2005. To accomplish this mission, Brennan utilized a dedicated training unit known as Task Force PHOENIX. Initially filled by rotating Special Operations Forces (SOF) or active Army units, by April 2005 Task Force PHOENIX consisted of the 53d Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Florida Army

Chart 1—International Coalition’s Organizational Structure, Summer 2005



National Guard, under Brig. Gen. John M. Perryman. To build up the ANA, Task Force PHOENIX assigned groups of American soldiers, known as embedded training teams, to Afghan units. The team members supervised all aspects of Afghan training and acted as advisers once the units deployed. They worked to instill the ANA with a professional military ethos while standardizing its capabilities. They also provided coordination with American units once the Afghans had completed their initial training. The system worked reasonably well, but it would take time before these practices took root with the Afghans and their units would be capable of independent operations.

Along with securing territory and training the ANA, the United States continued to engage in counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan. Primary responsibility for this effort fell to U.S. SOF, organized as the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A). Consisting of American and coalition Special Forces units, CJSOTF-A operated throughout Afghanistan and conducted its own missions, generally to capture or kill medium- or high-level enemy leaders, in addition to supporting larger coalition operations. For command and control, the task force fell under CFC-A's operational control and the tactical control of CJTF-76.

Finally, CFC-A utilized provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) to engage with Afghans at the local level to build support for the fledgling central government. The concept for the reconstruction teams originated in 2002 as a means to undertake nation building in a targeted manner. Although the PRTs did not have a standard organizational makeup, they typically consisted of 80 to 125 military and civilian personnel commanded by a lieutenant colonel, usually a civil affairs officer. Team members included security forces, engineers, and representatives from other government agencies, such as the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Assigned to specific provinces, the PRTs worked to institute development projects of varying scale, relying primarily upon Afghan workers to engender support from the local population. By mid-2005, twenty-two PRTs operated in Afghanistan. The U.S. Army controlled thirteen of them and ISAF operated the remaining nine.

American and NATO forces operated in much the same manner under the banners of OEF and ISAF, but the two missions remained distinctly separate. Operation ENDURING FREEDOM was the American response to the 11 September 2001 attacks and the

means by which it waged the Global War on Terrorism. As such, despite their expansion into nation building and counterinsurgency operations, the priority for OEF forces remained targeting international terrorist groups. ISAF had no such counterterrorism mission. It initially totaled roughly 2,300 personnel and was responsible for securing Kabul after the fall of the Taliban. By 2005, it had grown to around 8,000 troops from thirty countries. Yet even with its growth, ISAF remained focused on postconflict security and stability rather than combat operations. After ISAF transferred to NATO, command of the force rotated between nations every six months, with Turkish Lt. Gen. Ethem Erdağ taking over on 13 February 2005. As a NATO effort, it stood apart from the OEF coalition. It used a separate command chain that included U.S. European Command as opposed to U.S. Central Command. Aligning the ISAF and OEF missions remained a point of some contention between American and NATO leaders, but so long as the situation in Afghanistan was relatively stable, the two organizations were able to work together effectively.

Underlying American and NATO leaders' strategic views on Afghanistan was the belief that the Taliban no longer threatened the country's stability. After its defeat in late 2001 and early 2002, policymakers in the Bush administration opposed including the remaining Taliban leaders in the formation of a new Afghan government. The old regime's refusal to turn over Osama bin Laden and the members of al-Qaeda had not only prompted its overthrow, but seemingly disqualified its key leaders from having an official role in Afghanistan's future. Unfortunately, the Taliban had no intention of giving up the fight for control of Afghanistan.

After his government's fall from power, Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar established a leadership council in Quetta, a town in Pakistan's Balochistan Province. The Taliban found ready support among the province's Pashtun population and protection from the Pakistani government. Pakistan's intelligence services had spent considerable resources supporting the Islamic-extremist Taliban in order to provide strategic depth against India and a training ground for fighters in their low-grade civil war in Kashmir. Although Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf had agreed to support the American invasion of Afghanistan and the effort to destroy al-Qaeda, members of his government refused to abandon the Taliban. On the contrary, they provided money, logistical support, medical treatment, and political cover to Omar and

his followers as a hedge against potential Indian involvement in Afghanistan. With protection and support from elements within the Pakistani government, Omar slowly rebuilt the Taliban ranks by recruiting from the same religious schools, or madrassas, that originally had spawned his movement

Secure in his sanctuary in Pakistan, Omar declared a holy war against American forces in Afghanistan on 1 January 2003. Determined to reestablish the Taliban's position and retake its traditional seat of power, the city of Kandahar, Omar began recruiting in southern Afghanistan in 2003, inserting cadres into eastern Paktika and rural Zabol Provinces. In 2004, he expanded into southern Uruzgan and northern Kandahar Provinces. By May 2005, Mullah Omar's organization occupied districts west of the city of Kandahar as well. With almost 15,000 fighters, a revitalized Taliban outnumbered the Americans in RC South and was poised to mount a renewed fight against the new government in Kabul and its international backers.

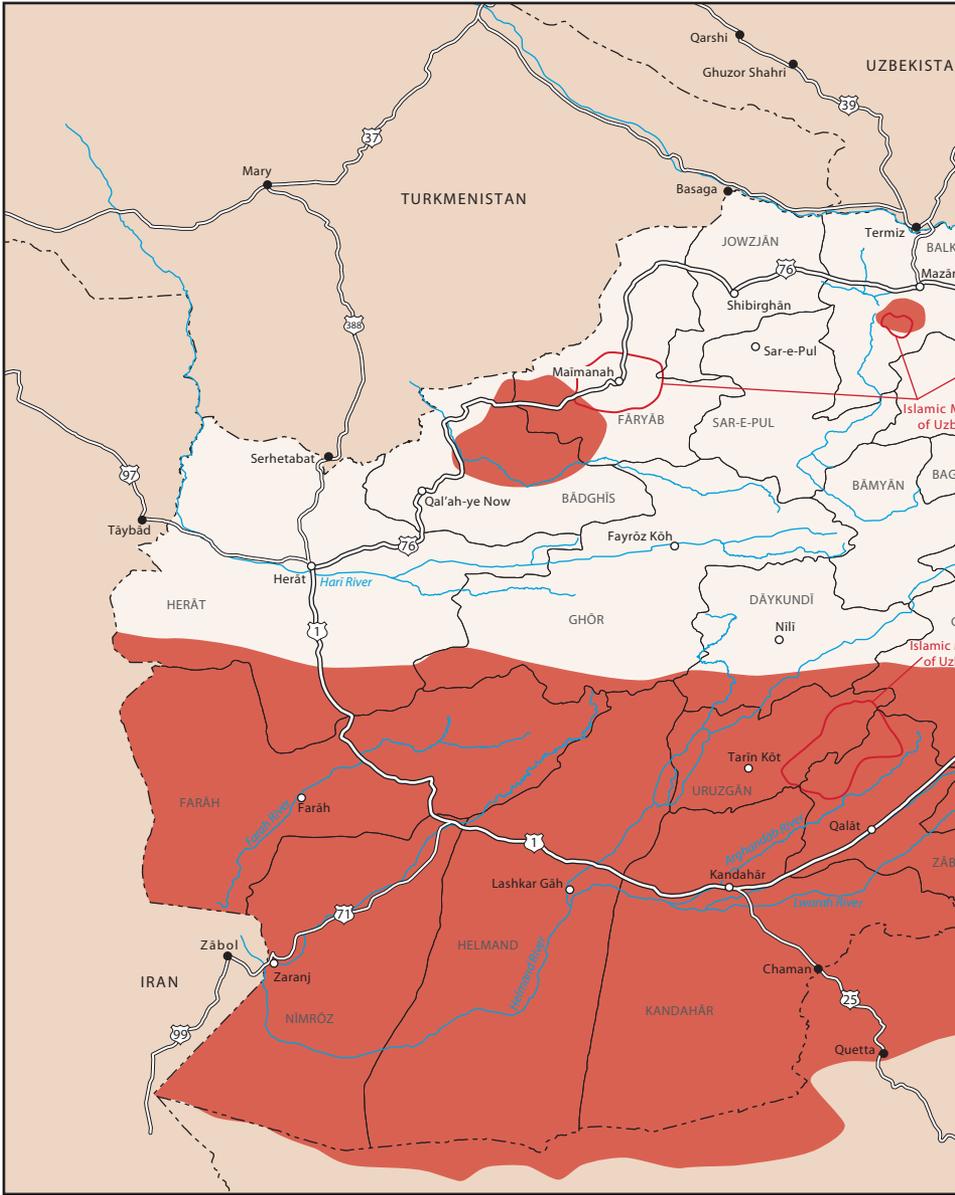
Additional groups opposed to the American intervention and the Bonn Process established their own bases across the border in Pakistan. Relatively weak Pakistani authority in the semiautonomous Federally Administered Tribal Areas and the North-West Frontier Province allowed these regions to serve as safe havens for warlords, terrorists, and criminal organizations, many of whom traced their origins to the Soviet-Afghan War in the 1980s. (*See Map 2.*) The most notable of these was the Haqqani Network, led by Jalaluddin Haqqani and his son, Sirajuddin. Their organization had ideological and financial ties to both the Taliban and al-Qaeda. A former *mujahid*, Jalaluddin espoused a form of strict religious nationalism for Afghanistan. He received support from Pakistan's intelligence services and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency during the war against the Soviets and was an early ally of Osama bin Laden. From bases in Pakistan's tribal areas, especially North and South Waziristan, the Haqqanis opposed the Bonn Process and the establishment of democracy in Afghanistan.

Another former mujahid, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, also mounted an armed opposition from Pakistan against the formation of a new government in Afghanistan. During the war against the Soviets, Hekmatyar's political group, Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HiG), received considerable financial support from Pakistan and the Central Intelligence Agency. During the 1990s, Hekmatyar twice served as prime minister of Afghanistan, but his radicalism and

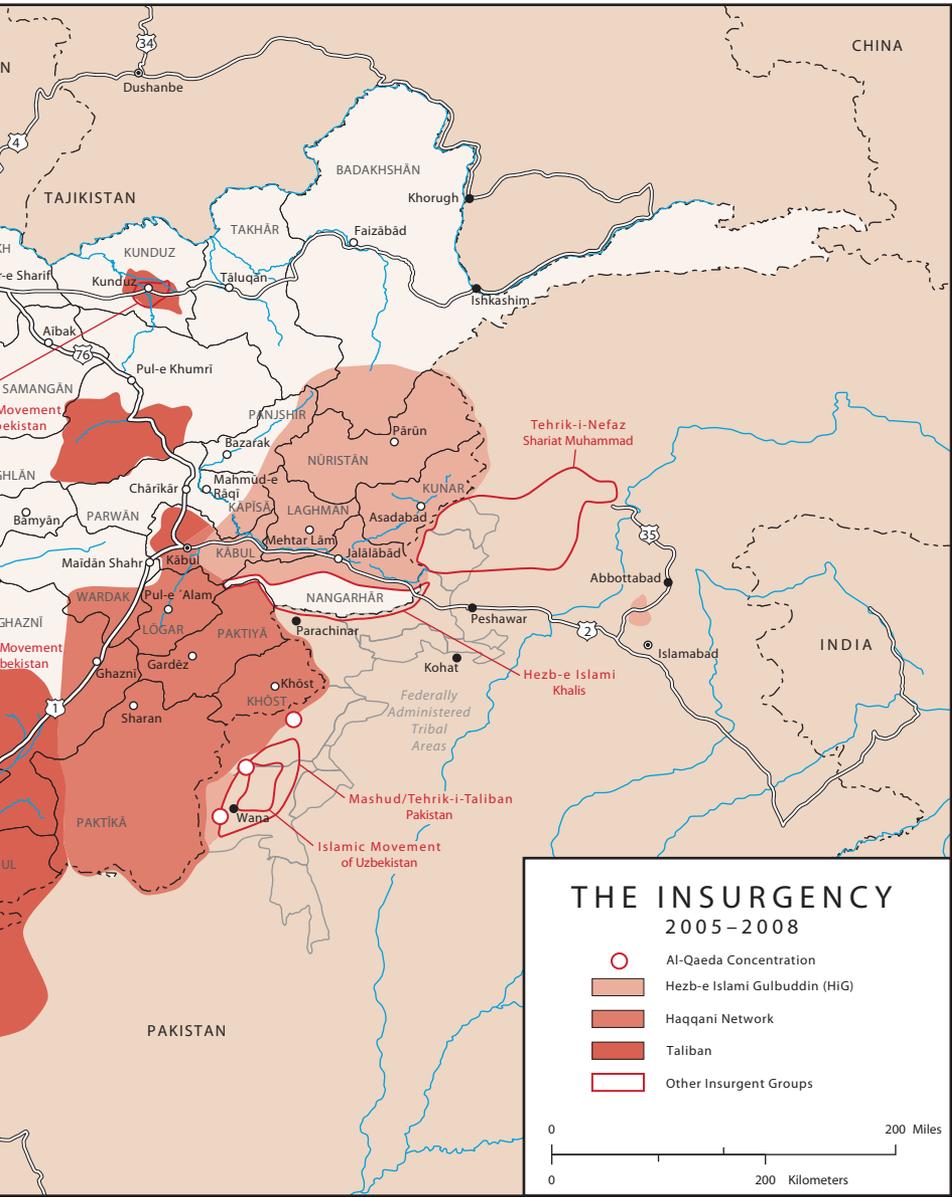
instability prevented him from consolidating power, and in 1994 Pakistan's intelligence services abandoned their support for him in favor of the Taliban. After the Taliban seized power in 1996, Hekmatyar fled to Iran, where he lived in exile for the next six years. He opposed the American intervention in 2001 and reportedly returned to Pakistan sometime in 2002, where he began a renewed insurgency in Afghanistan.

Finally, looming over American strategy was the specter of al-Qaeda. By early 2005, Osama bin Laden's organization was a shadow of its former self and had lost whatever momentum it had gained with the 11 September 2001 attacks. American and Pakistani intelligence operatives maintained constant pressure on the organization, capturing Khalid Sheikh Mohammed—the lead organizer of the September 11th attacks—and dozens of others between 2002 and 2005. Though its members had been killed, captured, or scattered and its operational infrastructure crippled during the American invasion, many senior leaders remained free. As the hunt for al-Qaeda terrorists progressed, American policymakers continued to view Afghanistan and Pakistan through the lens of the Global War on Terrorism, rather than with a regional focus. In considering insurgent groups such as the Taliban, Haqqani, or HiG, they looked at their connections to al-Qaeda as supporters of international terrorism, not as local actors focused on specific objectives in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

By 2005, the United States also was engaged in a far larger conflict that monopolized American attention. The invasion of Iraq in March 2003 fundamentally altered the Global War on Terrorism. The United States committed significantly to substantial combat operations there, and did not have official support for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) from either NATO or the United Nations. This resulted in fewer American resources for Afghanistan. The development of an insurgency in Iraq from late 2003 through 2005 only exacerbated this situation. Thus, with Iraq continuing to demand the majority of the U.S. Army's resources, and the situation in Afghanistan progressing toward the conclusion of the Bonn Process, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld believed that the United States could reduce its military presence in Central Asia. To that end, he supported limiting American involvement in Afghanistan essentially to an economy-of-force effort by divesting OEF of most of its nation-building programs, concentrating American forces in RC East, and shifting overall responsibility for Afghan security to NATO.



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## *Operations*

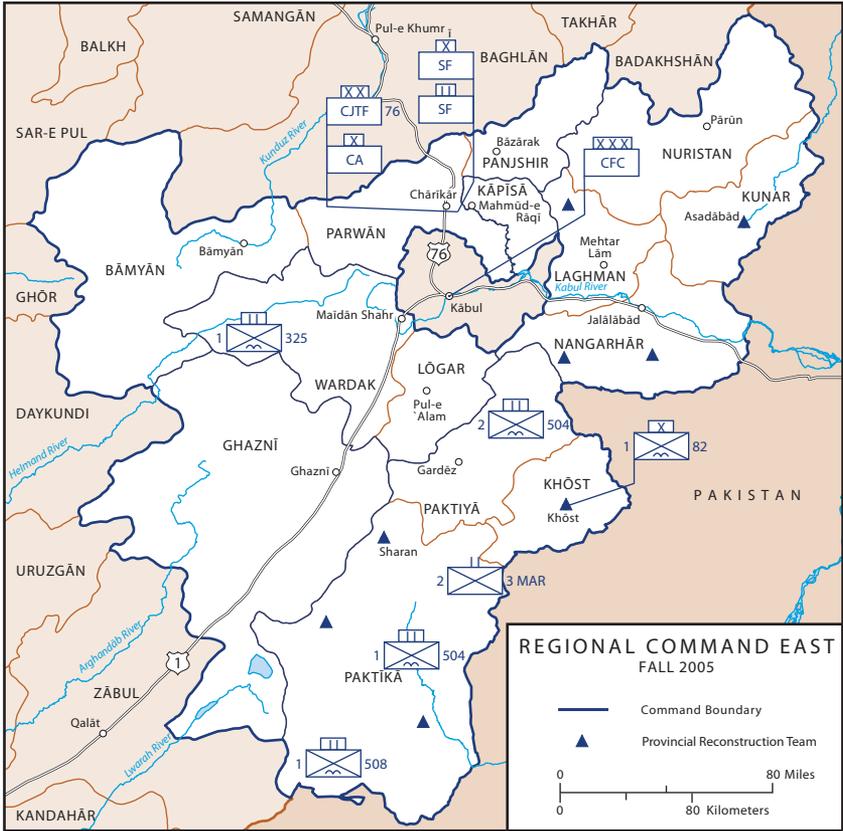
General John P. Abizaid, the head of U.S. Central Command in May 2005, was responsible for operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Considering the disparity between the U.S. Army forces committed to each conflict—just under 20,000 in Afghanistan compared to roughly 137,000 in Iraq—Abizaid later admitted that he could only dedicate “maybe 10 percent” of his time to the OEF campaign. As General Barno neared the end of his deployment, Abizaid nominated as CFC-A commander a proven officer who could coordinate the transition to NATO without much supervision. Lt. Gen. Karl W. Eikenberry, who succeeded Barno on 4 May 2005, had served as the senior security sector coordinator for the U.S. Embassy in Kabul during his 2002–2003 deployment and had set up OMC-A. Upon returning as the CFC-A commander, Eikenberry received the same mission as Barno: to help build an Afghan government that was:

moderate and democratic, understanding that Afghans will not copy U.S.-style institutions; representative of all responsible elements in Afghanistan and formed through the political participation of the Afghan people; capable of effectively controlling and governing its territory; capable of implementing policies to stimulate economic development; [and] willing to contribute to a continuing partnership with the U.S.-led coalition in the [Global War on Terrorism]

Eikenberry understood that Secretary Rumsfeld wanted to draw down American forces and turn over stability operations to NATO. Setting conditions for that transition, and facilitating the continued growth of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), became Eikenberry’s top priorities.

### *The End of the Bonn Process (May–December 2005)*

With the Afghan parliamentary and provincial council elections set for September, Eikenberry had a small window of opportunity to build public support for the central government. He therefore focused on improving the means to connect the Afghan population: roads. As the key to strengthening government, bolstering trade, and creating employment opportunities, Eikenberry adopted the adage, “where the road ends, the Taliban begins” to convey his conceptual approach. Growing security concerns had interrupted previous



MAP 3

attempts at improving Afghanistan’s transportation infrastructure. Eikenberry sought to rectify this situation by pushing his forces into areas that lacked a government presence, thereby expanding security and allowing PRTs to oversee road construction.

Responsibility for implementing Eikenberry’s plan fell to General Kamiya’s CJTF-76. The majority of American combat forces operated in RC East owing to its population density and proximity to Pakistan’s tribal areas (*Map 3*). Colonel Donahue’s 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division, eventually controlled five infantry battalions. The 2d Battalion, 504th Infantry, under Lt. Col. George T. Donovan, covered Khost and parts of Paktiya, Logar, and Paktika Provinces. Lt. Col. Timothy P. McGuire’s 1st Battalion, 508th Infantry, from Task Force BAYONET occupied the rest of Paktika Province. The 1st Battalion, 325th

Infantry, commanded by Lt. Col. David P. Anders, spread two companies across Wardak, Logar, southern Ghazni, and western Pakiya Provinces.

In July, Lt. Col. Orlando Salinas' 3d Battalion, 141st Infantry (Texas Army National Guard), replaced Lt. Col. Blake C. Ortner's 3d Battalion, 116th Infantry (Virginia Army National Guard), which had been operating in Ghazni Province and providing security at Bagram Air Base. Lastly, the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, under Lt. Col. James E. Donnellan conducted operations in Kunar Province. General Kamiya's other maneuver brigade, Colonel Owens' 173d Airborne Brigade, deployed to RC South. Owens sent Lt. Col. Mark R. Stammer's 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry, to Zabul Province, and Lt. Col. Bertrand A. Ges' 3d Battalion, 319th Field Artillery, provided security in the city of Kandahar.

Several incidents between May and the September elections cast doubt upon the country's readiness for a diminished American presence. The first took place on 3 May when Capt. Dirk D. Ringgenberg, commanding Company C from 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry, engaged Taliban forces in northern Zabul. Debriefing Ringgenberg personally, General Eikenberry learned that the Taliban lost seventy-six fighters but fought on until they could no longer continue resistance. During Eikenberry's previous deployment, the Taliban had not constituted a persistent threat to the burgeoning Afghan government. The battle thus signaled the possibility that the Taliban had been reconstituting its military forces while allied troops focused on governance and development.

An engagement the following month reinforced concerns over the strengthening insurgency. Beginning in late June, members of the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, launched Operation RED WINGS in Kunar Province to clear antigovernment forces from one of the region's remote river valleys. RED WINGS turned tragic when local herders compromised U.S. Navy Lt. Michael P. Murphy's four-member Navy Sea, Air, and Land (SEAL) team, which was attempting to locate a HiG-affiliated insurgent named Ahmad Shah. Engaged by the enemy and out of radio contact with higher headquarters, the team soon found itself in a life-and-death situation. After Murphy sacrificed himself to transmit a satellite call for support, insurgents downed a helicopter bearing reinforcements, killing all sixteen on board. Only one member of the original SEAL team, HMI Marcus Luttrell, survived the encounter. Murphy received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions.

Eikenberry faced a different challenge in July as relations between the United States and Uzbekistan plummeted after the Bush administration offered support to victims of the country's human rights abuses. Unwilling to continue its participation in the Global War on Terrorism, Uzbekistan terminated the American lease for the Karshi Khanabad Air Base. The base had served as a critical staging point for operations in 2001 and continued to provide American forces with easy access to fuel, allowing the twelve C-130 transport aircraft stationed there to fly forces in and out of Afghanistan. To compensate for the loss, CFC-A built a 5.6-million-gallon fuel storage facility at Bagram Air Base.

Finally, in August, Donnellan's marines mounted a follow-on operation to RED WINGS, Operation WHALERS, targeting Ahmad Shah's growing power base. The marines intended to clear insurgents from central Kunar Province, driving them against a blocking position in the Chowkay Valley. Although the operation's plan worked well, the Army's 105-mm. howitzers at Asadabad were not in range of the entire valley. Calling in air support would take time, so Donnellan had his marines carry two 81-mm. mortars and ammunition along the valley's eastern ridge. With the help of these mortars, the marines decimated Shah's fighters, killing an estimated forty insurgents and preventing Shah from disrupting the coming election. Though successful, the need for the operation illustrated that the insurgent threat in RC East remained a concern.

Given the importance of the September elections, General Abizaid deployed his strategic reserve to assist in their implementation. The 22d Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) out of Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, injected a combined-arms-capable force with much-needed artillery and aviation support into Afghanistan. Eikenberry directed the expeditionary unit to Uruzgan Province, a hotbed of Taliban activity that housed only a twelve-member Special Forces team and a PRT. The 22d MEU oversaw voter registration, provided security during voting, and safeguarded ballot boxes. Although Mullah Omar and his associates launched thirty-two attacks the day before the election and forty-one attacks on election day itself, the insurgents failed to kill or wound any civilians. The Afghans cast fewer votes than in the 2004 presidential election, but Afghan and coalition leaders deemed the September 2005 elections a success, marking an important milestone in the nation's development. The new Afghan parliament met for the first time on 18 December 2005.



*An Afghan celebrates voting.* (U.S. Army Center of Military History)

Even with the successful elections, the ANSF's slow rate of improvement proved a continuing concern for Eikenberry. A critical feature for the anticipated drawdown of American forces in Afghanistan was the ability of indigenous units to take on an increased role in security operations. Abizaid hoped to withdraw a combat battalion for every second or third Afghan *kandak*—nominally a battalion, but more comparable to an American company—that graduated from initial training. However, Eikenberry soon learned that existing ANA *kandaks* were losing strength through attrition and desertions. To address the issue, he had OMC-A push recruitment, pay, discipline, and leadership reforms through the Afghan Ministry of Defense.

Regretfully, although necessary, the reforms did not correct the most pressing problems within the American training mission. The main issue was a lack of resources for Task Force PHOENIX. It trained new *kandaks* and provided adviser teams for three ANA corps: the 201st, headquartered in Kabul Province; the 203d, headquartered in Paktiya Province; and the 205th, headquartered in Kandahar Province. As of March 2005, the ANA had an estimated strength of 43,000, with 58 percent of its forces either still in training or deployed around Kabul. As the ANA grew, however, the American and coalition training missions did not keep pace.

By July, embedded training teams could cover only 60 percent of Afghan units. As the ANA approached its planned end strength of 70,000, this problem would only get worse. The arrival of General Perryman and the 53d Infantry Brigade, which took over the Task Force PHOENIX mission in July, did not solve the problem. It fielded about 1,500 personnel—out of a total of only 1,900 soldiers in the task force—for duty as embedded trainers.

The situation with the Afghan National Police was even more concerning. Under the lead-nations approach, the Germans were responsible for training the police. However, by 2005, German efforts to operate a police academy and train officials in the Ministry of Interior, the higher police headquarters, were not meeting the country's needs. The German approach focused on slowly building a modern police force, capable of engaging in highly technical aspects of law enforcement and of working with a functioning judicial system upholding the rule of law throughout the country. Regrettably, the high rate of Afghan illiteracy, limited resources for or understanding of technology, and a virtually nonexistent judicial system undermined this approach. Moreover, armed insurgents increasingly targeted police as the most visible representatives of the central government. In reality, Afghanistan did not need the modern, technically proficient police force the Germans sought to create, but one more capable of functioning as an armed constabulary and engaging in paramilitary operations to establish local security. Consequently, the Germans produced a police force neither sufficient in number nor with appropriate training to address Afghanistan's security needs.

With the Germans proving either unwilling to or incapable of significantly increasing the rate of police training, the United States stepped in to fill the gap. American law dictated that the Department of State, not the Department of Defense (DoD), had oversight of Afghan National Police funding, regardless of which agency oversaw the training effort. Initially the DoD left police training to State Department officials, but by early 2005, increasing Afghan security needs—especially the forthcoming elections—required the American military to take a more active role in police training. After negotiating an agreement with the State Department, Secretary Rumsfeld turned over responsibility for part of the police training mission to CFC-A. On 12 July, Eikenberry formalized this expanded mission by renaming OMC-A the Office of Security Cooperation–Afghanistan (OSC-A).

Although these decisions appeared to provide a clear mandate for American security assistance units, the situation on the ground was more convoluted. Germany maintained its lead nation status for the Afghan police owing to its continued oversight of Afghanistan's National Police Academy. Training of rank-and-file patrolmen took place at the Central Training Center in Kabul and seven regional training centers, which theoretically were under OSC-A. However, although the Army's training mission increased, its personnel did not. Responsibility for staffing the training centers thus fell to the State Department, which contracted DynCorp International for trainers. Unfortunately, as American Ambassador Ronald E. Neumann noted, "Our contractual arrangements were distant, rigid, bureaucratic, and terribly ill suited to fighting a war." Though DynCorp provided several hundred trainers and mentors for the Afghan police, the company's contract also included training efforts in Iraq and Jordan. This arrangement made it difficult to develop and implement a training program tailored to Afghan needs. The problems with the ANSF training effort would continue throughout Eikenberry's time in Afghanistan.

As the ANSF training mission evolved, American maneuver forces built upon momentum gained by the September elections. General Kamiya's CJTF-76 termed the postelection effort Operation SECURE PROSPERITY. Intended to accelerate business growth and ANSF development, the plan withdrew Special Forces from the border, where they had been conducting counterterrorism missions against targets crossing into Afghanistan. With the elections over, they returned to working with local forces. Some detachments took over for the departing 22d MEU in Uruzgan Province. Others returned to the Pech River Valley along the border between Kunar and Nuristan Provinces where they secured an area north of coalition forces.

After the Special Forces redeployed, Eikenberry looked to coordinate with the Pakistani military to prevent insurgents from crossing the border. Cooperation with the Pakistanis intensified after a devastating earthquake struck Pakistan on 8 October, affecting a quarter of the country, killing 80,000, and leaving 4 million homeless. As the crisis overwhelmed the Pakistani government, General Abizaid ordered a humanitarian assistance effort and appointed Eikenberry its interim commander. Earthquake relief interrupted SECURE PROSPERITY, redirecting some of Eikenberry's troops to staff an operations center and establish a life-support area, and detailing five of the theater's twenty-eight CH-47 cargo helicopters to

Pakistan. With altitude restricting the amount of troops and equipment the helicopters could carry, and with the other twenty-three CH-47s in theater committed to supply routes—the only method to support a third of the American outposts—few rotary-wing aircraft could engage in air assaults for a month. Once returned, the CH-47s permitted SECURE PROSPERITY to resume.

Operation SECURE PROSPERITY extended into December, when Taliban, Haqqani, and HiG fighters ceased operating due to snow in the mountains and rain in the lowlands. This weather-induced lull gave Eikenberry time to assess the situation. The slow development of ANSF units contributed to the CFC-A commander's increasing concerns regarding the drawdown of American forces. The American push into areas previously devoid of coalition patrols over the preceding eighteen months revealed that the Taliban and HiG had developed sanctuaries within Afghanistan. Whatever benefits the United States incurred by helping Pakistan with the October earthquake would have limited value if insurgents could find refuge in Afghanistan. The Afghan government's continued inability to adequately secure its population meant that someone else would have to take action to prevent the insurgents' return. It remained to be seen whether the United States or NATO would fulfill this mission.

Regretfully for Eikenberry, only Ambassador Neumann shared his concerns. Confident of continuing progress in Afghanistan, U.S. Central Command hoped to begin reassigning personnel to OIF as soon as the transition to NATO was complete. As 2005 drew to a close, Secretary Rumsfeld also began to question the number of combat troops allocated to Afghanistan for the coming year. With NATO taking control of the security effort, the secretary eventually decided that Eikenberry would retain OSC-A and theater logistics but would lose one of his two maneuver brigades.

#### *Coalition Deployments (January–May 2006)*

After the Bonn Process drew to a close with the Afghan National Assembly's first meeting in December 2005, President Karzai's government and the international community made new plans for Afghanistan's future. At a January 2006 conference in London, all parties agreed on a framework to guide development for the next five years. The resultant Afghanistan Compact formalized the international community's commitment to "build lasting Afghan capacity" and the Afghans promised to "combat corruption and ensure public transparency and accountability." For the U.S.

Army, the most important elements were the compact's provisions regarding the ANSF and initiatives for reconstructing Afghanistan's infrastructure. The plan called for an ethnically diverse, fully operational Afghan Army with 70,000 soldiers and a combined 62,000-member Afghan police force by 2010. It also stipulated the creation of a "fully upgraded and maintained" Ring Road—the main highway that circumnavigated the country—by 2008 and an electrical system that could reach 65 percent of Afghan households by 2010. The compact charged the U.S. Army, ISAF, and partner nations with continuing to "provide strong support to the Afghan Government in establishing and sustaining security and stability in Afghanistan." NATO forces eventually would assume responsibility for stability operations throughout the country, whereas the OEF counterterrorism mission would remain a separate American effort.

In anticipation of expanding the ISAF mission, the U.S. Army began rotating its combat forces in Afghanistan in early 2006. Maj. Gen. Benjamin C. Freakley's 10th Mountain Division took over CJTF-76 from General Kamiya's Southern European Task Force on 21 February. Freakley would rely upon Col. Michael S. Rose's Combat Aviation Brigade, 10th Mountain Division (Task Force FALCON), and Col. Larry D. Wyche's 10th Sustainment Brigade (Task Force MULESKINNER) for air and logistical support. Initial plans called for the 10th Mountain Division's 3d and 4th Brigade Combat Teams to deploy as maneuver units to Afghanistan for service in RC East and RC South, respectively. However, because of Rumsfeld's concerns over having enough combat troops for Iraq, and fears that sending two American brigades to Afghanistan would delay NATO's deployment of forces, U.S. Central Command chose to send only the full 3d Brigade.

Col. John W. "Mick" Nicholson's 3d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Task Force SPARTAN), started rotating into theater in early 2006 for duty in RC East. From his brigade headquarters at Forward Operating Base SALERNO in Khost Province, Nicholson eventually dispersed his maneuver battalions throughout the regional command. He sent Lt. Col. Christopher R. Toner's 2d Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, to Paktika Province. He kept the 3d Battalion, 141st Infantry Regiment, in Ghazni Province until replaced by Lt. Col. Steven Gilbert's 1st Battalion, 102d Infantry Regiment, from the Connecticut Army National Guard. Lt. Col. Joseph M. Fenty's 3d Squadron, 71st Cavalry Regiment, took up positions in northern Kunar Province and Lt. Col. Christopher G. Cavoli's 1st Battalion, 32d Infantry Regiment, assumed positions

along the Pech River and its tributaries. Lt. Col. David A. Bushey's 4th Battalion, 25th Field Artillery Regiment, would provide fire support for Nicholson's units throughout the regional command. The 1st Battalion, 3d Marines, under Lt. Col. James W. Bierman continued in its area of operations at the junctions of Nangarhar, Kunar, and Laghman Provinces.

Before the DoD decided to send only one combat brigade from the 10th Mountain Division, the newly formed 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, had been preparing to deploy to RC South. U.S. Central Command ended up sending the brigade commander, Col. A. Kent Schweikert, along with members of his brigade staff, 200 logisticians from Lt. Col. Michael C. Howitz's 94th Brigade Support Battalion, and Lt. Col. Frank Sturek's 2d Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, to southern Afghanistan. Schweikert would serve as the senior commander in RC South until NATO forces arrived, at which time he became the region's deputy commander. Sturek's team deployed to Zabul Province before moving to Ghazni and Wardak Provinces in RC East. Lt. Col. Ronald Metternich's 2d Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, replaced Sturek's battalion in November 2006.

The reduction of American forces for RC South was contingent on sufficient NATO units arriving in the spring of 2006 to cover the regional command until the planned transfer to ISAF control during the summer. In February, Canadian General David W. Fraser established a brigade-sized command, Task Force AEGIS, in Kandahar. In addition to Schweikert's team, AEGIS included the Canadian PRT, a battalion-sized logistical element, and Col. Ian Hope's 1st Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI). Additionally, elements from the 341st Romanian Infantry reinforced Sturek's battalion in Zabul Province. The Netherlands also planned to send a maneuver battalion, but internal Dutch politics delayed authorizing the deployment until February 2006. This delay affected Great Britain's contribution of forces to RC South. Heavily engaged in Iraq, Britain's Parliament would not commit forces to Afghanistan until the Dutch agreed to deploy forces. This condition resulted in British Lt. Col. Stuart Tootal's 3d Battalion, Parachute Regiment, rotating into the theater in mid-May, several months behind NATO's planned schedule.

Before ISAF formally assumed responsibility over RC South, international forces nominally fell under CJTF-76's control as a part of the OEF mission. However, each national contingent continued to report directly to its home government, and they put various

caveats on what their forces could do. As a result, although General Freakley ultimately had 20,000 American and NATO troops under his command in RC South during the first half of 2006, the staggered nature of the NATO deployments and restrictive national guidelines limited their operational capabilities.

*Operation MOUNTAIN LION (April–June 2006)*

As NATO forces rotated into RC South during the early months of 2006, the United States focused its efforts on RC East. In designing his campaign plan, General Freakley built upon Eikenberry's emphasis on security, governance, and reconstruction as well as ISAF's goal to extend the areas in which the Afghan government could operate. He intended to use a four-step "clear, hold, build, and engage" approach. American forces would conduct combat operations against enemy fighters, reducing the insurgents' strength to the point that Afghan troops could establish a permanent security presence in an area. The resulting stability would allow reconstruction projects to proceed while the Afghan government established firm ties with local communities.

In addition to the maneuver units assigned to CJTF-76, Freakley utilized Special Forces units to carry out his campaign. In early 2006, CJSOTF-A was placed under the operational control of Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan and the tactical control of CFC-A. The new Special Forces task force commander, Col. Edward M. Reeder Jr., controlled twenty-five Operational Detachment Alpha teams, six civil affairs teams, six psychological operations teams, and SOF units from five partnering nations. All were integrated into CJTF-76's upcoming campaigns.

General Freakley intended to conduct four major operations in 2006. In the first, Operation MOUNTAIN LION, American combat forces would extend the Afghan government's reach into the northeastern provinces of Nuristan, Kunar, and Laghman and create space for development projects in Nangarhar Province. The Americans specifically designed the operation to target HiG, which they believed to be the weakest of the major insurgent groups operating in Afghanistan. The second operation, MOUNTAIN THRUST, scheduled to begin in mid-May, shifted American forces into RC South to assist the transition to ISAF. Upon its completion, Freakley's units would return to RC East and conduct Operation MOUNTAIN FURY against insurgents linked to the Haqqani Network in Paktika, Paktiya, Khost, and Ghazni Provinces. The fourth

major operation would commence in the fall, when rain and snow in the mountains began to inhibit insurgent operations, and continue until the 82d Airborne Division's scheduled takeover of CJTF-76 in early 2007.

Preparations for Operation MOUNTAIN LION started in March with the insertion of a reconnaissance and surveillance unit in Asadabad to monitor Kunar and Nuristan Provinces. The DoD's intent to withdraw the Marine contribution to OEF—consisting of successive battalions that had patrolled Nangarhar and Laghman Provinces since 2003—affected Freakley's plan. The 10th Mountain Division commander wanted to insert two battalion-sized task forces into the river valleys straddling the border between Kunar and Nuristan Provinces before the marines left. Operating out of small bases and even smaller outposts, these units would conduct combat operations while demonstrating the benefits of aligning with the Kabul government.

One of these task forces, Colonel Fenty's 3d Squadron, 71st Cavalry Regiment, started its deployment at Forward Operating Base ASADABAD in Kunar Province. Helicopters then transported the squadron up the Kunar River Valley to Naray District. The mountains made this move particularly dangerous. On 5 May 2006, a CH-47 carrying Fenty and nine other soldiers struck a tree while unloading personnel and equipment on a mountainside outcropping. With its rear rotor blades disabled, the helicopter pitched forward and plummeted over 300 meters to the ground, killing all aboard. After the tragedy, Lt. Col. Michael L. Howard replaced Fenty as commander of 3d Squadron. Under Howard, the squadron established a PRT in Kamdesh District, Nuristan Province, and built an outpost to protect it from attack. The outpost provided an obstacle for HiG movements through Nuristan and screened units to the south, permitting them to focus on development. More importantly, the outpost showed President Karzai that America still was willing to expand its presence after the Bonn Process.

The second portion of MOUNTAIN LION involved inserting Colonel Cavoli's 1st Battalion, 32d Infantry Regiment, into the Pech River Valley. Four rivers fed the Pech between Asadabad and Camp Blessing—the site of 1st Battalion's headquarters—and Cavoli had responsibility for all of them. Supported by elements from the 201st and 203d ANA Corps, the United States established a presence in the Waygal and Watapur Valleys to the north and the Shor'yak and Korangal Valleys to the south. Although Cavoli's troops interacted with the communities, their primary mission



*A convoy through the mountains* (U.S. Army Center of Military History)

was to interdict insurgents infiltrating from Pakistan. The move into the Korangal valley proved especially significant, as its residents had a long tradition of hostility toward outsiders, which they defined as anyone from beyond the valley. On 7 May, the ANA chief of staff, General Bismillah Khan Mohammadi, raised the Afghan national flag over a new outpost in the middle of the valley, illustrating Freakley's intent "to go where we hadn't been before with strength, establish a presence with combat outposts and partner with the Afghan military, and stay there . . . [to] do reconstruction." The event marked the beginning of a difficult struggle for control of the valley.

#### *NATO Takeover of RC South (May–July 2006)*

As American forces pushed into the northern provinces of RC East, NATO units continued preparations for ISAF's takeover of RC South. British General David J. Richards assumed command of ISAF on 4 May, beginning a six-month rotation during which the international task force would become the lead effort in Afghanistan. He initially struggled to create a robust headquarters capable of overseeing the expanding NATO effort. Richards ultimately used elements of NATO's Allied Rapid Reaction Corps as his headquarters, but it did not have the mandate or personnel to

deploy for extended periods or to exercise control over international forces. The unit did the best it could until NATO created a permanent ISAF headquarters in early 2007.

Richards occupied a unique position as the ISAF commander. Although a British general, he did not fall within the British military chain of command. Instead, he operated within the NATO command chain, reporting to superiors in The Hague and Brussels. Additionally, although he commanded NATO forces in Afghanistan, the ability of each national contingent to appeal to its home government limited Richards' authority. Finally, though the American contribution to NATO functioned as a part of U.S. European Command, CFC-A operated under U.S. Central Command. Thus, Richards had to coordinate with Eikenberry—and Freakley as the CJTF-76 commander—who fell under a separate American combatant command. This convoluted mix of national and international command chains made it difficult to establish a clear unity of effort within the NATO coalition and between the ISAF and OEF missions. Without clarifying guidance from Washington or Brussels, the commanders in Afghanistan had to make do with an informal command structure.

Richards looked to the NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe's Operations Plan 10302, finalized in late 2005, for guidance. It stipulated that after the transfer of the regional commands in Afghanistan to ISAF control, NATO forces would oversee a period of "stabilization" in which they were to "assist the Afghan government to extend and exercise its authority and influence" until enough "stability is achieved to allow the handover of ISAF military tasks to Afghan authorities." The PRTs would comprise the leading edge in this effort, with NATO forces providing support. In theory, the reconstruction teams would synchronize their efforts across their respective Afghan provinces. Richards had to sort out and implement this synchronization with the national contingents under his command.

Richards focused his efforts on three areas. First, ISAF identified highly populated regions for security, development, and governance efforts. Called Afghan Development Zones, they resembled a similar initiative begun under General Barno in 2004. The second part of Richards' approach involved the creation of a Policy Action Group in Kabul under President Karzai and composed of key members of the Afghan government and international representatives. The group would monitor the development zones, allocate resources, and attempt to align Afghan and ISAF efforts. Finally, Richards

would push ISAF forces outside the development zones to engage with the local population. Where necessary, they would conduct combat operations, but their emphasis was on stability operations in support of the Afghan central government.

Upon his arrival, Richards discovered that the NATO effort in RC South had little cohesion, largely owing to the staggered deployment of international units. Canadian forces arrived in January and February, followed by Colonel Schweikert's American units in March and British forces in April. Romanian and Dutch forces were scheduled to arrive over the summer, after the transfer of RC South from OEF to ISAF control. Additionally, the disjointed nature of NATO's command structure meant that each national battle group arrived with its own perception of their respective missions and vastly different capabilities. Some were prohibited by their respective governments from engaging in combat operations. Others had more operational flexibility, but did not have the personnel or combat support elements to conduct offensive operations. Finally, none were on a unified rotation schedule. In effect, each national contingent engaged in its own mission within the boundaries of its province, without coordinating with neighboring NATO forces.

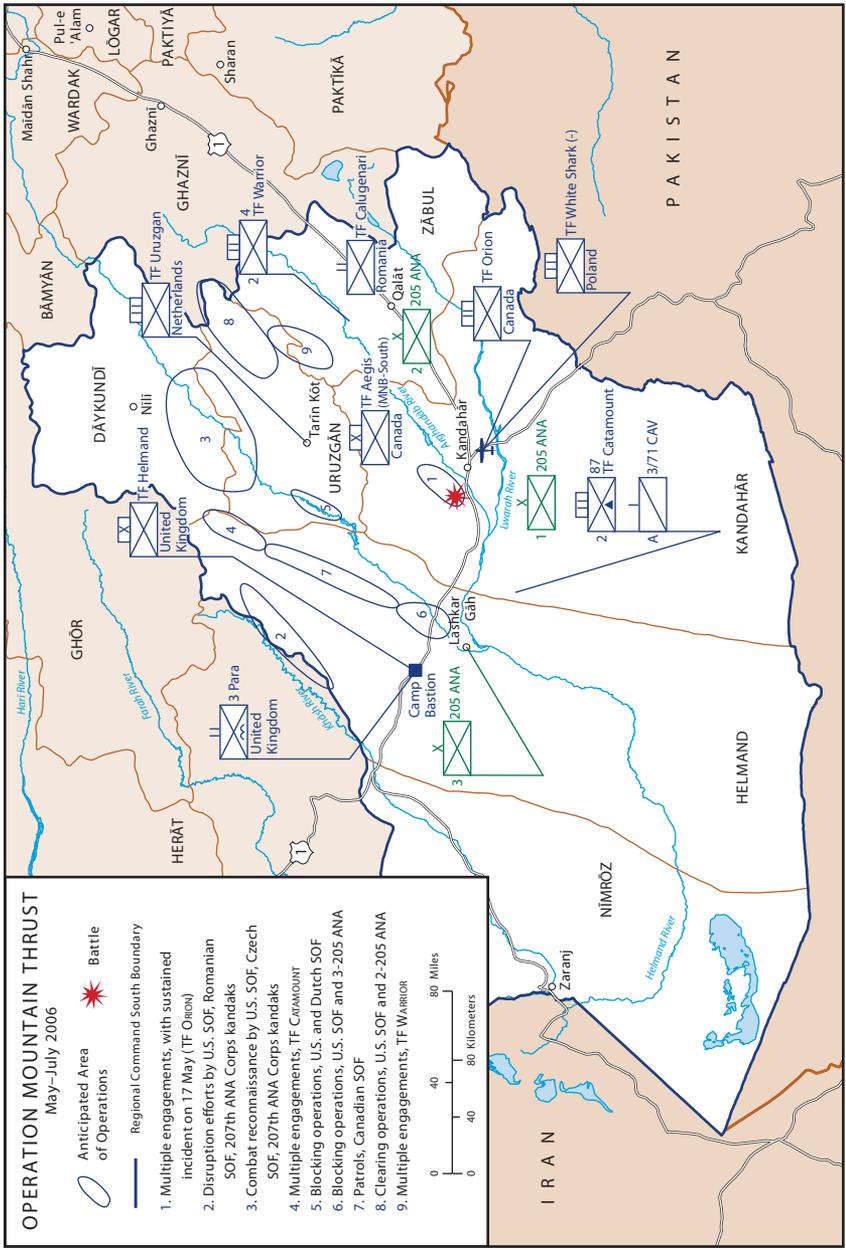
Despite the jumbled nature of NATO's arrival in RC South, the transfer to ISAF control remained set for July. General Richards had to closely coordinate with General Freakley, as CJTF-76 maintained operational control over NATO forces in RC South before the official transfer of authority. Both officers sought the smooth execution of Operation MOUNTAIN THRUST, which differed from Operation MOUNTAIN LION in several ways. Not only did it include international forces operating under the Canadian Task Force AEGIS, but CJTF-76 utilized SOF as the decisive effort. Special Forces from five nations began operations in May, working with the Afghan 205th Corps to project force into the junction of Uruzgan, northern Helmand, northwest Zabul, and northern Kandahar Provinces. The objective was to relieve pressure on British forces in Helmand, support Canadian forces in Kandahar, and protect the Dutch movement into Uruzgan (*Map 4*).

Although SOF units took the operational lead, American maneuver forces also contributed to MOUNTAIN THRUST. Colonel Toner withdrew most of his 2d Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, from Paktika Province for operations in northern Helmand. Colonel Sturek's 2d Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, conducted operations in northern Zabul Province, and a company from 3d Squadron, 71st Cavalry

# OPERATION MOUNTAIN THRUST

May–July 2006

-  Anticipated Area of Operations
-  Battle
-  Regional Command South Boundary
- 1. Multiple engagements, with sustained incident on 17 May (TF Orion)
- 2. Disruption efforts by U.S. SOF, Romanian SOF, 207th ANA Corps landaks
- 3. Combat reconnaissance by U.S. SOF, Czech SOF, 207th ANA Corps landaks
- 4. Multiple engagements, TF CATAMOUNT
- 5. Blocking operations, U.S. and Dutch SOF
- 6. Blocking operations, U.S. SOF and 3-205 ANA
- 7. Patrols, Canadian SOF
- 8. Clearing operations, U.S. SOF and 2-205 ANA
- 9. Multiple engagements, TF WARRIOR



MAP 4

Regiment, moved into Kandahar Province to support the Canadians. Shifting American forces into RC South proved exceedingly difficult. Toner's battalion had to move across four provinces, which would require route clearance, maintenance, and unmanned aerial vehicles. To sustain the battalion in the desert for three months, the U.S. Air Force dropped food, water, and ammunition on pallets. Planes also dropped humanitarian supplies, reducing the likelihood of an uprising and keeping Toner's supply lines open.

Early reports during MOUNTAIN THRUST indicated stiffer than anticipated resistance. RC South contained only 10 percent of Afghanistan's total population, but as the birthplace of the Taliban movement, Kandahar and Uruzgun Provinces had many committed fighters. Helmand also had numerous Taliban supporters, and accounted for more than 85 percent of Afghanistan's opium and heroin production, which the Taliban taxed to fund the insurgency. The coalition operation continued until late July and consisted of company-sized missions in multiple valleys. Despite unexpected difficulties, MOUNTAIN THRUST succeeded in creating time and space for the transition from United States to NATO ISAF control over RC South on 31 July. Toner's battalion returned to Paktika Province after the operation, but the U.S. Army did not abandon RC South after the transfer of authority. To support ISAF operations, the Army kept a maneuver battalion, logisticians, an aviation battalion, more than 350 embedded training team members, and about 350 Special Forces personnel in the region.

#### *Continuing Operations in RC East (August 2006–February 2007)*

With several American units shifting to RC South to support the transition to ISAF, OEF forces in RC East worked to consolidate gains made during MOUNTAIN LION. CJTF-76 did not conduct another major operation in the regional command until August. Once Freakley recovered most of his maneuver forces used for MOUNTAIN THRUST, he initiated Operation MOUNTAIN FURY, targeting Paktika, Paktiya, Khost, and Ghazni Provinces. Elements from 2d Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, and 2d Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, partnered with units from the Afghan 203d Corps to clear out insurgents along the border between Paktika and Ghazni Provinces. Various conventional units and SOF elements partnered with the ANA to conduct small-scale operations across the region. The Pakistani Army contributed by establishing blocking positions along the border.

Whereas in previous operations, American maneuver units tried to connect their efforts in an overarching framework, MOUNTAIN FURY consisted of small unit actions across large areas. The six-week operation ultimately involved 7,000 soldiers spread across four provinces. American forces completed one major road project, built thirty-eight district centers, and provided medical assistance to more than 6,000 Afghans. Soldiers also killed hundreds of insurgents and captured numerous weapons caches at the cost of sixteen American deaths and eighty-four other casualties. Despite its accomplishments, the operation did not cripple the insurgency in the region. Insurgent forces reacted aggressively, attempting to wipe out an American platoon-sized force. Although unsuccessful, the retaliation illustrated that the region remained far from stable.

On 5 October, American conventional forces completed the final shift to ISAF as CJTF-76 formally became the ISAF RC East headquarters. General Freakley maintained his authority over American maneuver forces as part of the OEF mission, but took on the role of ISAF deputy commander for security operations. Although the new position ostensibly made Freakley responsible for ISAF operations across the entire country, General Richards allowed him to continue to direct American operations in RC East. The CJTF-76 commander was committed particularly to setting conditions for the 3d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division's upcoming relief by the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division. He therefore launched his fourth and final operation, MOUNTAIN EAGLE, in early November.

Unlike the two previous operations in RC East where American units focused on specific provinces, MOUNTAIN EAGLE spanned almost the entire regional command. Soldiers continued to push into remote valleys in the northeastern provinces and tried to cut infiltration routes in the southern provinces. Coalition and Afghan forces also established twelve new combat outposts. The overall goal was to block insurgent lines of communications to Pakistan and disrupt coordination between the Taliban and the Haqqani Network before winter set in. More importantly, MOUNTAIN EAGLE included humanitarian and medical assistance using international and Afghan government resources. CJTF-76 allocated millions of dollars in assistance and the United Arab Emirates funded new infrastructure projects. The Afghan government publicized these efforts using radio broadcasts, leaflets, and a coordinated *shura* (decision-making councils) campaign to refute Taliban misinformation and build popular support. General



*A 10th Mountain Division soldier on watch (U.S. Army Center of Military History)*

Eikenberry thought the operation a success and a model for future counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan.

*NATO's Difficulties in RC South (July 2006–February 2007)*

With American forces refocusing their efforts in RC East, ISAF began independent operations in RC South. The coalition encountered immediate problems as the Taliban proved considerably stronger than anticipated. The British experience in Helmand Province illustrates these difficulties. The delayed deployment of British forces meant that they arrived in Afghanistan in April and May, when the warmer weather prompted an increase in insurgent activity. The British also staggered their deployment, inserting companies over the course of two months. This deployment strategy limited their ability to conduct operations until all of their units arrived in theater. Aside from these self-imposed restrictions, the British faced an operating environment rife with internal problems and defined by political and economic factors at odds with what the coalition hoped to achieve in the province.

Helmand Province accounted for 42 percent of poppy production in Afghanistan in 2006, and 30 percent of the global supply of opium. British Prime Minister Tony Blair had campaigned for reelection promising to tackle his country's narcotics problem.

Blair used the prospect of reducing the drug supply in Afghanistan to gain support from Parliament for deploying troops. Unfortunately for the British, the fact that many Afghans in Helmand depended on poppy cultivation for their livelihood meant that any attempt to target poppy production would spark resistance. Reportedly, various Afghan politicians in Helmand were deeply involved in opiate production and sought to undermine British antinarcotics initiatives.

The British intended their counternarcotics operations in Helmand to be part of a larger peacekeeping mission. Before the deployment of British troops, Defence Secretary John Reid announced that they “would not be the aggressors,” and that, “If we came for three years . . . and had not fired one shot at the end of it, we would be very happy indeed.” The emphasis on stability efforts rather than combat operations was not unique to the British. Planning by NATO members often reflected an incongruity between their anticipated mission, the operating environment in Afghanistan, and the circumstances they encountered during their deployments.

The British approach to Helmand Province centered on securing an area encompassing the provincial capital of Lashkar Gar, the province’s largest town of Gereshk, and the British headquarters at Camp Bastion. Task Force HELMAND, composed of the British PRT and Tootal’s paratroopers, would sponsor economic activity in this area, converting it into an Afghan Development Zone. They would only advance outside the zone after conditions within it improved. These plans soon went awry, however, when the Taliban seized several district centers in northern Helmand over the course of the summer.

In response to the Taliban actions, President Karzai and provincial governor Mohammed Daoud insisted that the British send troops to reclaim and protect the towns. Although the British argued that they were trading space for time and would retake the district centers once they had secured central Helmand, the Afghans insisted on action. Determined that the “‘black flag’ of Mullah Omar should never be allowed to fly over the district centers,” Daoud complained that if the British did not send troops north then they “might as well go home.” Facing the choice of abandoning their operational plan or ignoring the desires of Afghan government officials, the British chose the first option and sent units north to garrison five district centers. In so doing, they sacrificed their ability to conduct offensive combat operations because they were left with

insufficient maneuver forces, and effectively locked themselves into defensive operations based around these district centers.

The deteriorating security situation in Helmand Province was part of a larger Taliban effort to oppose NATO forces across RC South. The Taliban increased attacks in Zabul and Uruzgan Provinces and concentrated insurgents around the city of Kandahar. Three days after the American forces transferred RC South to ISAF control at the end of July, the Taliban ambushed Canadian forces southwest of the provincial capital, killing four and wounding ten soldiers. The Taliban, growing increasingly bold, abandoned low-level guerrilla tactics and utilized battalion-sized elements against coalition forces. They infiltrated the Panjwa'i and Zharey Districts west of Kandahar, putting them in a position to launch an offensive against the provincial capital.

In August, ISAF commander General Richards and Task Force AEGIS commander General Fraser agreed to address the situation in Panjwa'i. A Taliban attack on 19 August, in which between 300 and 500 insurgents struck an Afghan police position near Bazar-e Panjwa'i, escalated the situation. The insurgents forced police and an undersized Canadian company to withdraw under cover of night. As the Taliban threat to the city of Kandahar potentially could undermine the entire ISAF position in RC South, Richards



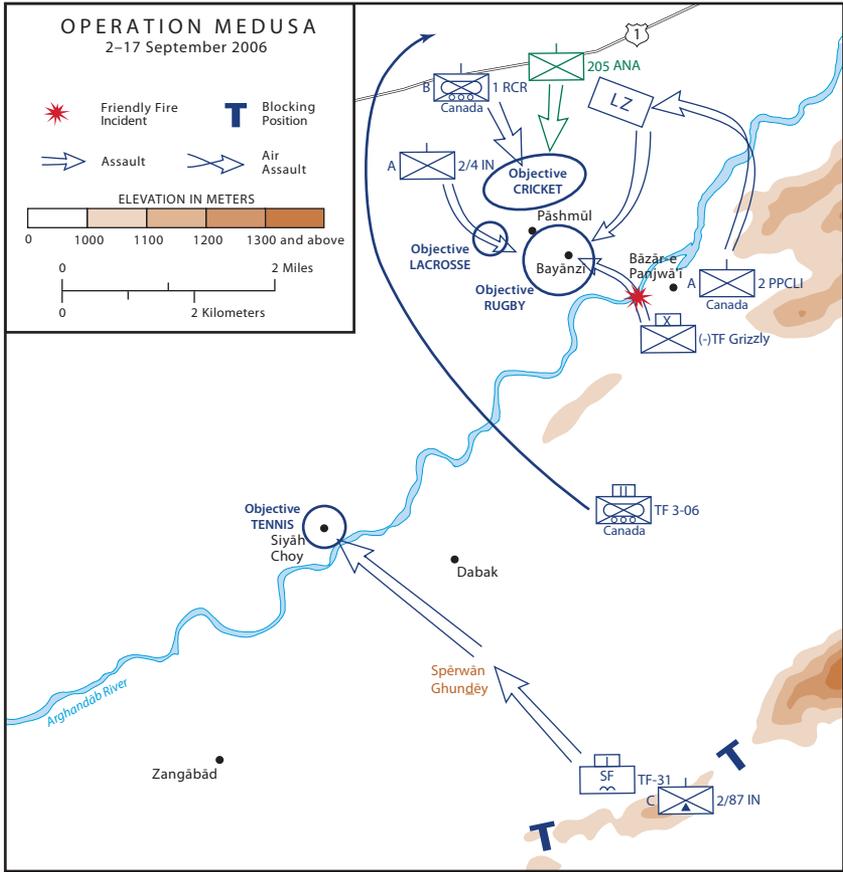
*Canadian soldiers during Operation MEDUSA* (U.S. Army Center of Military History)

and Fraser began to gather forces for a major offensive in Panjwa'i in September.

They designated the offensive Operation MEDUSA. Fraser built his assault force around Lt. Col. Omer H. Lavoie's 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR), which began rotating into the theater in August. Fraser asked for and received a company from Colonel Sturek's 2d Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, along with American air and artillery assets for the operation. Fraser could also rely upon two Operational Detachment Alpha teams from Lt. Col. Donald C. Bolduc's Special Operations Task Force 31, which partnered with comparably sized Afghan units. General Freakley also sent a company from the 2d Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, to support the SOF units. Finally, the Afghans provided a company from the 205th ANA Corps for the operation and the 1st Kandak, 3d Brigade, 201st ANA Corps, to serve as a reserve. British forces supported MEDUSA by keeping the enemy engaged in Helmand and the Dutch moved forces south to interdict possible enemy reinforcements from Uruzgan. The combined force made MEDUSA the largest NATO operation in Afghanistan to date, and the largest offensive operation for American forces since 2002.

Initial plans for Operation MEDUSA called for a river crossing followed by a calculated attack toward the villages of Bayanzi and Pashmul. First, Company A, 2d PPCLI, would seize the town of Bazar-e Panjwa'i on the south bank of the Arghandab River. Next, Company C from 1st RCR would pass through Company A, cross the river, and advance on the village of Pashmul. As the primary attack advanced across the river, Company A from 2d Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment; Company B from 1st RCR; and a kandak from the 205th ANA Corps would launch a diversionary attack north of the town. Three Special Forces teams and an American infantry company would attempt to cut off any Taliban escaping south (*Map 5*).

On 2 September, the Canadian Company A established its position in Bazar-e Panjwa'i while the diversionary assault to the north began creeping forward. The next day, Company C from 1st RCR began its attack across the Arghandab, encountering well-placed fire that killed four Canadian soldiers, wounded twelve, and destroyed the attack's lead vehicles. Taliban resistance proved significantly greater than anticipated—initial intelligence predicted less than 1,000 Taliban fighters in the area, but later estimates placed the number closer to 2,000 to 3,000. Immobilized and running low on ammunition, the company pulled back to Bazar-e Panjwa'i to refit. A second push



MAP 5

along the same route made even less progress before disaster struck. Early on 4 September, a U.S. Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt II ground attack aircraft, flying runs against targets east of Pashmul, accidentally strafed the Canadian position, killing one and wounding thirty. The friendly-fire incident rendered Company C combat ineffective, forcing Fraser and Lavoie to adjust their attack plan. With an American and Canadian company and an Afghan kandak already north of Pashmul, Fraser designated them the new main effort. While the remnants of Company C secured Bazar-e Panjwa'i, American helicopters flew the 2d PPCLI's Company A to join the northern assault. With Company A, 2d PPCLI, on its left; Company A, 2d Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment, on its right; and an ANA kandak in reserve,

Company B, 1st RCR, launched a deliberate attack with breaching equipment and armored bulldozers on 6 September.

To the south, American Special Forces seized a hilltop east of the Arghandab River called Sperwan Ghundey. There, close air support repelled repeated enemy counterattacks. Company C from 2d Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, positioned itself where it could support the Special Forces units and the maneuver forces to the north. Meanwhile, General Fraser formed an ad hoc command for an attack across the Arghandab. Led by Col. R. Steven Williams, the assault force—designated Task Force GRIZZLY—contained elements of Company C, 1st RCR, as well as the 297th Support Battalion and the headquarters of the Alaska Army National Guard's 207th Infantry Group. With orders to make his unit “look like a thousand man organization,” Williams' force advanced across the Arghandab on 6 September while the Taliban attempted to repel the coalition attack from the north. Using artillery fire and psychological operations to mask his unit's true size, Williams advanced on Pashmul from the southeast. The two coalition assaults linked up at Pashmul by 13 September. Meanwhile, the Special Forces units crossed the Arghandab to the south on 12 September in an effort to mop up any Taliban fighters retreating through the area but found most of the enemy gone.

Operation MEDUSA ended on 17 September after coalition units seized all objectives, killing more than a thousand Taliban fighters in the process. In mounting a staunch defense, insurgents expended 400,000 rounds of small-caliber ammunition, 2,000 rocket-propelled grenades, and 1,000 mortar shells against the coalition attacks. His forces' failure to hold onto the area compelled Mullah Omar to abandon his hopes for a direct assault on Kandahar city and return to a more indirect campaign. Marine Corps General James L. Jones, the Supreme Allied Commander–Europe, noted that the Taliban “believed that the newly arrived NATO forces wouldn't fight. They were wrong, and they suffered a major tactical defeat.” Operation MEDUSA showed that ISAF units could mount offensive operations and would continue fighting even after taking casualties. Unfortunately for the coalition, the operation also dispelled any myth regarding conducting peacekeeping versus combat operations and the serious nature of the Taliban threat. ISAF did not have sufficient forces to hold the Panjwa'i District after clearing it. Although defeated in MEDUSA, the Taliban was sure to return with rebuilt forces.

*The War Ebbs and Flows (September 2006–March 2007)*

Despite the short-term tactical gains achieved during Operation MEDUSA, events over the following months provided the Taliban with renewed momentum. In October, the British acted upon an agreement with the Taliban for both sides to pull out of the district center at Musa Qal'ah. To General Eikenberry's dismay, the accord led to similar withdrawals from Sangin and Now Zad. Not surprisingly, the Taliban portrayed the British departures as victories. That same month, the Pakistani Army began withdrawing from North Waziristan under a truce signed on 5 September. Insurgents could now stage attacks into Afghanistan free of interference, and enemy crossings rose by a third. By the following spring, insurgent crossings had multiplied threefold.

After the Pakistani truce, insurgents increased their attacks in Paktika, one of two Afghan provinces sharing a border with North Waziristan. American forces responded by launching a major operation in the province as part of the ongoing Operation MOUNTAIN FURY. After the 2d Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, retrieved its units from RC South, it gathered air and intelligence assets to conduct Operation CATAMOUNT BLITZ in November. Despite eliminating pockets of Haqqani Network fighters, CATAMOUNT BLITZ was not large enough to seal the province's entire border, ensuring that the fighting would continue after the winter lull.

Although neither American nor NATO forces were able to defeat the insurgency in 2006, operations such as MEDUSA and CATAMOUNT BLITZ provided opportunities to develop the ANSF. After the United States absorbed the police training mission in 2005, Eikenberry made ANSF development a central element of his planning. As preparations continued for transferring responsibility for Afghan security to ISAF by the end of 2006, Eikenberry sought to expand the American training effort. One of his motivations was U.S. Central Command's plan to inactivate CFC-A after the transition, as the United States would ostensibly no longer need a three-star headquarters in Afghanistan. However, with the United States maintaining primary responsibility for ANSF development as a part of the OEF mission, Eikenberry encouraged Maj. Gen. Robert E. Durbin, who took command of OSC-A in January 2006, to request a massive increase in developmental money and to think broadly about how to spend it. In April, General Abizaid authorized an expansion for the advisory effort, adding an administrative element to OSC-A, and redesignating it as the Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A).



*Americans training Afghan soldiers.* (U.S. Army Center of Military History)

With the expansion of his command, Durbin implemented several new initiatives. The most significant of these were the Afghanistan National Air Corps, commando kandaks, and the Afghan National Civil Order Police. Although the National Air Corps—a small helicopter fleet centered in Kabul—would be expensive for the Afghan government to maintain, it was essential that the president travel to all the rugged and remote parts of the country in order to exercise influence beyond the capital. The effort to create commando kandaks came in response to President Karzai’s complaints regarding American SOF night missions. Although carefully done, these missions involved foreign troops forcing their way into Afghan homes. Durbin wanted to recruit talented individuals from ANA units and have Special Forces train them to lead these raids. Although this arrangement deprived regular ANA units of some of their most capable soldiers, Durbin needed to put an Afghan face on these vital, and politically sensitive, military operations. The Afghan National Civil Order Police was to be an elite police force capable of handling dangerous constabulary tasks.

General Eikenberry hoped that increasing Durbin’s authority would enable his command to work more effectively with American maneuver units in training Afghan security forces. For

General Freakley's CJTF-76, training meant partnered operations. Impossible just a few years earlier, partnering became more feasible by 2006 as three ANA corps fielded units in the American operational area. Freakley successfully incorporated ANA units into MOUNTAIN FURY and MOUNTAIN EAGLE, and ISAF utilized ANA units in MEDUSA. These operations represented important progress for ANSF development, but the effort was far from complete and significant problems remained within all the Afghan security forces.

In addition to the expanding ANSF training mission, the transition to ISAF primacy in Afghanistan accompanied further changes in the American effort. The most significant was the inactivation of CFC-A in January 2007. With the transfer of RC East to ISAF, American maneuver forces became part of the new mission. On 4 February 2007, General Dan K. McNeill officially succeeded General Richards, becoming the first American ISAF commander. McNeill had previous experience in Afghanistan, having served as the Combined Joint Task Force-180 commander from May 2002 to May 2003, but his second deployment was markedly different from his first. Instead of commanding an American force of less than 10,000 personnel, McNeill would now lead an international coalition of more than 35,000 service members from 37 countries. The mission had also changed. Instead of hunting al-Qaeda and Taliban holdouts in Afghanistan, he had to combat a growing insurgency based in Pakistan while strengthening the new Afghan government.

McNeill's assumption of ISAF command did not resolve the convoluted and bifurcated American command structure. His position put him in the NATO chain of command, reporting to Joint Forces Command-Brunssum (Netherlands)—one of two NATO operational headquarters. Above the Joint Forces Command was Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, NATO's strategic-level headquarters typically led by an American four-star general (who concurrently served as the Supreme Allied Commander-Europe and the head of U.S. European Command).

The two subordinate American commands in Afghanistan, however, reported directly or partially to U.S. Central Command. The American training mission, led by General Durbin's CSTC-A, remained an OEF mission and did not fall under ISAF. The American CJTF-76 operated under a dual command chain depending on the mission. When conducting counterterrorism operations, it functioned under U.S. Central Command as a part of OEF. When it engaged in counterinsurgency or security operations

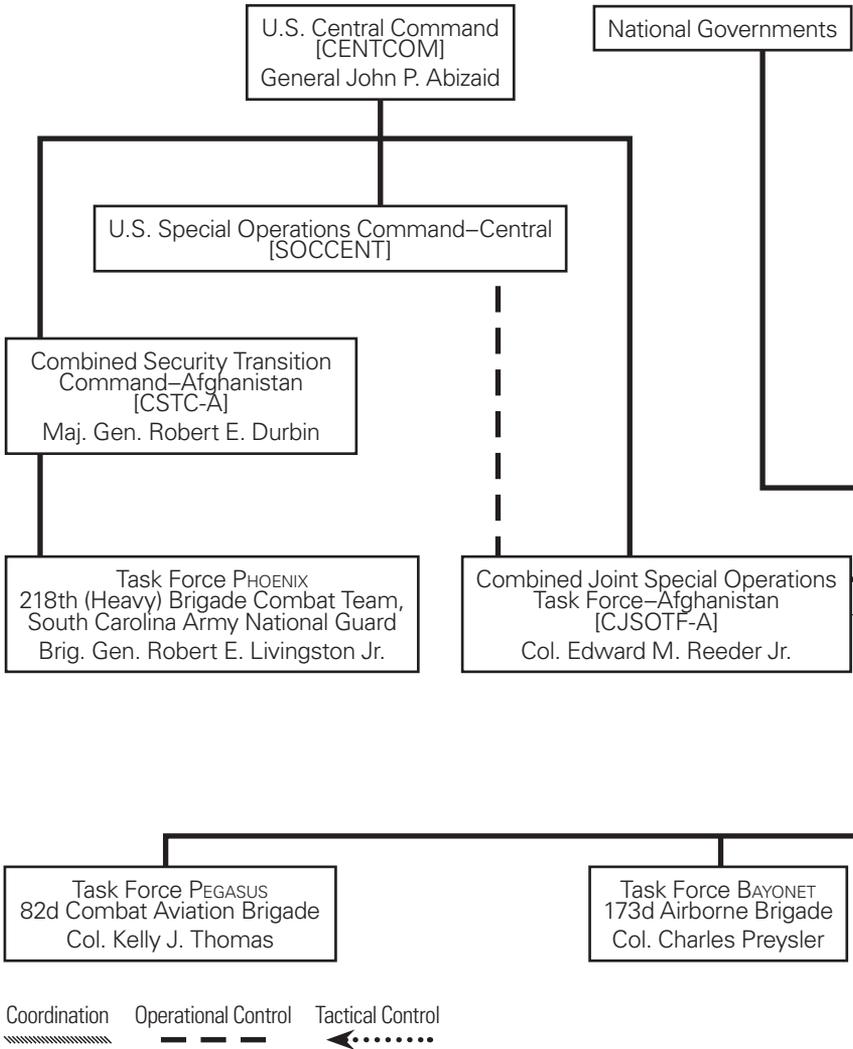
within its regional command, it did so as a part of ISAF and U.S. European Command.

On 2 February, Maj. Gen. David M. Rodriguez's 82d Airborne Division took over CJTF-76 from the 10th Mountain Division. As the senior American two-star general in theater, Rodriguez fell under both the OEF and ISAF command chains. As the RC East commander, he reported to McNeill. He also was designated as commander of the U.S. National Support Element—which included the OEF mission—and reported directly to U.S. Central Command. In this capacity, Rodriguez maintained authority over all American personnel in Afghanistan, including tactical control of CJSOTF-A. Following the inactivation of CFC-A, operational control over American Special Forces in Afghanistan shifted back to the special operations element of U.S. Central Command. This divided American command arrangement was far from ideal, but in the absence of clarifying guidance from either American combatant command, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or the Bush administration, Generals McNeill, Rodriguez, and Durbin had to work out a system of cooperation on the ground (*Chart 2*).

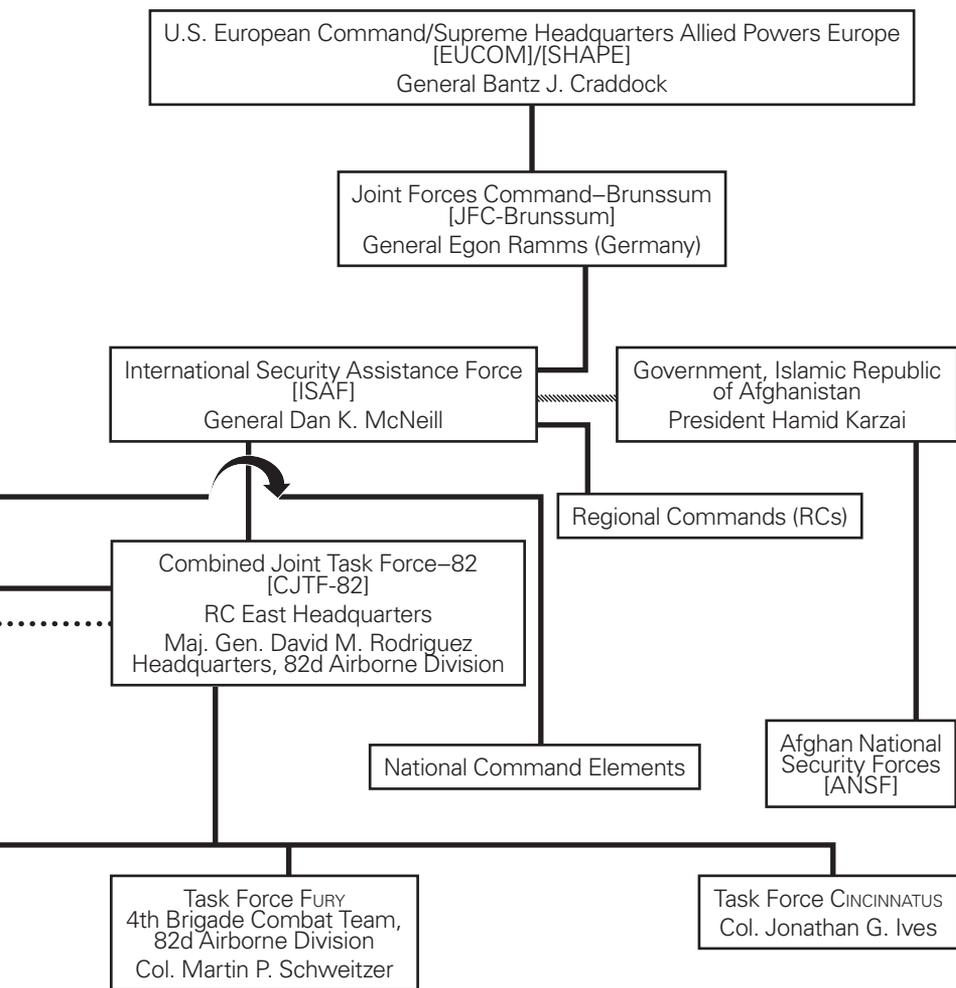
The complicated chain of command in Afghanistan grew out of the United States' strategic shift away from the conflict as the situation in Iraq deteriorated. Drastically escalating sectarian violence over the course of 2006 compelled the Bush administration to announce a surge of five combat brigades to Iraq in January 2007. The expansion of OIF meant that Afghanistan would remain an economy-of-force mission for the United States for the foreseeable future. General McNeill accepted this reality, recalling later, "I didn't delude myself, I got it. It was all about Iraq. I understood that." In practical terms, this priority meant further constraints on resources, as evidenced by the replacement of Colonel Nicholson's 3d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Task Force SPARTAN), with Col. Martin P. Schweitzer's 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division (Task Force FURY). Although the organic brigades were similar in size, Nicholson had used three additional maneuver battalions—either from the National Guard or the Marine Corps—during his deployment. Schweitzer would not have access to comparable reinforcements and thus would need to undertake the same mission as Nicholson but with fewer resources.

At first, the Joint Chiefs of Staff tried to offset this three-battalion decrease by giving Task Force PHOENIX an additional 3,500 soldiers to support the police training mission. Unfortunately

Chart 2—International Coalition’s Organizational Structure, Summer 2007



for General McNeill, the Bush administration instead chose to deploy these soldiers to Iraq, leaving Task Force PHOENIX to meet new requirements from its 2,700 troops, which the National Guard struggled to fill consistently throughout 2007. The command could cover only 69 percent of ANA units and 32 percent of Afghan National Police units by the end of the year.



Anticipating a dearth of resources, American commanders received welcome news in January 2007 when the DoD announced it would be extending the 3d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division’s tour an additional 120 days. The decision came directly from the new secretary of defense, Robert M. Gates, who replaced Secretary Rumsfeld in December. In the fall of 2006, Eikenberry and

his staff had briefed Rumsfeld on their overextended forces, with little effect. Gates, however, took over the DoD intent on putting more focus on Afghanistan. After receiving a similar briefing on the diminishing capabilities of American ground forces, the new secretary concluded that the Army needed an additional combat brigade for Afghanistan simply to maintain its ongoing missions. With the decision to surge forces into Iraq limiting the availability of brigades for service in Afghanistan, Gates chose to extend the 10th Mountain soldiers to provide time to prepare an additional brigade for deployment. Gates also secured more troops for Task Force PHOENIX. Even with these additional forces, though, Gates acknowledged that “in terms of major units, that was all we could do, frankly, until we began drawing down the [planned] surge in Iraq.” General Abizaid echoed this assessment, noting that “there weren’t enough American forces to be able to do the things that we wanted ultimately to do with combat power.”

*Task Force FURY in the Lead (February–June 2007)*

The decision to extend Task Force SPARTAN compelled General Rodriguez to readjust where to deploy his forces. He decided to split RC East in half, committing Task Force SPARTAN to the northern provinces of Nuristan, Nangarhar, Kunar, and Laghman, and assigning the incoming Task Force FURY to cover Paktiya, Paktika, Khost, Ghazni, and Logar Provinces. Colonel Schweitzer, the Task Force FURY commander, sent Lt. Col. Timothy J. McAteer’s 2d Battalion, 508th Infantry Regiment, to Ghazni Province. He split Paktika Province in two, sending Lt. Col. David J. Wood’s 4th Squadron, 73d Cavalry Regiment, to its western districts and keeping Colonel Toner’s 2d Battalion, 87th Infantry Regiment, from Task Force SPARTAN, in the eastern districts. Schweitzer’s third maneuver battalion, Lt. Col. Brian J. Mennes’ 1st Battalion, 508th Infantry Regiment, became Rodriguez’s tactical theater reserve. Losing one of his maneuver battalions forced Schweitzer to use elements of Lt. Col. Steven A. Baker’s Special Troops Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division, as a combat force patrolling Logar Province. The remaining portions of Baker’s unit provided combat support and combat service support along with Lt. Col. Michael P. Peterman’s 782d Support Battalion. The lack of combat power in the brigade also required Schweitzer to convert parts of Lt. Col. Scott D. Custer’s 2d Battalion, 321st Field Artillery Regiment, into provisional infantry for duty in Khost Province. All of these units received airlift, aerial fires, and medical evacuation

support from Col. Kelly J. Thomas' Combat Aviation Brigade, 82d Airborne Division (Task Force PEGASUS).

Although extending Task Force SPARTAN provided Rodriguez's command—renamed CJTF-82 in early March—more combat power, it did create certain logistical problems. The regional command needed additional infrastructure to accommodate two combat brigades. Most of Task Force SPARTAN's major equipment had already been shipped back to Fort Drum, New York, before Gates' decision. In order to continue operations, it would have to borrow vehicles and combat systems from Task Force FURY. This resulted in a slower operating tempo because, as Colonel Peterman noted, "you can't really split a wrecker two ways." Task Force FURY's logisticians spent months securing additional material and equipment to adapt to these increased requirements.

General Freakley's push into remote parts of Afghanistan and the increasing number of ANSF units taking the field sparked insurgent attacks. The escalating violence created an additional need for sufficient ground units to provide American combat support over a larger area. Freakley's intent was to draw the enemy away from the Afghan population, which meant establishing additional forward operating bases and combat outposts. By May 2007, RC East contained forty-three such positions, roughly twice the number that existed at the beginning of 2006. These bases quickly became targets for insurgent attacks, requiring soldiers to spend more time on force protection than on patrolling. Even with the additional combat brigade, CJTF-82 required more ground troops to fulfill its security mission. The solution, as seen with combat support and artillery units, was converting auxiliaries into infantry units.

With two combat brigades committed to the provinces along the Pakistan border, CJTF-82 found that it needed an additional maneuver force to protect the provinces north and west of Kabul. The Army utilized Lt. Col. James E. Bonner's 23d Chemical Battalion as the base of an ad hoc task force to fill this role. The battalion originally deployed to Afghanistan after the Army diverted the 43d Support Group—tasked with providing support and base management for CJTF-82—to Iraq. U.S. Army Forces Command decided to combine parts of Bonner's battalion with other assorted personnel to create Task Force CINCINNATUS under the command of Col. Jonathan G. Ives from the U.S. Army Reserve. The new task force was to take on the 43d Support Group's support mission. Fifteen days before the unit began operations, however, Colonel Ives

learned that he would instead have security responsibility for five provinces. He also would oversee New Zealand's PRT in Bamyan Province, a Turkish team in Wardak Province, and American teams located at Bagram and in Panjshir Province. Ives pulled the security element out of the Bagram reconstruction team, the military police from the 82d Airborne Division's special troops battalion, and any other personnel he could find to provide sufficient maneuver units for his operational area.

The CJTF-82 campaign plan maintained the American strategic objective of creating a stable Afghanistan that could support America's Global War on Terrorism and deny safe haven to al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. In practice, this meant using PRTs and maneuver forces to support provincial governments and build ANSF capabilities. Rodriguez's CJTF-82 would embrace the clear, hold, and build approach with the understanding that "the decisive operation will fall within the build portion." The initial effort would focus on creating Afghan Development Zones around the cities of Ghazni, Sharan, and Gardez that eventually would connect to create a single zone in the center of Task Force FURY's operational area.

CJTF-82's main effort in RC East over the first half of 2007 involved three major operations to create these Afghan Development Zones. Colonel Mennes' 1st Battalion, 508th Infantry Regiment, commenced Operation OQAB HAMKARI (Eagle Teamwork) around Ghazni in late February before transitioning to other operations as the theater tactical reserve. At the same time, Colonel McAteer's 2d Battalion, 508th Infantry Regiment, conducted Operation OQAB ETEHAB (Eagle Unity) around Sharan while Colonel Woods' 4th Squadron, 73d Cavalry Regiment, conducted Operation EAGLE STRENGTH around Gardez. The operations received additional support from a Polish battalion-sized battle group and elements from the 1st Battalion, 102d Infantry Regiment. Designed as "a little bit of an 'ink blot' approach," drawing on established counterinsurgency methods used in conflicts like the Vietnam War, the operations involved company-grade officers and reconstruction team members engaging with the local populations while field-grade officers developed connections with provincial governors and members of the provincial councils. The intent was to create a network where Afghan government officials could establish contact with their superiors and subordinates and reach out to other leaders for advice and support. These connections also could help identify areas for economic development and partnering efforts with the ANSF. Once



*Conducting a shura over tea.* (U.S. Army Center of Military History)

the coalition forces and local leaders had built these relationships, maneuver units working with Afghan security forces would engage and defeat insurgent groups or drive them out of the area. As the military cleared new areas, the Afghan police could establish their presence and link communities to the central government. With security in place, development projects could then commence.

The operations involved countless patrols, small-scale engagements, and shuras with local leaders. The coalition forces particularly focused on securing portions of Afghan National Highway 1, which connected Kabul and the main population centers in RC East to RC South. Keeping the transportation infrastructure open was essential to the economic development plans at the heart of the operation. By the summer, the 203d ANA Corps was ready to launch its own operation—called MAIWAND in reference to a nineteenth-century Afghan victory over British forces—in Ghazni Province near its border with Paktika. Carried out in June, the operational goal, again, was to separate insurgents from the population by providing humanitarian assistance and reconstruction. While ANA units conducted most of MAIWAND's engagements with the populace, Colonel McAteer's battalion carried out supporting operations. The 4th Squadron, 73d Cavalry Regiment, and the Polish battle group also contributed by established

blocking positions while Task Force FURY handled logistics. In terms of cooperation and ANSF development, Operation MAIWAND represented a high point in southern RC East. Although Task Force FURY continued to conduct operations in the area for the remainder of its deployment, none matched MAIWAND's size or degree of Afghan involvement.

*New Development and Training Approaches (2007–2008)*

In addition to combat operations, CJTF-82's approach included new ideas about improving soldiers' understanding of and engagement with the Afghans. Early in its deployment, Task Force FURY employed anthropologists recruited by the U.S. Army to provide insight into Afghan thinking. Although these Human Terrain Teams were controversial, especially among anthropologists who claimed that the military's use of their expertise jeopardized their professional ethics, Colonel Schweitzer credited them with improving his brigade's mission planning and command function. Regardless of Schweitzer's support, only six teams made it to Afghanistan before the DoD discontinued the program.

A more helpful concept percolated up from the field in April and May. After observing the outdated nature of Afghan agricultural methods, units advocated modernization efforts to help farmers improve their livelihoods. Officials at U.S. Central Command supported the idea and requested National Guard soldiers who could teach modern farming techniques. The Pentagon approved the initiative and helped create Agribusiness Development Teams for service in Afghanistan. Numbering almost fifty members with the addition of security personnel, the teams took on a more instructional role than Department of Agriculture planners serving with the PRTs. The first of the agribusiness teams deployed in early 2008 and found a ready audience among the Afghans.

The most significant development effort in RC East, however, was the culmination of repeated attempts to create functioning economic zones. Although General Rodriguez centered his campaign on establishing Afghan Development Zones in Ghazni, Paktiya, and Paktika Provinces, the greatest success came in Nangarhar Province. Task Force SPARTAN's push into the provinces to Nangarhar's north during MOUNTAIN LION and MOUNTAIN EAGLE had created an effective security perimeter for internal economic development. Planners in Col. Charles "Chip" Preysler's 173d Airborne Brigade Combat Team, Task Force SPARTAN's eventual

replacement, saw an opportunity to create an Afghan Development Zone they called “Nangarhar, Inc.” Begun in the latter half of 2007, the zone utilized \$3.2 billion in infrastructure improvements designed to sustain economic growth. The program worked not only because it had financial backing but also because it incorporated nationally approved goals, aligning itself with other economic strategies outlined in the Afghanistan Compact, most notably the Afghanistan National Development Strategy.

Developed by the Afghan central government and the international community, the National Development Strategy represented an attempt to consolidate and coordinate various ongoing economic development efforts. It integrated the Afghan Development Zones into its approach to Afghan economic improvement. It also introduced two new institutions—coordination centers and development councils—which tied local governance to the government in Kabul. The Afghan constitution had created a rigid system in which various security forces reported directly to Kabul, but did not communicate effectively with each other. Coordination centers provided a method for the military, police, border police, and intelligence agencies to share information, respond to incidents, and plan operations. The centers brought representatives from the different organizations into the same buildings along with American advisers who promoted amicable interactions while also reporting back to their brigade commanders. The strategy also designated the development councils to increase Afghan agency by directing reconstruction money toward projects nominated by Afghans. At the communal, district, and provincial levels, the councils included leading figures who identified development projects and forwarded them to Kabul for review and prioritization. The program used Afghanistan’s complex social hierarchy to create broad support for development projects. The concept proved extremely popular, with more than 16,000 council meetings taking place across the country in the first eighteen months of the program.

Finally, in addition to new efforts to promote Afghan economic development, CJTF-82 and the U.S. State Department intensified attempts to influence Pakistan to secure its northern border. Still suffering the aftereffects of the 2005 earthquake and the failed war against rebels in the tribal areas, the Pakistani government struggled to counter the spread of Islamic radicalism within its borders. Frustrated by an increasing number of insurgent attacks emanating from Pakistan, General McNeill met with senior Afghan and Pakistani military leaders to improve coordination across the

border. The CJTF-82 deputy commander for operations, Brig. Gen. Joseph L. Votel, tried to expand this effort by coordinating a series of meetings between Afghan, Pakistani, and coalition general officers and senior colonels. Regrettably, the program made little progress owing to long-standing border disputes and Pakistan's prior support of the Taliban. The murder of Maj. Larry J. Bauguess Jr. by a Pakistani soldier at a border engagement meeting on 14 May 2007 further strained relations.

The situation in Pakistan exploded in July when armed Islamic radicals seized the Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) complex in Islamabad. Although government forces retook the mosque, attacks against President Musharraf's administration increased dramatically. By December, radical Islamists formed the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan—or Pakistani Taliban—as a direct challenge to Musharraf's regime. The U.S. Agency for International Development worked to counter Pakistan's growing instability with a \$300 million development program for Pakistani territories bordering Afghanistan. The United States also contributed nearly \$1 billion in aid to the Pakistani military in 2007. At the same time, President Bush authorized unmanned aerial vehicle strikes against insurgents in Pakistan. Despite these efforts, Pakistan plunged further into crisis that December when Islamic fundamentalists assassinated former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, a powerful politician who was one of Musharraf's leading rivals. With its political and military leadership consumed with internal threats, the Pakistanis could not effectively support operations against the Taliban and other Afghan insurgent groups based in Pakistan.

Despite the increasingly chaotic situation in Pakistan, American development efforts in RC East continued unimpeded. The 173d Airborne Brigade Combat Team focused on Nangarhar Province's development potential because of its waterways, extensive farmland, and long growing season, as well as its strong governor, Gul Agha Sherzai. While the brigade staff exploited these conditions in Nangarhar, Inc., its special troops battalion established six coordination centers, each with call-in lines that enabled security forces to respond to local problems. Nangarhar's PRT supported the coordination centers and helped implement Nangarhar, Inc. As they had since 2004, reconstruction teams answered to ground-force commanders. The two American combat brigades each supervised four teams, while Task Force CINCINNATUS supervised two American teams as well as the New Zealand team in Bamyan Province. Similarly, the PRT in Farah Province fell under the American commander for RC West.

Finally, Col. Richard L. Stevens, who replaced Colonel Williams as commander of American forces in RC South, supervised the reconstruction team in Zabul Province.

As central as the reconstruction teams were to American and coalition efforts in Afghanistan, some felt they did not go far enough. Maj. Gen. Robert W. Cone, CSTC-A commander during the latter half of 2007, believed that development needed an even more local focus. Most district governments were ineffective, consisting only of a governor appointed by President Karzai, a small staff, and a police squad controlled by the Ministry of Interior. With support from U.S. Central Command and General McNeill, Cone devised a plan to improve law and order at this level. Labeled Focused District Development, the plan began with selecting communities for development, a difficult task given the number needing attention. Next, the Afghan National Civil Order Police, originally a highly trained crisis response force, replaced the police within a district so they could train as a unit. After weeks of intense instruction, the units returned to their districts for a period of continued mentoring to ensure that they employed their new skills. Once mentors were satisfied, the units could start operating independently as the program moved on to another district.



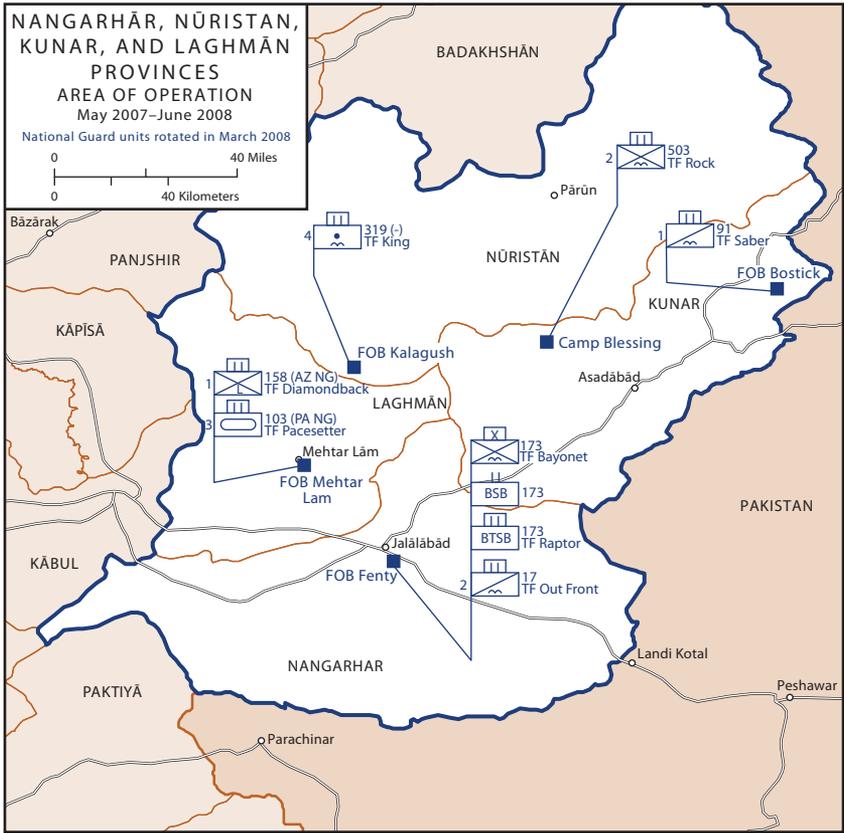
*An Afghan National Police pickup truck (U.S. Army Center of Military History)*

Unfortunately, although Focused District Development increased the proficiency of local police, its coverage was too uneven to have a measurable effect on Afghanistan's overall security. A limited number of trainers meant that only six districts could be developed during the first iteration. Brig. Gen. Robert A. Livingston Jr., the Task Force PHOENIX commander from April 2007 through May 2008, did not have sufficient resources to support Focused District Development while mentoring ANSF units en masse. In addition to a paucity of American or coalition trainers, too many districts needed attention for the existing Afghan National Civil Order Police crews. Moreover, the time required to reintegrate local police once their training ended consumed valuable coalition resources. After spending eight weeks learning about evidence-based prosecution, squads had to be accompanied by American forces upon their return so judges and governors would not negate the reforms. In practice, it would take years for Focused District Development to improve the country's security, but lacking a viable alternative American forces pressed on with the concept.

*Task Force BAYONET in Northern RC East (May–October 2007)*

Colonel Preysler's 173d Airborne Brigade Combat Team had been slated to deploy to Iraq until Secretary Gates selected it to replace Task Force SPARTAN. KNOWN as Task Force BAYONET, the brigade retained a number of veterans from its 2005–2006 deployment to Afghanistan. Despite their wealth of experience, the 173d Airborne Brigade Combat Team faced more than a few challenges. Their previous familiarity with the country proved of limited benefit; they had operated in RC South on their first tour, but would now occupy bases in RC East. The shift in the brigade's assignment meant that the airborne units could not prepare as they normally would for deployment or gather intelligence regarding their intended areas of operation. The paratroopers also learned that only one battalion from Task Force SPARTAN had spent its entire deployment in northern RC East, which limited the amount of intelligence they could provide their replacements. Colonel Preysler later commented that his unit's deployment was a "pretty tough way to come into combat."

General Rodriguez stationed Colonel Preysler's brigade in RC East's northern provinces. Preysler deployed his three maneuver battalions along a line straddling the southern border of Nuristan Province, bisecting the brigade's area of operations (*Map 6*). Lt. Col. Christopher D. Kolenda's 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment, replaced 3d Squadron, 71st Cavalry Regiment, in north-



MAP 6

ern Kunar Province. Lt. Col. William B. Ostlund’s 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry Regiment, took over for the 1st Battalion, 32d Infantry Regiment, in the Pech River Valley. Finally, Lt. Col. Stephen J. Maranian’s 4th Battalion, 319th Field Artillery Regiment, converted some of its soldiers into light infantry and established its headquarters at Forward Operating Base KALAGUSH in central Nuristan Province. The Special Troops Battalion, 173d Airborne Brigade Combat Team, commanded by Lt. Col. Jeffrey L. Milhorn, and Lt. Col. James R. Ryan’s 173d Support Battalion established positions at Forward Operating Base FENTY near Jalalabad. Task Force BAYONET also included an Arizona Army National Guard formation, Lt. Col. Alberto C. Gonzalez’s 1st Battalion, 158th Infantry Regiment, which moved into Forward Operating Base MEHTAR LAM in Laghman Province. The unit had the dual mission of securing the

province alongside their ANSF counterparts and providing security forces for eleven PRTs.

The brigade's mission was to disrupt the insurgent infiltration routes running from Pakistan to Nangarhar and the area surrounding Kabul. Nuristan and Kunar Provinces were also safe havens for antigovernment militant groups who could operate out of the region's isolated river valleys. Each battalion occupied a forward operating base and sent smaller contingents to combat outposts and firebases in remote positions. Although some of these could be supplied over land routes, many could be reached only via helicopter. The deployment arrangement enabled the Americans to cover a large geographic area, but limited the combat power they had at any one location. Some of the outposts held only a platoon, with squads distributed in support positions. The battalions protected these isolated units with artillery and aerial support. Even so, reminiscent of the British experience in Helmand Province during 2006, the paratroopers in northern RC East occupied isolated positions and had limited offensive capabilities, making them vulnerable to enemy attack. Both General Rodriguez and Colonel Preysler accepted the risk as necessary to protect Kabul and support economic development in Nangarhar Province.

In Kunar Province, Colonel Kolenda's 1st Squadron, 91st Cavalry Regiment, worked to secure the northernmost limit of American forces. After taking losses early in their deployment, Kolenda had his soldiers meet the elders of nearby towns. The squadron commander's outreach resulted in a large shura, in which more than a hundred local representatives accepted development initiatives and allowed troops to inspect projects. Shura participants spoke out against the insurgents who entered their villages—most of whom were associated with HiG—and reported their activities to American commanders. While operating from Forward Operating Base NARAY, Kolenda and his subordinates met these leaders outside either Combat Outpost (COP) LYBERT along the Pakistani border or COP KEATING, the squadron's outpost in Kamdesh District, Nuristan Province.

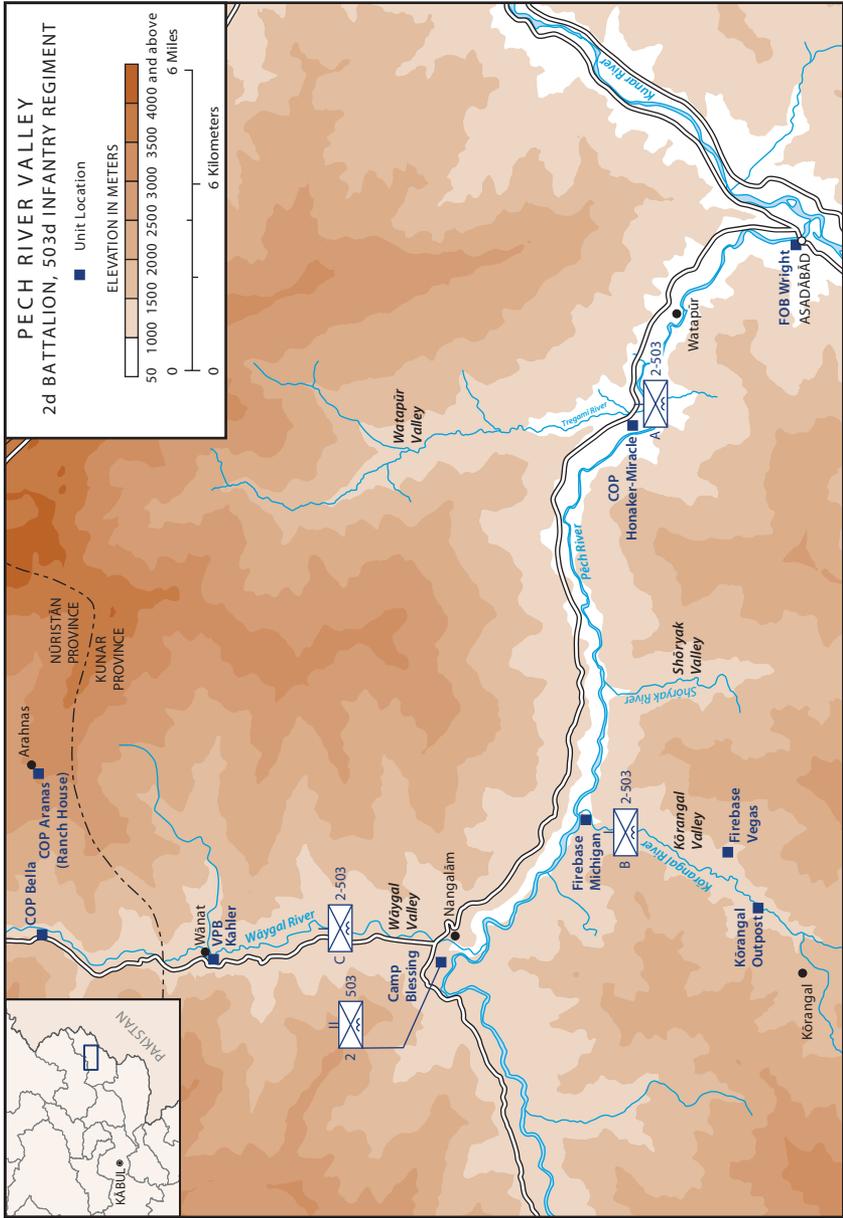
COP KEATING exemplified the difficulty the Army faced in establishing and maintaining isolated positions. Named for 1st Lt. Benjamin D. Keating, a troop executive officer from 3d Squadron, 71st Cavalry Regiment, who died traversing the only road to the outpost, COP KEATING was situated at the base of three mountains. It had been established in 2006 to support a PRT. Although Colonel Kolenda understood the outpost's importance,

he closed its ground supply route after one of his soldiers almost died driving along it. In doing so, he accepted that the soldiers at the outpost were more vulnerable because of their lack of ground support, but the likelihood of a major attack remained low so long as locals resisted HiG and kept the Americans informed of what they were doing. Kolenda's approach reflected the difficult choices required by the operational environment. The gamble seemingly paid off with a decline in insurgent activity during the beginning of the squadron's tour, although attacks increased in frequency and ferocity in early 2008.

To the west, Colonel Ostlund's 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry Regiment, faced a far more aggressive enemy from the beginning of its deployment (*Map 7*). Ostlund's soldiers were responsible for the valleys of the Pech River and its tributaries. The Waygal and Watapur Valleys extended to the north and the Korangal Valley ran to the south. Ostlund deployed a company into each of the three valleys, intending them to maintain a sustained presence and support the ANSF. The battalion commander recalled:

Each platoon went out on two patrols a day, every day, and the intent of nearly every patrol was a non-lethal engagement, checking on a project, meeting with the business people of a village, meeting with the farmers of a village, meeting with the teachers of a village, or meeting with political leaders. It was just shura after shura after shura after shura and with that constant interaction you get it [i.e., understand the population and the environment].

The enemy, meanwhile, regularly attacked the American positions, especially the two northernmost outposts in the battalion's operational area. COP BELLA, located along the Waygal River, and COP ARANAS (otherwise known as RANCH HOUSE), in the town of Arahnas, were roughly twenty kilometers from Ostlund's battalion headquarters at Camp Blessing. Half of an infantry platoon held each outpost and they could only be supplied by air. On 22 August 2007, insurgents led by Hazrat Omar, a HiG affiliate and native of Arahnas, attacked RANCH HOUSE. Situated on the side of a mountain, the outpost could not be reinforced quickly, nor could it be easily supported by indirect artillery fire. After Omar's forces got close enough to the outpost to render artillery fire ineffective, the Americans called in air support. The battle ended when A-10 Thunderbolt aircraft, whose 30-mm. cannon could fire closer to friendly troops than artillery, killed the remaining insurgents.



MAP 7

Because the enemy routinely carried off their dead, it was difficult to determine the number of insurgents killed in the RANCH HOUSE incident. Although the defenders withstood the assault, Ostlund believed the outpost too exposed and in October decided to close it.

In November, a foot patrol out of COP BELLA traveled to Arahnas to convey the central government's peaceful intent toward the region's villages. Insurgents ambushed the patrol, led by 1st Lt. Matthew C. Ferrara, during its return to the outpost. The mountainous terrain again made it difficult to support the soldiers with indirect fire. Mortar and howitzer crews could not fire accurately at their targets until Spec. Kyle J. White, knocked unconscious in the initial attack, awoke, found a radio, and relayed friendly locations back to the battalion. The battle ended after six hours with the enemy failing to overrun the patrol despite killing six soldiers, including Lieutenant Ferrara. Enemy casualties were unknown.

As much concern as Ostlund had for his northern outposts, his forces in the Korangal Valley faced the most determined enemy in the region. The battalion's Company B endured daily attacks almost from the beginning of its deployment, prompting Ostlund to try to clear the area south of the Pech River in October. Operation ROCK AVALANCHE was a sequence of search-and-attack missions along known infiltration routes. It proved a difficult fight, as every family compound the Americans faced could become a hardened fort that could be cleared only with artillery support. Regrettably, such methods resulted in civilian casualties, which naturally intensified hostility from local villagers. Ground forces soon became targets, as on 25 October when enemy fighters from the Korangal valley ambushed an American column and started carrying off a wounded soldier. Observing the abduction, Spec. Salvatore A. Giunta chased after the captors, killing one and wounding another. Giunta saved the soldier, averting a rescue attempt that would have shut down combat operations in the region. He later received the Medal of Honor for his actions.

Although Colonel Ostlund contended that ROCK AVALANCHE resulted in an abrupt drop in enemy attacks in the Korangal Valley, he could only accomplish so much given the resources available. His battalion comprised roughly 1,000 soldiers. Added to this were 400 marines serving as embedded trainers with 2,500 Afghan security forces. These 3,900 soldiers had to secure an area with a population of 525,000 Afghans. With only six security personnel—American and Afghan—per 1,000 residents, Ostlund's battalion could not achieve the troop density recommended by

American counterinsurgency doctrine. The colonel later contended that he “didn’t have enough forces to ‘clear, hold, and build’ in one of my valleys, much less the 10 or 15 that we were responsible for.”

*The Deteriorating Situation in RC South (2007–2008)*

General McNeill intended RC East to be ISAF’s main effort in 2007. However, he routinely had to send his theater’s tactical reserve, Colonel Mennes’ 1st Battalion, 508th Infantry Regiment, south to assist coalition forces. In March, the battalion flew to Helmand Province to support the British and then returned to the province a month later for an assault on Sangin. The operation went as planned, enabling the British to reestablish their control over the village, but the next effort would not be as easy.

After being battered by coalition forces in 2006, the Taliban adjusted its operational approach in RC South. It ceased gathering in areas that could be targeted by large-scale coalition operations such as MEDUSA. Instead, it built up its presence in northern Helmand Province while preparing for a more determined effort to capture the city of Kandahar. The Taliban began by seizing control of Musa Qal’ah in early 2007. From there it waged a guerrilla campaign against coalition and Afghan forces, increasingly using improvised explosive devices. In doing so, the Taliban kept the Karzai government off balance and presented itself as a viable alternative within remote districts. The Taliban did not design these efforts to defeat ISAF or the central government’s forces in open battle, but rather to increase its political and economic influence with local Afghans. The British responded by increasing their forces in the province to 7,700—double what they had in 2006. In April, they launched Operation ACHILLES to clear the Taliban from northern Helmand. Even with their additional forces and support from the Canadians and Mennes’ battalion, the fight proved difficult. The British did not recapture Musa Qal’ah until December, and did not have sufficient forces to prevent the Taliban from returning to the province the following spring.

To the east, in Kandahar Province, the Taliban started using the heavily vegetated Arghandab District as an operational base in late 2007. From there, its fighters could spread to adjoining districts, eventually making their way into the suburban areas around the city of Kandahar. The Canadians routinely cleared Zharey and Panjwa’i Districts but could not hold the terrain. Insurgents easily fled into Pakistan or disappeared among the local population. They also began to use the border between Helmand and Kandahar

to their advantage, recognizing that the coalition did not wage a comprehensive campaign across the provinces. As soon as coalition forces withdrew, the Taliban returned and reinstated a shadow government in the area, effectively marginalizing the central government's position in the region.

General McNeill's ability to influence events in RC South proved limited, illustrating the inherent difficulties in the ISAF coalition. General Rodriguez had more tools to shape the battlefield as the American OEF commander in RC East. In addition to his combat brigades, he could issue orders to aviation, military police, engineers, military intelligence, and logistics brigades. More important was Rodriguez's ability to direct Special Forces. Even though ISAF limited his area of responsibility to RC East, Rodriguez oversaw twenty-five Special Forces teams, seventeen of which operated in RC South. In comparison, McNeill could only set priorities and deploy his theater reserve. With each national contingent maintaining the right to appeal any operational mission to its home government, McNeill had difficulty organizing a concerted effort against the Taliban forces. He was limited further by the various national caveats that determined what each force contingent was authorized to do. This included the various PRTs, which reported to the nation that had responsibility for their operational area. McNeill could not coordinate these efforts, nor could he link them to development projects because ISAF did not control any engineer units. Without them, McNeill could not direct reconstruction, roadbuilding, or improvised explosive device clearance. The overall coalition effort—including American operations—could not gain momentum so long as its component elements pursued independent objectives.

*Operation PAMIR HAMKARI (October 2007–March 2008)*

As the Taliban expanded its presence in RC South, CJTF-82's focus remained in the southern parts of RC East. Although it had made progress during OQAB HAMKARI—especially in Khost Province where insurgent activity declined significantly—eastern Paktika and western Ghazni Provinces remained a concern. Less than a month after Operation MAIWAND concluded, Taliban fighters captured twenty-three South Korean missionaries traveling near Ghazni. The Korean government chose to negotiate directly with the Taliban, securing the hostages' release in exchange for Seoul's promise to withdraw its remaining 200 soldiers by the end of the year. Even though American special operators managed to dismantle the kidnappers' network within six weeks, the insurgents

had shown that they could force coalition members to withdraw their forces from Afghanistan.

General McNeill found the incident reflective of an overall decline in the security of the region and confirmed his desire for a more aggressive operational approach to the Taliban. The ISAF commander was displeased particularly with linking operations to Afghan Development Zones. Determining that, “We’re not where we need to be in security for those things to have a fair chance to succeed,” McNeill decided by the summer of 2007 to largely abandon the zones. He instead sought to target insurgent strongholds, such as Haqqani infiltration into the Tora Bora cave complexes in southern Nangarhar Province. McNeill recalled Mennes’ battalion from RC South in August and sent it to Nangarhar. It would remain there until November, at which point it returned to RC South.

The shift away from development zones required CJTF-82 to craft a new campaign plan. Intelligence showed that the insurgents were adapting to the presence of two American combat brigades in RC East and improving cooperation between various local groups. The insurgents waged a two-pronged campaign, targeting ANSF border units to draw American forces away from interior districts and infiltrating into the provinces surrounding Kabul to wage an intimidation campaign against Afghan citizens and to conduct terror attacks against the government.

In response to General McNeill’s shift away from development zones and the increase in insurgent activity, General Rodriguez’s CJTF-82 planners developed a new campaign, Operation PAMIR HAMKARI (Mountain Teamwork). It commenced in October and ran through March 2008. Rodriguez sought to “concentrate CJTF-82’s finite resources into prioritized districts to reinforce success from Operation OQAB HAMKARI and adjust to changes in the operational environment.” American units would retain the standard lines of operation—security, governance, and development—but shift away from districts within the development zones and instead focus on those containing commercial centers and critical lines of communications.

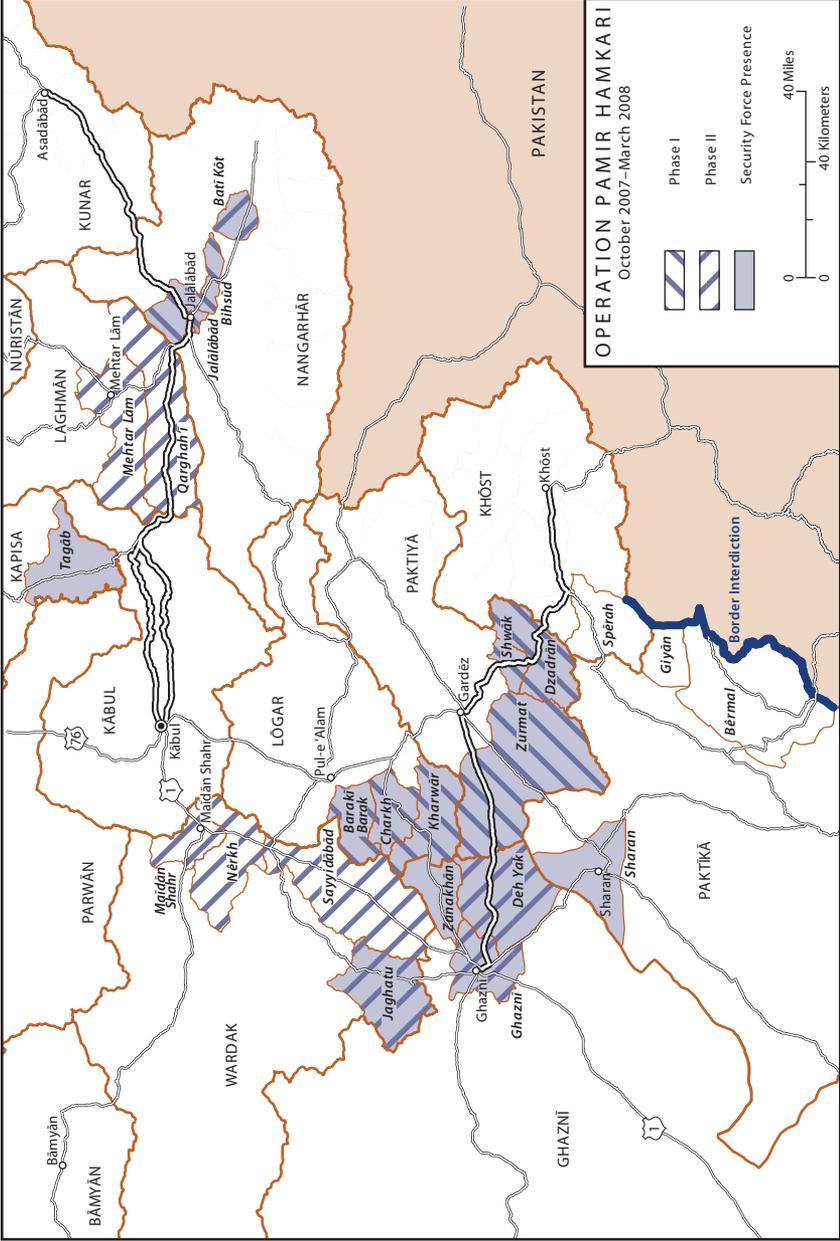
PAMIR HAMKARI consisted of two phases. (*See Map 8.*) During the first phase, Task Force FURY sent forces into Sperah District in Khost Province as the main effort while continuing border interdiction in Paktika. Additional maneuver units secured districts in Paktiya and Logar Provinces, creating a security zone around the commercial center of Gardez. CJTF-82 also targeted the area around Jalalabad in Nangarhar Province, another key commercial

center. These efforts set the stage for the second phase, scheduled to begin in December, when American forces moved into districts in Ghazni, Wardak, and Laghman Provinces. American planners hoped to take advantage of the anticipated winter lull in insurgent activity and increase the Afghan and ISAF security presence enough that the districts would prove hostile to insurgents upon their return in the spring.

Although PAMIR HAMKARI reflected a change for CJTF-82 at the operational level, American activities at the tactical level remained largely the same. Maneuver forces still separated the enemy from the local population, established or maintained the central government's presence in an area, and improved local security and economic opportunity. In one example, Lt. Col. Michael R. Fenzel's 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry Regiment—from Task Force BAYONET—worked to influence populations in Paktika's eastern districts. Initially, his units conducted air assaults against suspected enemy positions, cleared them, captured anticoalition forces, and flew back to their base. When that tactic proved ineffective, they began conducting sweeps. Although longer than raids, the sweeps moved in a set direction and did not allow troops to stay in any one location long enough to establish relationships with local communities. Fenzel again adjusted his approach by concentrating his battalion in ten districts, placing companies next to Haqqani-controlled villages for as long as it took the soldiers to earn hospitality status under Pashtun codes of honor. Once attained, Fenzel had the battalion's engineers build bases so the ANSF could “hold” locations while his maneuver units moved to new communities. Fenzel's efforts reflected the campaign's larger goal of developing ANSF capabilities. Unless the Afghans could provide for their own security and build trust among the local population, any progress made during the American operation would prove unsustainable. Considering the majority of the operation took place, by design, during a period of decreased insurgent activity, CJTF-82 could not evaluate its success until the campaign season began anew in 2008.

#### *CJTF-101 in Afghanistan (March–June 2008)*

In addition to extending the 3d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division's deployment in 2006 and committing two combat brigades to Afghanistan, Secretary Gates had extended the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division's tour in Afghanistan to fifteen months. Thus the unit began preparations for its relief in March 2008, just as insurgent activity began to



MAP 8

increase in the spring. Its replacement, Col. John P. “Pete” Johnson’s 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Task Force CURRAHEE), replaced the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division, in southern RC East. Lt. Col. Anthony G. DeMartino’s 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, moved into Ghazni. The 2d Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, commanded by Lt. Col. John C. Allred, assumed control of eastern Paktika Province. Lt. Col. Thomas W. O’Steen’s 1st Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, took over Paktiya Province and Lt. Col. David J. Ell’s 4th Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, operated in Khost Province. The brigade’s operational area also contained an enlarged Polish battle group, which controlled eastern Ghazni and western Paktika Provinces. Lt. Col. Anthony K. “Kirk” Whitson’s 801st Support Battalion and Lt. Col. Charles C. Bradley’s Special Troops Battalion, 101st Division, supported the brigade. Colonel Johnson also received help from Lt. Col. Daniel J. Fuhr’s 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, Illinois Army National Guard, which was serving with Task Force PHOENIX.

In April, Maj. Gen. Jeffrey J. Schloesser’s 101st Airborne Division took over for General Rodriguez’s 82d Airborne Division. Schloesser designated his command CJTF-101. Joining CJTF-101 were Col. James M. Richardson’s Combat Aviation Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Task Force DESTINY); Col. Jeffrey P. Kelley’s headquarters from the 101st Sustainment Brigade, and Lt. Col. David L. Dellinger’s Special Troops Battalion, 101st Airborne Division. Schloesser’s command also managed the arrival of the 2,500-strong 24th MEU, commanded by Marine Col. Peter Petronzo, which deployed to RC South in early March for service with the British.

The second wave of force rotations started in June, with Col. John M. Spiszer’s 3d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division (Task Force DUKE), replacing the 173d Airborne Brigade Combat Team in northern RC East. Spiszer placed Lt. Col. Brett Jenkinson’s 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, and Lt. Col. James C. Markert’s 6th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, in Nuristan and Kunar Provinces. Lt. Col. Salvatore J. Petrovia’s 1st Battalion, 6th Field Artillery Regiment, took up position in Laghman Province and Lt. Col. Daniel S. Hurlbut’s 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry Regiment, went to RC South. Lt. Col. Patrick Daniel’s Special Troops Battalion, 3d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, and Lt. Col. Bradley A. White’s 201st Support Battalion filled out the brigade. Colonel Spiszer made up for sending a maneuver battalion to RC South with

the addition of Lt. Col. Stephen M. Radulski's 3d Battalion, 103d Armored Regiment, from the Pennsylvania Army National Guard. Finally, General Schloesser gained a third maneuver force when Col. Scott A. Spellmon's 1st Combat Support Brigade (Maneuver Enhancement)—a new unit activated at Fort Polk, Louisiana, on 16 September 2007—replaced Task Force CINCINNATUS. Unfortunately, Spellmon brought only two of his battalions to Afghanistan; the other two were sent to Iraq.

Although the security situation in RC South continued to decline, General Schloesser kept his attention on RC East. Soon after his arrival in April 2008, the 101st Airborne Division commander started withdrawing units from the region's more isolated posts. He found the process painfully slow because he had to negotiate every closure with an Afghan government that wanted the United States to cover more, not less, territory. Despite Afghan concerns, with insurgents increasingly threatening the more isolated American outposts, Schloesser wanted units positioned so that they could reinforce each other.

Schloesser's revised campaign plan also emphasized developing the ANSF over holding territory or maintaining freedom of movement. Although previous American operational approaches included building up Afghan capabilities, Schloesser put the ANSF at the center of CJTF-101's plans. He expanded the definition of combat operations to include those conducted with the ANSF and in conjunction with Pakistani forces that targeted enemy support areas and lines of communications. In response to Schloesser's focus, CJTF-101 planners designed a three-phase campaign plan, forging the emphasis on named operations used in previous rotations. The first phase—beginning with the transfer of authority from the 82d Airborne Division and running into the fall—sought to exploit CJTF-82's successes with multiple partnering operations. Planners considered any efforts not specifically designed to improve ANSF capabilities as shaping operations. The campaign's second phase, to begin in the fall, would focus on building governance at the district and provincial levels. The intent was to take advantage of security gains made over the summer to improve governance in targeted districts. If things went well, the selected districts could transfer to ANSF control over the winter, allowing coalition units to shift to phase three by moving to adjacent districts and beginning anew.

The effort would be the culmination of years of work by American and ISAF troops to develop ANSF capabilities. Even so, at its core, the campaign suffered from the same deficiencies

that plagued previous American efforts: lack of resources. Without the ability to provide security throughout the regional command, insurgents could simply move to another district and begin sowing instability. The Americans tried to expand their coverage by continuing to convert auxiliary troops into infantry units, but this was only a stopgap solution. As one CJTF-101 staff member said, “In terms of executing the full spectrum operations mission, it was barely sufficient in some places and completely insufficient in others. The fact that a company out of the division special troops battalion was being employed as foot soldiers in lieu of infantry was an indicator of that.”

### *McKiernan Assumes ISAF Command*

In late spring 2008, General McNeill departed as ISAF commander. His replacement, General David D. McKiernan, took command on 3 June. McKiernan had commanded American land forces during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, but had yet to serve in Afghanistan. Despite this, he had developed an appreciation for the situation in Kabul and RC East during his time as commander of U.S. Army, Europe. He had a more limited understanding of the situation in the other regional commands, and upon taking command of ISAF he initiated a comprehensive examination of the theater. He quickly discovered that, “in reality, the regional campaigns were all operating to different drumbeats, and a lot of those dictated by the drum being played back in national capitals.” This was particularly apparent in RC South, where “there were really four different campaigns going on.” The situation in RC East was also troubling. As the American national command element under OEF, CJTF-101 had responsibility for all American forces in theater. It provided policy and strategic recommendations to higher headquarters, assigned American forces to subordinate operations, and served as the final authority on the allocation of resources. Considering CJTF-101 also had operational duties as the headquarters for RC East, McKiernan thought it was too much responsibility for one headquarters.

One of McKiernan’s first initiatives was to align the American and ISAF command chains. He wanted to bring together the various national campaigns under a single commander who could provide a unified strategic vision. The effort came to fruition in October with the establishment of a new headquarters, United States Forces–Afghanistan (USFOR-A). The organization would serve as a coordinating headquarters instead of as an operational

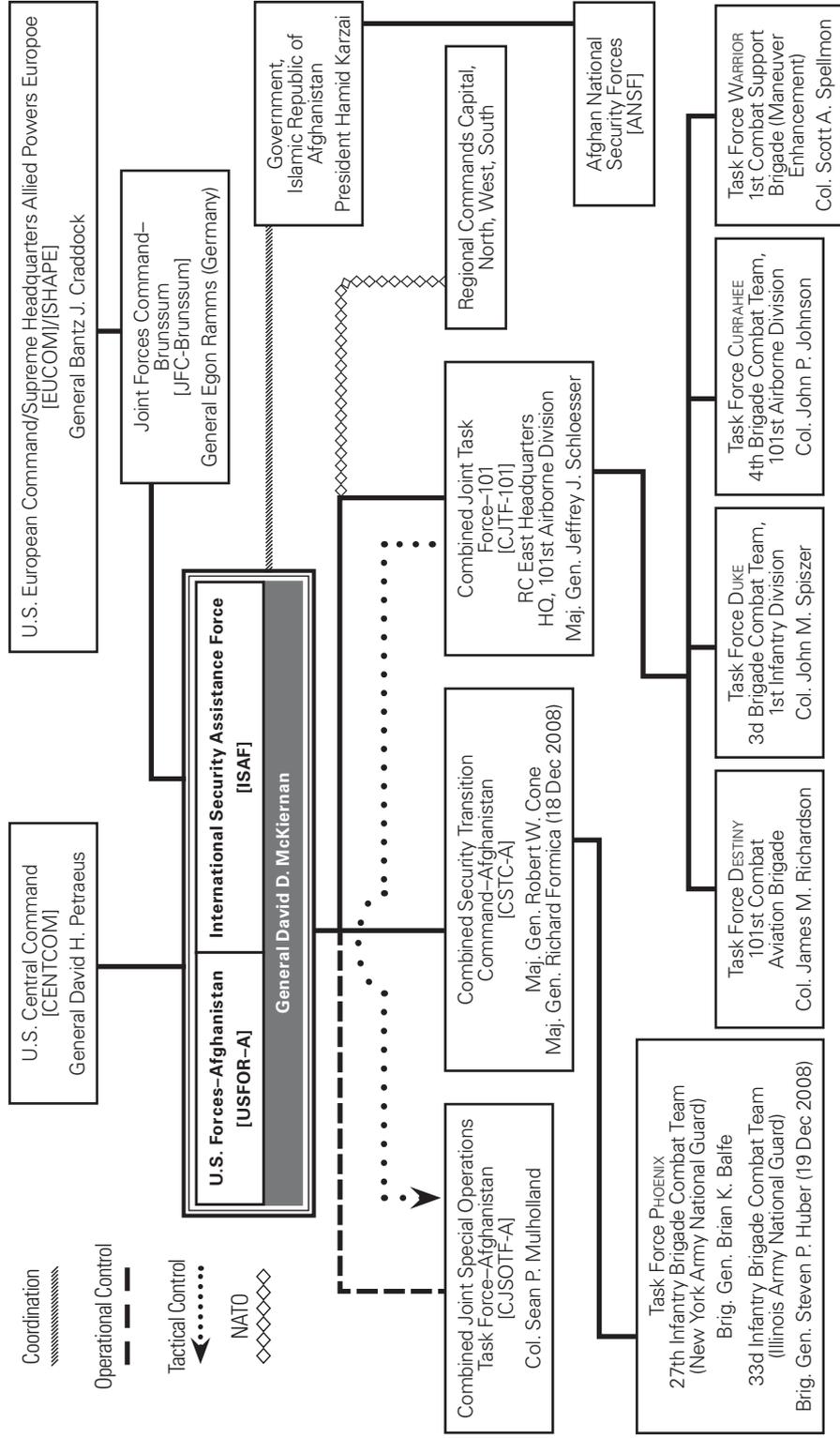
command. General McKiernan would provide strategic guidance and intended USFOR-A to “coordinate the funding, resourcing, and activities on the U.S. side to meet and support that one intent, that one command and one strategy.” As commander of both ISAF and USFOR-A, McKiernan would control all American forces in theater, except for special operators who targeted high-level threats to the United States and the internment personnel who worked for them (*Chart 3*).

The new headquarters enabled U.S. Central Command to oversee all American operations in Afghanistan for the first time since CFC-A disbanded in January 2007. As such, it presented the combatant command with an opportunity to influence the United States’ strategic objectives. However, its goals did not differ substantially from those given to General Eikenberry in 2005. U.S. Central Command directed McKiernan to seek an Afghanistan that was “moderate and stable, representative of its populace, capable of self-governance, and willing to contribute to a continuing partnership in the global war on terrorism.” The one significant change was the substitution of “stable” for “democratic” with regard to the Afghan government.

McKiernan spent the last half of 2008 working to establish his new headquarters and trying to align the various American and ISAF efforts. Although McNeill had focused on RC East in early 2008, McKiernan was more concerned with the situation in RC South. Ten days after he took command, insurgents broke into Sarposa Prison in western Kandahar city and released all of its inmates, many of whom were mid-level Taliban operators. The audacious attack was a propaganda coup for the Taliban, embarrassing the Karzai government and ISAF and signaling the Taliban’s increasing power in the districts surrounding the city.

To counter the Taliban’s advances in RC South, McKiernan wanted ISAF to push into the more remote districts, where 80 percent of Afghans lived. Such a campaign would require NATO members to commit additional forces. However, this was unlikely. In fact, Canada conditioned its continued involvement in Afghanistan on the addition of a non-Canadian combat element to Kandahar Province. The United States had already dispatched Lt. Col. Richard D. Hall’s 2d Battalion, 7th Marines (Reinforced), to Helmand Province to serve as police trainers and mentors and the 24th MEU to provide additional security. Even so, McKiernan could not risk either the provincial capital falling to the Taliban or the Canadian forces withdrawing from the province. With no other

Chart 3—International Coalition’s Organizational Structure, December 2008



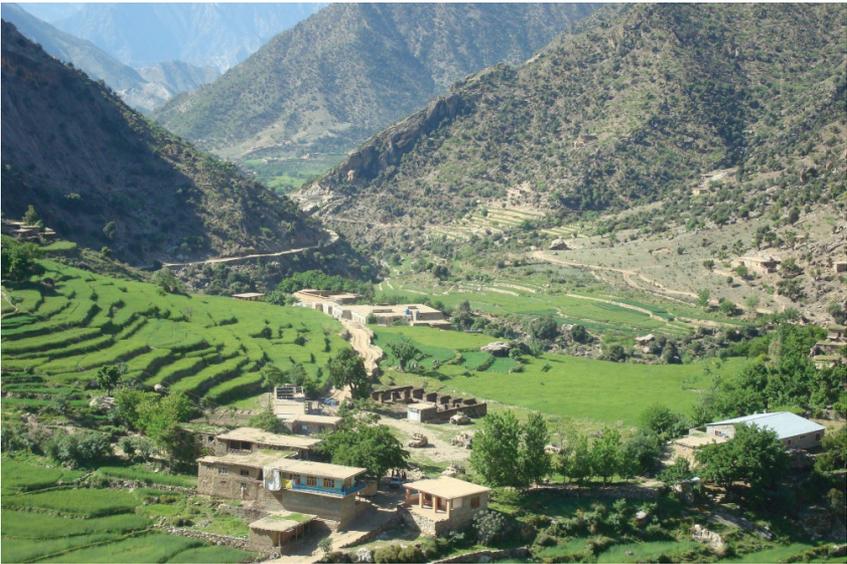
NATO member offering a contribution, McKiernan sent the 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry Regiment, from Task Force DUKE to support the Canadians.

McKiernan quickly saw that unifying the command chains would be only a partial solution to the problems afflicting the ISAF and American campaigns. He understood that, “whatever the strategy had been, was, and might be in the future, whatever azimuth changes, it was an under-resourced strategy.” What he needed were more troops to shore up coalition efforts and gain momentum against the insurgency. To that end, within two weeks of assuming command of ISAF he sent a request to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for a Marine expeditionary brigade, a Stryker brigade, a second combat aviation brigade, another brigade for CSTC-A, a division headquarters for RC South, and more route clearance companies: 30,000 troops in all. A decline in troop commitments in Iraq enabled the Bush administration to approve most of these requests, but the additional forces would not start arriving until 2009. For the remainder of 2008, American forces in Afghanistan would have to make the most of what resources they had.

*The Constraints of a Limited Campaign (June 2008–January 2009)*

A major attack against American forces in Kunar Province over the summer illustrated the continuing threat to American forces. As its tour drew to a close, Colonel Ostlund’s 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry Regiment, worked to consolidate its positions in the valleys adjacent to the Pech River. Having already closed COP RANCH HOUSE, Ostlund’s soldiers sought to also close COP BELLA in the Waygal Valley. Negotiations with locals to establish an outpost in Wanat delayed these efforts. The position in Wanat was closer to the battalion’s headquarters at Camp Blessing and could be reinforced by road—unlike either BELLA or RANCH HOUSE. By the summer of 2008, Ostlund’s battalion was ready to execute the move as part of its preparations to turn over the battlespace to Colonel Spiszer’s incoming 3d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division.

The move from COP BELLA to Wanat began on 8 July. Helicopters airlifted supplies out of BELLA to the new outpost while members of Ostlund’s Company C moved to Wanat via ground convoy. The new position—initially named Vehicle Patrol Base KAHLER for one of the unit’s platoon sergeants killed earlier in the deployment—consisted of a central compound in the village and a preliminary observation post roughly 100 meters to the east. Despite delays getting heavy equipment to the site, the soldiers

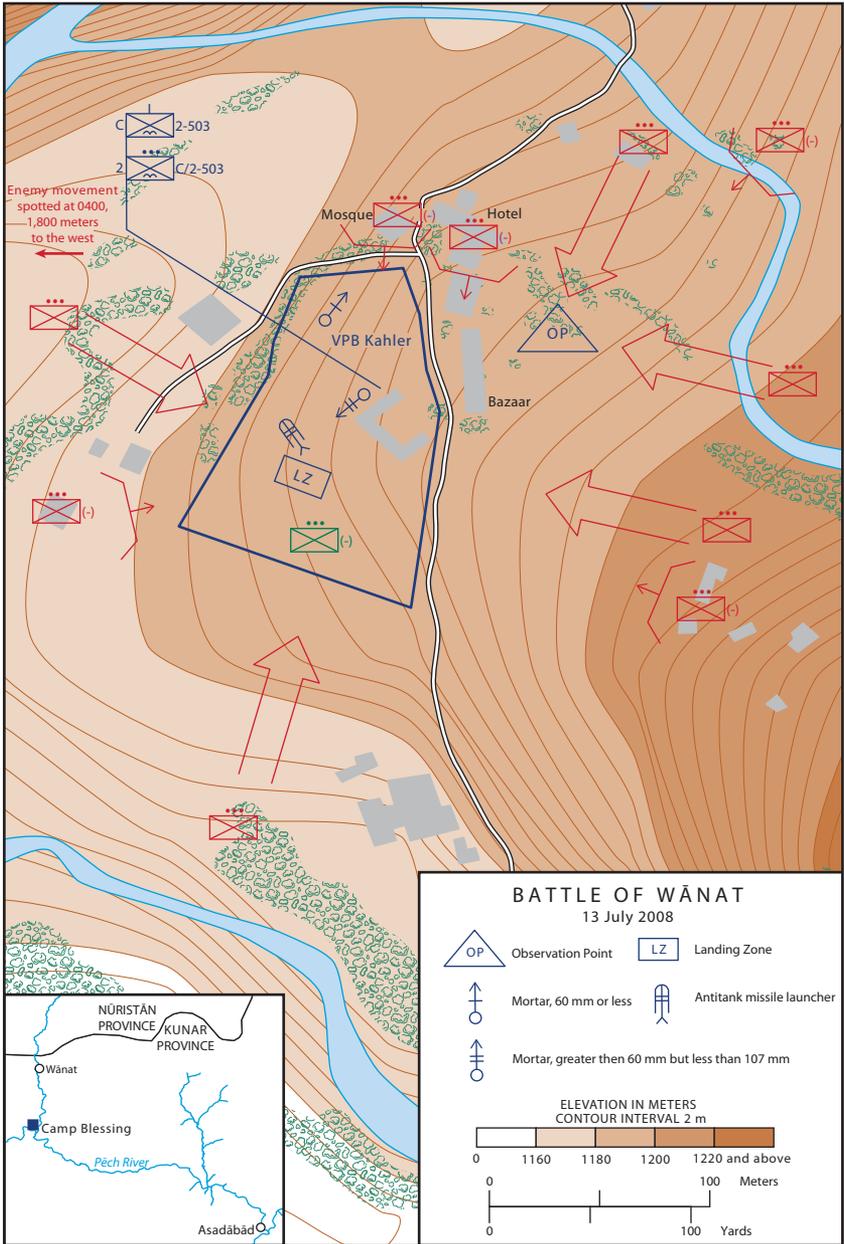


*Looking southward over Wanat village* (U.S. Army Center of Military History)

established a basic perimeter and defensive positions within a few days. Based upon experience gained over the previous year, the soldiers did not expect an attack as insurgents generally engaged in an extended surveillance period of any new coalition position. In this instance, however, circumstances within the insurgent forces broke with precedent.

As the Americans planned to close the outpost at BELLA, they did not realize that insurgents had been organizing a major attack on the position. Several hundred fighters had gathered in the area when the paratroopers began moving to Wanat. Instead of abandoning the operation, the insurgents converged on the new American position, launching a coordinated assault with between 120 and 300 fighters on 13 July. The initial volley of rocket-propelled grenades disabled the base's heavy weapons systems, forcing the defenders to hold their ground with small arms and squad automatic weapons before air support helped drive off the attackers. Nine Americans were killed and twenty-four were wounded defending the outpost (*Map 9*).

From a campaign perspective, the Battle of Wanat served as a harsh validation of General Schloesser's desire to consolidate American positions. Schloesser and Colonel Ostlund intended the position in Wanat, which could be supported by ground, to replace



MAP 9

remote outposts that could only receive support by air. However, after subsequent investigations showed several members of the local population, including the district governor and police chief, had been complicit in the attack, the CJTF-101 commander determined that maintaining forces in the Waygal Valley did not justify the risks.

An attack on another American base in August supported the argument to locate American forces in stronger positions. On 18 and 19 August, multiple suicide bombers hired by the Haqqani Network attempted to breach the fully established defenses of Forward Operating Base SALERNO in Khost Province. Neither attack proved successful, though the casualties included several Afghan civilians who had queued up for work outside one of the base's gates. One suicide blast on 19 August injured American and Afghan Special Forces personnel, but it did not prevent them from repulsing the attack that followed.

The attacks in Kunar and Khost Provinces proved atypical for most American units in RC East. During the latter half of 2008, they worked to implement General Schloesser's initiative to increase partnering operations and improve ANSF capabilities. In Paktika Province, Colonel Allred's 2d Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, supported a program started in 2006 to use American law enforcement professionals as advisers for Afghan police units. Initially deployed to help Afghans counter improvised explosive devices, the advisers quickly became mentors to Afghan police, teaching them evidence-based operations and other forensic techniques. In one instance, the program helped provincial leaders apprehend a border police commander who had been selling the equipment he was supposed to issue to his officers.

In neighboring Paktiya Province, the 1st Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, established a more robust American presence than seen in previous American rotations. Based out of Forward Operating Bases GARDEZ and WILDERNESS and COPs ZURMAT and HERRERA, Colonel O'Steen's soldiers pursued a broad mission. Its key responsibility was to secure the road leading to the Khost-Gardez Pass, one of the country's most important thoroughfares and a frequent target of the Haqqani Network. Working with U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Brett D. Sharp, the Gardez PRT commander, O'Steen built roadside rest stops that grew into centers of commerce. Like in Paktika, these small efforts could be highlighted as examples of successful American efforts, but it was difficult to connect them in a way that could build momentum throughout the regional command.

One of the main challenges for American forces was the result of seemingly positive developments across the border in Pakistan. Encouraged by General McKiernan, the Pakistani army undertook a new effort to stabilize the North-West Frontier Province. Pakistani ground troops increased their activities and the Americans used unmanned aerial vehicles to strike at key insurgent positions in the area. As a result, many enemy fighters sought refuge in Afghanistan. They took advantage of an unusually mild winter in late 2008 to continue attacking the Americans. Colonel Markert's 6th Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, absorbed much of this increased activity. Operating along the Pakistan border in Nuristan and Kunar Provinces, Markert coordinated with Pakistan's Frontier Corps as it cleared insurgents from the local administrative districts, known as tribal agencies, along the border in November. His soldiers also worked to secure the squadron's line of communications through Ghaziabad District in northern Kunar Province. Even after all of these efforts, carried out with fewer soldiers than his predecessor but the same number of bases to occupy, Markert generally had to pursue a defensive campaign in the province.

To the west of Markert's unit, Colonel Jenkinson's 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, screened Task Force DUKE's northern flank. While still interdicting routes used by HiG and its affiliates, the battalion concentrated on protecting friendly lines of communications. In evaluating his deployment, Jenkinson stated that, "Logistics defined the realm of the possible for me." Poor weather in the mountain valleys could prevent helicopters from performing medical evacuation, forcing Jenkinson to reduce his patrols or curtail their movements to within foot-evacuation distance. In the summer, high heat kept roads dry but reduced the loads aircraft could carry, limiting resupply capabilities. When it rained, the battalion lost vehicles off cliffs and soldiers to injuries suffered trying to recover them. The arrival of newer Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles in place of High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles added new challenges, as "a 50-ton vehicle or a 30-ton vehicle is not good for rock crawling on the side of a mountain." In some cases, Jenkinson resorted to contracting locals using donkey trains to supply some of his soldiers. However, rains could make observation posts in the Korangal Valley so inaccessible that even these rudimentary approaches proved impossible. Thus, with logistics limiting how his unit could operate, Jenkinson struggled to generate the type of momentum called for by General Schloesser's campaign plan.



*Soldiers patrolling in Kunar Province.* (U.S. Army Center of Military History)

Colonel Jenkinson's logistical difficulties were part of the larger reality facing American forces throughout Afghanistan, namely that they were reaching the limits of what they could achieve with the resources available. By the end of 2008, the United States had 30,000 troops in Afghanistan, compared to less than 20,000 in mid-2005. Even with these additional forces, countering the insurgency proved exceedingly difficult. The Taliban, the Haqqani Network, and even HiG were exceptionally resilient, adapting to each new coalition initiative while steadily increasing their attacks against Afghan and ISAF personnel. Coalition casualties had increased since the Taliban launched their reinvigorated insurgency in 2006. In 2007, American forces sustained 771 battle casualties, including 78 killed in action. American casualties dropped to 663 in 2008, but the number killed in action rose to 97. Both years represented a dramatic increase from 2006, during which the United States suffered 373 total casualties and 62 killed in action. A comparison to the totals from 2001 to 2005—555 casualties and 97 killed in action—is even more alarming. This trend showed no sign of abating, as more small-arms and improvised explosive device attacks occurred in Afghanistan than in Iraq by late 2008. Even after the United States and NATO increased the resources committed to Afghanistan, the security situation continued to decline.

General McKiernan's progress in reconciling the ISAF and OEF command chains and achieving unity of effort within and between the regional commands were positive steps, yet they did not make up for the fact that neither the coalition nor the Afghan government had sufficient boots on the ground to break the insurgency. Colonel Johnson's 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, achieved some success in RC East's southern provinces, but McKiernan's decision to send the 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry Regiment, from northern RC East to support the Canadians in Kandahar Province continued the trend of shifting resources to shore up a particular region. The move reduced the 3d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division's combat power in northern RC East even as the enemy ramped up their attacks. Colonel Spitzer had little recourse but to make do in an under-resourced area of operations in the secondary effort of the secondary theater of the Global War on Terrorism.

With American ground forces partnering with the Afghans to implement General Schloesser's multiphase campaign plan, General McKiernan pushed Washington for additional resources. In the fall of 2008, President Bush approved an additional brigade for RC East and some additional forces for RC South, but the DoD continued to base troop availability on circumstances in Iraq. McKiernan seemingly received support from Lt. Gen. Douglas E. Lute's National Security Council study that recommended pursuing counterinsurgency over counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan. However, such a modification—if it was resourced fully—would entail a significant expansion of the American war effort. With Bush approaching the end of his time in office, he did not want to commit the incoming president, Barack H. Obama, to a new strategy. As a consequence, American forces in Afghanistan continued as they had been doing, and waited to see what changes, if any, the new administration would bring.

### *Analysis*

In 2005, with a new elected Afghan government established under President Hamid Karzai and al-Qaeda reduced to a fraction of its former fighting strength, OEF appeared on track to accomplish its strategic objectives. However, the reconstitution of the Taliban across the border in Pakistan threatened to undermine the American-led coalition's achievements. As the Taliban waged a growing insurgency in Afghanistan—alongside allied groups such

as the Haqqani Network and HiG—the Karzai government and coalition forces were slow to recognize and adapt to the emerging threat. Between 2005 and 2008, American and international efforts in Afghanistan progressed in a disjointed manner. This lack of cohesion, combined with the difficulties of establishing a representative government in a country that did not possess the civil and cultural foundations for a Western-style national administration, continually plagued coalition efforts. As it faced an enemy that only needed to perpetuate instability and erode public support for the new government to achieve success, the coalition struggled to maintain the operational initiative even with the help of additional resources.

The complex nature of the international coalition increased the challenge of confronting these resurgent threats. The United States remained the largest contributor to the international effort in Afghanistan, with just under 20,000 troops in 2005. With its military resources increasingly engaged in Iraq, however, the Bush administration restricted OEF to an economy-of-force effort and supported transferring responsibility for Afghan security and development to NATO. Although the alliance slowly expanded its authority in Afghanistan after its assumption of the ISAF mission in 2003, fundamental differences between member states over their commitments and operating environments prevented the coalition from developing a cohesive operational approach. The NATO deployments to RC South in 2006—in which Canadian, British, Dutch, and Romanian units arrived at different times, with varied capabilities, and pursuing their own objectives within their respective operational areas—epitomized these challenges.

The coalition's byzantine command structure was also a source of friction. The expansion of ISAF in 2005 and 2006 and the inactivation of CFC-A in early 2007 resulted in the United States employing a bifurcated command structure split between combatant commands. U.S. European Command was nested within NATO and had responsibility for the ISAF mission that included national contingents from member states. The American CJTF operated within this command structure as the RC East Headquarters and the CJTF commander served as the ISAF deputy commander for operations. ISAF oversaw counterinsurgency and nation-building operations, with the latter carried out primarily by PRTs. Meanwhile, from January 2007 through October 2008, U.S. Central Command was responsible for American forces engaged in counterterrorist operations, such as certain Special Forces

units, and the training mission for the ANSF. Army leaders in Afghanistan managed to operate within this complicated command structure thanks to effective interpersonal relationships. Although functional, it did not adhere to the principle of unity of command and created the potential for discord between the command chains. How the system would have worked during a crisis is unknown, but the creation of USFOR-A in October 2008—which brought some clarity to the American and coalition command chains—showed that commanders found the existing structure problematic.

In addition to the difficulties American forces had aligning their initiatives with various coalition efforts, the Army continually ran up against resource limitations even as its mission expanded and the insurgency grew in strength. Over the course of 2006, General Freakley—the CJTF-76 commander—sought to extend the American operational perimeter by sending his units into remote areas of RC East. The intent was to create stable zones around the major Afghan population centers, enabling reconstruction projects and economic development to progress without disruption from insurgents. Doing so meant creating more forward operating bases and COPs. Without additional soldiers to hold these positions, however, their commanders had to reduce their garrisons and diminish their combat power, which left them more vulnerable to attacks. Yet, if the Americans did not push into the less accessible areas and instead concentrated their forces in more easily defensible positions, they would have ceded vast portions of the nation to enemy groups, providing them freedom of movement and the ability to target the Afghan government, the coalition, and the Afghan population with impunity. As with the British in Helmand Province, the U.S. Army had to strike a balance between providing sufficient local security to achieve its strategic objectives without overextending its forces. The decision in early 2007 to maintain two American infantry brigades in Afghanistan did not alter this balancing act. So long as the insurgent groups maintained secure bases in Pakistan, they could continue to oppose the coalition and the Karzai government, fostering instability across Afghanistan.

The slow development of the ANSF exacerbated this problem by requiring American and coalition troops to provide local security rather than seeking out and engaging the enemy. The effort to build an Afghan army proved arduous and slow given the country's security needs. Afghanistan had no conventional military between the fall of the communist government in 1992 and the beginning of the American training effort in 2002. During the

civil wars that ravaged the country between 1992 and 1996, and even during the years of Taliban control, Afghanistan experienced fighting between armed groups loyal to warlords or competing religious, ethnic, and tribal factions. Many of these militias dated back to the Soviet-Afghan War nearly a generation before. Building a functional Afghan army loyal to a central government required a fundamental change to Afghan concepts of national identity and civic duty. Moreover, not only was the Afghan population ethnically and linguistically divided, but the Afghan government lacked functioning civil service and bureaucratic structures, and Afghan society as a whole did not maintain the necessary educational levels to support a Western-style military. Consequently, widespread illiteracy, corruption, and sectarianism undermined American training efforts. These problems continued after the U.S. Army took over the police training mission in 2006, and the lack of additional personnel commensurate with the expanded mission compounded them. Creating capable and self-sufficient Afghan security forces would require many years and considerable support, with no certainty of success. Although theoretically possible, neither the United States nor NATO was willing to make such an open-ended commitment.



*Honoring two soldiers killed by an improvised explosive device*  
(U.S. Army Center of Military History)

In the absence of ANSF units in sufficient numbers and capabilities to secure the population, American and NATO forces filled the vacuum but struggled to maintain momentum on the ground as their units continually rotated in and out of Afghanistan. Between mid-2005 and the end of 2008, the U.S. Army in Afghanistan utilized three divisional headquarters, the Southern European Task Force, five maneuver brigades, the 1st Combat Support Brigade (Maneuver Enhancement), the brigade-sized Task Force CINCINNATUS, and myriad support units at various times. The ANSF training element averaged roughly a brigade, and American Marine, Air Force, and Naval units and personnel rounded out American forces. Beginning with just under 20,000 troops in 2005, the American presence in Afghanistan rose to roughly 30,000 by the end of 2008. Even so, the rotational nature of Army deployments meant that each year brought new commanders and new units, creating a cyclical nature to the Army's operations. Arriving units and personnel spent months gaining situational awareness of their operational areas, months executing their campaigns, and then months preparing for redeployment to their home stations. The turnover from General Eikenberry to General McNeill to General McKiernan added another layer of discontinuity, making it difficult to achieve operational consistency. NATO deployments further compounded the problem. Taken together, the continual rotations contributed to the disjointed nature of the war.

In spite of these strategic and operational challenges, soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines worked to accomplish their given tasks to the best of their abilities. The vast majority served as professionals in a challenging environment and under difficult circumstances. Such is the nature of nation building and counterinsurgency. Whether the United States, NATO, and the Afghan government succeeded against the insurgents would fall to the incoming American president and his administration. In the meantime, soldiers on the ground carried on as they had in a conflict that looked no closer to ending after seven long years of fighting.

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

ANA	Afghan National Army
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
CFC-A	Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan
CJSOTF-A	Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force– Afghanistan
CJTF	Combined Joint Task Force
COP	Combat Outpost
CSTC-A	Combined Security Transition Command– Afghanistan
DoD	Department of Defense
HiG	Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MEU	Marine Expeditionary Unit
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OEF	Operation ENDURING FREEDOM
OIF	Operation IRAQI FREEDOM
OMC-A	Office of Military Cooperation–Afghanistan
OSC-A	Office of Security Cooperation–Afghanistan
PPCLI	Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry
PRT	provincial reconstruction team
RC	Regional Command
RCR	Royal Canadian Regiment
SEAL	Sea, Air, and Land
SOF	Special Operations Forces
USFOR-A	United States Forces–Afghanistan

## Unit Reference Guide

### **Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan (CFC-A); disbanded February 2007**

Lt. Gen. David W. Barno (October 2003–May 2005)

Lt. Gen. Karl W. Eikenberry (May 2005–February 2007)

### **Combined Joint Task Force–76 (CJTF-76)**

*Southern European Task Force (SETAF) (May 2005–  
February 2006)*

- 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division (Task Force DEVIL)
- 173d Airborne Brigade (Task Force BAYONET)
- 12th Combat Aviation Brigade (Task Force GRIFFIN)

*10th Mountain Division (February 2006–February 2007)*

- 3d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division (Task Force SPARTAN)
- Headquarters, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division
- Combat Aviation Brigade, 10th Mountain Division (Task Force FALCON)
- 10th Sustainment Brigade (Task Force MULESKINNER)

### **Combined Joint Task Force–82 (CJTF-82)**

*82d Airborne Division (February 2007–April 2008)*

- 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division (Task Force FURY)
- 173d Airborne Brigade (Task Force BAYONET)
- Combat Aviation Brigade, 82d Airborne Division (Task Force PEGASUS)
- Task Force CINCINNATUS  
23d Chemical Battalion

### **Combined Joint Task Force–101 (CJTF-101)**

*101st Airborne Division (April 2008–June 2009)*

- 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Task Force CURRAHEE)
- 3d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division (Task Force DUKE)
- Combat Aviation Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Task Force DESTINY)
- 1st Combat Support Brigade (Maneuver Enhancement)

- 101st Sustainment Brigade
- 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit

**Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A)**

**International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)–North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**

- General Ethem Erdağı (Turkey) (February–August 2005)
- General Mauro del Vecchio (Italy) (August 2005–May 2006)
- General David J. Richards (United Kingdom) (May 2006–February 2007)
- General Dan K. McNeill (United States) (February 2007–June 2008)
- General David D. McKiernan (United States) (June 2008–June 2009)

**United States Forces–Afghanistan (USFOR-A) (established October 2008)**

- General David D. McKiernan

**Office of Military Cooperation–Afghanistan (OMC-A)**

- Redesignated Office of Security Cooperation–Afghanistan (OSC-A), July 2005
- Reorganized as Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A), April 2006

## About the Authors

**Dr. Brian F. Neumann** is a historian at the U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH). He earned his B.A. in history from the University of Southern California in 1998 and his M.A. and Ph.D. in history from Texas A&M University in 2001 and 2006, respectively. His academic field is twentieth-century U.S. military history with a focus on World War I. After teaching for four years, he joined CMH in 2010 and began working in the Contemporary Studies Branch, Histories Division, with a focus on Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. He cowrote and edited the center's campaign brochure on Operation ENDURING FREEDOM 2002–2005. After working with the Chief of Staff of the Army's Operation ENDURING FREEDOM Study Group for two years, Dr. Neumann became the editor of the "U.S. Army Campaigns of World War I" commemorative pamphlet series in November 2016. He also serves as a member of the CMH World War I Commemoration Committee and as the Center's World War I subject matter expert.

**Dr. Colin J. Williams** is a historian with the Defense Logistics Agency. A retired Army officer, he has combat experience in Afghanistan and Iraq, and taught military history at the United States Military Academy, and served as a historian with the Contemporary Histories Division of CMH. He studied the political effects of social mobilization in revolutionary New York at the University of Alabama, from which he received a Ph.D. in history in 2013. Dr. Williams has contributed to *Key to the Northern Country: The Hudson River Valley in the American Revolution* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013) and to *New York History* (vol. 99, no. 1).

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