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14. ABSTRACT Immediately after the 9-11 attacks, CENTCOM commenced planning to destroy the Al Qaeda terrorist organization. Al Qaeda, aligned with the Taliban Government of Afghanistan, was using that country as a safe haven. As the initial stages of Operations Enduring Freedom were developing, the Operational Factor Space created some unique challenges for the CENTCOM planners. The long distances between the United States and its bases of operations, cultural concerns, and host nation limitations, drove CENTCOM to select a Course of Action that minimized the United States footprint in and around Afghanistan. This Course of Action intended to utilize Afghan Anti-Taliban Forces (ATF) in conjunction with U.S. Special Operating Forces to drive the Taliban from power and destroy Al Qaeda. Although this concept proved successful in the Northern portions of Afghanistan, it met with marginal success in the Southern portions. When the ATF proved unreliable in pursuing Al Qaeda in the Tora Bora region, CENTCOM did not have a reserve of conventional U.S. forces in the theater that could be used as a decisive force. CENTCOM had not planned for this contingency. As a result the chance to remove the leader of Al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, was lost.					
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THE INFLUENCE OF FACTOR SPACE ON THE OPENING STAGES OF ENDURING
FREEDOM

by

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A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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16 May 2003

An Abstract of:

THE INFLUENCE OF FACTOR SPACE ON THE OPENING STAGES OF ENDURING
FREEDOM

Immediately after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, CENTCOM commenced planning to destroy the Al Qaeda terrorist organization. Al Qaeda, aligned with the Taliban Government of Afghanistan, was using that country as a safe haven. As the initial stages of Operations Enduring Freedom were developing, the Operational Factor Space created some unique challenges for the CENTCOM planners. The long distances between the United States and its bases of operations, cultural concerns, and host nation limitations, drove CENTCOM to select a course of action that minimized the United States footprint in and around Afghanistan. This course of action intended to utilize Afghan Anti-Taliban Forces (ATF), in conjunction with United States Special Operating Forces, to drive the Taliban from power and destroy Al Qaeda.

Although this concept proved successful in the Northern portions of Afghanistan, it met with marginal success in the Southern portions. When the ATF proved unreliable in pursuing Al Qaeda in the Tora Bora region, CENTCOM did not have a reserve of conventional U.S. forces in the theater that could be used as a decisive force. CENTCOM had not planned for this contingency. As a result the chance to remove the leader of Al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, was lost.

INTRODUCTION

America watched in horror as the events of 11 September 2001 unfolded. The spectacular nature of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, broadcast live throughout the world, had transfixed not only America, but the entire international community. America's horror soon turned into anger, and with the anger came calls for retribution and justice. While the smoke was still rising from the remains of the Twin Towers, intelligence and law enforcement agencies quickly confirmed what most had intuitively concluded; Al Qaeda, the terrorist organization headed by Osama bin Laden, was responsible for the attacks. The day after the attacks, General Tommy Franks, the commander of United States Central Command (CENTCOM) was tasked by the Secretary of Defense with the "preparation of 'credible military options' to respond to international terrorism,"¹ and the planning for what would ultimately be designated Operation Enduring Freedom had begun.

The desired end state of the Global War on Terrorism, of which Enduring Freedom is the first campaign, was made clear by public statements from the national leadership in the weeks following the attacks. The President's aim was to reduce the vulnerability of the United States to terrorist attack, by ensuring that "every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated."² Toward that end, the objectives for military action in Afghanistan were developed; destruction of "the Al Qaeda network inside Afghanistan along with the illegitimate Taliban regime which was harboring and protecting the terrorists."³ These objectives were further clarified by President Bush's declaration that Osama bin Laden was wanted "dead or alive." With that statement, Osama bin Laden's capture or death had become a specific military objective of the campaign.

At first glance, the inclusion of Osama bin Laden's elimination as an objective may appeared to have been based solely on revenge or the desire to bring to justice the man who had orchestrated the deaths of more than 3,000 Americans. However, due to his dynamic, if not messianic, leadership of Al Qaeda, and arguably the majority of the Muslim extremist movement, his removal can be viewed as an essential step to reduce the United States vulnerability to terrorism. As one of Al Qaeda's Centers of Gravity, the decapitation of Osama bin Laden from the body of his organization would greatly mitigate the risk of future terrorist attacks on the United States. Clearly, Osama's elimination is a valid objective and has direct linkage to the desired end state.⁴

Despite not having an appropriate contingency plan in place on 11 September,⁵ the CENTCOM planning team quickly designed a campaign plan to achieve the majority of the military objectives of Enduring Freedom. They developed and executed an efficacious plan and, within months of the attacks, the Taliban had lost control of Afghanistan and Al Qaeda was on the run.⁶

As successful as Enduring Freedom was, CENTCOM failed to achieve one of its key objectives, the elimination of the leader of Al Qaeda. Osama bin Laden is widely believed to have escaped from Afghanistan during the battle of Tora Bora in December 2001. During this battle, CENTCOM's plan was to employ Afghan Anti-Taliban Forces (ATF), operating in conjunction with United States Special Operations Forces (SOF), to trap, then capture or destroy, the Al Qaeda fighters that had assembled in their mountain stronghold south of Jalalabad.⁷

As in any military operation, the three operational factors, space, time and force, posed both challenges and opportunities during Enduring Freedom. However, due to a

unique combination of geographic, topographic, political, and cultural features, factor space would play a determining influence on almost every major decision CENTCOM made while planning and executing the campaign. Factor space would come to bear on the choices made by the operational planners across the entire spectrum of operations, from strategic and operational movement, to force deployment and employment, weaponeering and rules of engagement. And, as in any campaign, the early decisions made by the planners would limit their options later in the campaign. The impact of these initial choices was especially acute throughout Enduring Freedom due to the long "flash to bang time" (the time between a requirement's identification and resolution) created by the extended distances to the theater of operations and the restricted bases of operations available to coalition forces within the theater itself.

This paper will examine the impact of factor space on the conduct of the initial stages of Enduring Freedom. It will study some of the steps CENTCOM took to alleviate the problems of space and how factor space drove decisions relating to force deployment and employment. Additionally, it will argue that if CENTCOM had ordered the strategic movement of an operational reserve of conventional forces into the theater, prior to the battle of Tora Bora, as a contingency against the failure of the SOF in support of ATF concept, it would have been in a much better position to achieve one of its key objectives, the neutralization of Osama bin Laden. Because there was no such force in theater, CENTCOM had limited its flexibility and assumed a risk that led to mission failure.

Operation Enduring Freedom is still ongoing and the vast majority of its planning documents and official lessons learned remain classified. Therefore, this paper will necessarily rely on open source documents to examine the order and composition of force

flows. These estimates, when coupled with the statements of key personnel, should provide insight to assess the Commander's intent and the overall operational design.

The purpose of this paper is not to endorse the use of conventional forces over special operations forces or to promote the use of ground forces as opposed to air power. Rather, the aim is to leverage the United States experience in Afghanistan to highlight the need to employ a balanced force, in order to take advantage of the complementary nature of all the tools in the Commander's kit, to ensure the flexibility required for success.

FACTOR SPACE

In his text *Operational Warfare*, Milan Vego's discussion of factor space starts:

Physical space encompasses land, sea, and airspace, including outer space, with all their features, which influence employment and effectiveness of land, sea, and air forces. In addition, legal, political, ethnic, or religious conditions considerably influence the use of physical space Therefore, the commander and his staff must consider the entire space in which a major operation or campaign will be conducted...distances from the basing or deployment area to the area where combat action will occur, geostrategic positions, the operational features of the physical environment, and the theater's geography.⁸

Afghanistan, a completely landlocked nation, located half a world away from the United States, presented some unusually challenging hurdles for the CENTCOM planners. The terrain consists of some of the highest mountains in the world with peak elevations over 24,000 feet. These mountains bisect the country from northeast to southwest. Roughly the size of Texas, there are vast expanses of desert. The soil is composed of a fine sand that has been compared to talcum powder, which created flight hazards and significantly degraded material readiness.⁹ The roadways and airfields have suffered from years of neglect and battle damage during a period of persistent conflict.¹⁰ These challenges were exacerbated by the lack of any pre-existing basing agreements with Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan or Pakistan, the nations that surround Afghanistan.¹¹ Additionally, all these

nations have almost exclusively Muslim populations who were at least sympathetic to, if not supportive of, the Taliban or Al Qaeda or both.

SHAPING THE BATTLESPACE

To call the theater of operations that Enduring Freedom was conducted in immature would greatly overstate its level of development on 11 September. Realizing the embryonic state of this theater, the CENTCOM staff immediately commenced activities to create the conditions necessary to conduct offensive operations against the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

One of the most crucial aspects of these efforts was the wielding of the diplomatic, economic and informational instruments of power by representatives from CENTCOM and the State Department to arrange for basing and overflight rights of almost all of the countries that share a border with Afghanistan. Without the cooperation of these nations, CENTCOM's options for military action in Afghanistan would have been extremely limited and the execution of the plan they devised would have been impossible.

Although the cooperation of each of these countries was significant, the use of the Pakistani airfields, ports and airspace was absolutely essential to the conduct of the United States war plan. CENTCOM and State Department negotiators were able to secure virtually unlimited use of Pakistani airspace, arranged for access to the airfield in Jacobabad for staging of Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) aircraft and personnel, attained an agreement to draw on Pakistani aviation fuel supplies, and elicited a promise to allow use of Pakistani ports to sustain coalition forces that might be operating in Afghanistan.¹² These negotiations began in earnest 24 September, before the plan had been briefed to or approved by the President. Pakistani support would continue to grow throughout the campaign.¹³

The importance of the Pakistani support can be illustrated by an examination of the strike sorties flown into Afghanistan. Of the sorties flown through 23 December 2001, over 75% originated from U.S. Navy aircraft carriers in the North Arabian Sea. Air Force B-52s and B-1s operating from Diego Garcia generated an additional 10%.¹⁴ The most direct path to their targets was through Pakistani airspace. Even with the use of Pakistani airspace, the distances to the target areas exceeded the norm for combat missions. As a result, the “carrier missions averaged more than twice the length of normal peacetime training and past combat missions.”¹⁵ If Pakistan had to be circumnavigated, the added wear on both aircraft and personnel would have severely reduced the tempo of operations. Furthermore, with the United States aerial refueling tanker fleet already operating near its maximum capacity,¹⁶ the additional resources required to conduct the extra in-flight refuelings would not have been available. This would have further eroded the ability to sustain flight operations.¹⁷

Numerous other countries allowed CENTCOM to establish bases of operations in their territory to support Enduring Freedom. These included some of Afghanistan’s immediate neighbors, like Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, plus more distant nations such as Oman, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Use of facilities in the Central Asian nations of the former Soviet Union enabled the United States to exploit lines of operations into Afghanistan from the north. These Northern lines were essential for operating in areas that were inaccessible from Pakistan, via helicopter or surface means, due to the high mountains that split the country and the distances from the airbase at Jacobabad. Once these Northern bases were established, they enabled the United States to provide logistical support to the Northern Alliance, its initial Anti-Taliban Afghan coalition partners, to insert and extract United States operatives to assist in targeting and coordination of air strikes, and to provide

CSAR coverage in the North (an integral part of the force protection effort). Additionally, these bases allowed the United States to start the flow of humanitarian aid to minimize the refugee crisis created by the war and aggravated by the Afghan winter. Ensuring the flow of humanitarian aid was an instrumental part of the United States strategic message that the war was being fought against the Taliban and Al Qaeda, not the Afghan people or the Islamic culture as a whole.

Most of these agreements came with caveats that placed restrictions on the type of forces that could be deployed or employed from these bases due to the domestic political concerns of the host nations. In a press conference on October 6, 2001 President Karimov of Uzbekistan stated, “US forces would not be permitted to conduct ‘land operations against Afghanistan’ or missile or aircraft strikes from Uzbek territory.”¹⁸ Pakistan’s President, General Musharraf, made similar comments indicating that, although their airbases had been approved for CSAR operations, there were no American conventional ground forces in his country.¹⁹ The reluctance of coalition partners in the nations immediately adjacent to Afghanistan to allow basing of conventional United States forces would limit force deployment options until bases of operations, capable of supporting C-17 and C-5 aircraft, were established in Afghanistan proper.

Although the United States was very successful in arranging for bases of operations in the theater, it was only a partial solution to the problems created by factor space. Due to the minimal infrastructure within the theater, specifically roads leading from the bases of operations into Afghanistan, the nonlinear nature of the battlespace, and political concerns, the entire logistics effort had to be supported by air. An ever present concern of American war planners is adequacy of strategic lift, which is, even under ideal conditions, among the

nation's biggest challenges. The requirement to conduct all intra-theater movement and resupply by air,²⁰ vice surface lines of communications, placed enormous strain on the Air Mobility Command, which was already surging to meet the demands of strategic maneuver. Even before combat operations had commenced "almost the entire active duty C-5 and C-17 fleet - - a total of about 140 aircraft -- was dedicated to supporting the war effort."²¹ The combined strain that inter-theater and intra-theater airlift requirements placed on the transportation system "forced commanders to delay the deployment of forces and to choose between the flow of critical supplies and the flow of additional forces."²²

In the case of Enduring Freedom, the analogy of a candle burning on both ends and the deployment of a large contingent of conventional forces is appropriate. As one end burns conducting the strategic movement of a force, the other end is burning just as quickly trying to keep the force fed and supplied. This must have weighed heavily on planners deciding the type and size of forces to request.

CULTURAL ASPECTS OF FACTOR SPACE

The Afghan people have a long history of violently repelling foreign forces that have attempted to conquer and occupy them.²³ This cultural aspect, a subset of factor space, also played an influential part on United States force selections. Concerns about being perceived as a conqueror, and the experience of the Russians during their occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, were cited by Secretary Rumsfeld and General Franks during congressional testimony in July of 2002. In this testimony, Mr. Rumsfeld stated "by keeping our footprint modest and by partnering with Afghan forces that oppose the Taliban and Al Qaeda . . . we showed the Afghan people that we're coming as a force of liberation, not occupation."²⁴ When queried about the number of United States ground troops in Afghanistan during the

early stages of the campaign, General Franks responded that he “was very mindful of the Soviet experiences of more than ten years, having introduced 620,000 troops into Afghanistan, more than 15,000 of them being killed, more than 55,000 of them being wounded.”²⁵ Based on their perceptions of cultural tendencies and the historical record, Mr. Rumsfeld and General Franks sought to employ forces that could feasibly accomplish the mission without unduly agitating the Afghans.

SOF AND THE ANTI-TALIBAN FORCES

The cumulative effects of extreme distances, limited bases of operations, cultural concerns and tenuous air lines of communication drove CENTCOM planners to pursue a course of action that would accomplish the objectives while minimizing the United States footprint in and around Afghanistan and simultaneously reducing the burdens on strategic lift.²⁶ The end result was a campaign plan that depended on the use of surrogate ground forces operating in conjunction with SOF to drive the Taliban out of power and Al Qaeda from its safe haven. In the words of General Franks, "using Unconventional Warfare forces alongside Afghan resistance groups whose goals were consistent with our own."²⁷ The role of United States Special Forces was to advise the ATF, coordinate logistics and, most importantly, bring overwhelming United States firepower to bear.

This combination proved valid in the northern portion of Afghanistan where the Northern Alliance, comprised primarily of Uzbek, Tajik, and Turkmen fighters had been waging a civil war against the Pushtun dominated Taliban from the time the Taliban seized power.²⁸ However, its use in the Southern, principally Pushtun, portion of the country, as a vehicle for capturing the key leaders of Al Qaeda and the Taliban, should have received further scrutiny. This is especially true for ATF that were operating in Jalalabad, an area

where bin Laden had been operating since then Soviet-Afghan War and where he was hosted when he first returned from Sudan in 1996. It is an area where pro Al Qaeda sentiment was known to run deep.²⁹

The ethnic, political and cultural differences between the Northern Alliance and the Anti-Taliban fighters from Southern Afghanistan is another factor space consideration that should have influenced the CENTCOM planners. The fact that CENTCOM felt it necessary to ban the use of the term Northern Alliance, and replace it with the more ethnic neutral ATF, as the front lines shifted towards the south, should have alerted CENTCOM that a significant change in the coalition was underway. Unfortunately, this key factor space consideration was missed and a fleeting opportunity to capture Osama in Tora Bora was lost because CENTCOM relied on less dependable Southern Afghan coalition partners.

TORA BORA

The operation in Tora Bora was a mitigated success. Although the mountain redoubt was greatly reduced, numerous Al Qaeda fighters were able to escape unscathed. There is still much debate about what exactly happened at Tora Bora, but certain facts appear indisputable. First, CENTCOM employed the same template it had used successfully in other parts of Afghanistan. In this case, it was a Pushtun dominant ATF operating in conjunction with approximately 50 Special Forces soldiers. Second, it is known that Osama bin Laden had returned to the area during the later part of November 2001. Third, it is relatively certain that when the Al Qaeda forces were defeated in December, Osama slipped over the mountains into the tribal regions of Pakistan that were also heavily Pushtun.³⁰

There are widespread reports that the Anti-Taliban Fighters in the region were taking bribes to allow Al Qaeda fighters to pass. Several of the key Afghan ATF commanders in

the region were known associates of Osama bin Laden and there are accusations that one had arranged an "American bombing halt . . . to allow him to negotiate Qaeda leaders' surrender, only to use the standstill . . . to help the fugitives to escape."³¹ Additionally, the ATF in Tora Bora were inclined to adhere to the Afghani tradition of negotiated surrender and alliance switching and were predisposed to pardon their Pushtun tribesmen. Finally, those Afghan fighters that were truly motivated to aggressively pursue the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces were hampered by a lack of cold weather equipment and general logistic shortages.³²

The ATF in Tora Bora were not willing or capable to press the battle. CENTCOM had misread "the cultural intelligence"³³ indicating that their ATF allies were not appropriate for this task. Although CENTCOM had intelligence that Al Qaeda's Center Of Gravity, Osama bin Laden, was in Tora Bora, the force they had built their plan around proved incapable of accomplishing its mission. Despite the importance of the task, they failed to develop a branch plan, nor did they have a ready reserve force to deploy to finish the job.

CONVENTIONAL ALTERNITIVES IN THEATER

In late November, as Al Qaeda forces were coalescing in the Tora Bora region of the White Mountains, there were limited conventional forces in theater and even less in Afghanistan itself. These forces primarily consisted of the Marines operating near Kandahar and Army units that were providing airfield security at various bases throughout the theater. None of these forces were in a position that would have enabled them to feasibly play a decisive role in the battle of Tora Bora.

In Michael O'Hanlon's *Foreign Affairs* article "A Flawed Masterpiece," he argues that to seal the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan near Tora Bora, "would have required perhaps 1,000 to 3,000 American troops."³⁴ He continues that the Marines in theater could

have been deployed to Tora Bora to block Al Qaeda's escape. CENTCOM planners, realizing the ineffectiveness of the ATF in the White Mountains, were thinking along similar lines. In mid December, they tasked the Marines in Afghanistan to commence planning cave clearing operations. However, the execute order was never given; factor space considerations significantly reduced the attractiveness of using Marines for this mission.³⁵

The Marines in Afghanistan, operating under the command of Task Force 58 (TF-58), were from the 15th and 26th Marine Expeditionary Units, Special Operations Capable (MEU (SOC)). The end strength of a MEU hovers around 2,200 personnel, however, the number of true "trigger pullers" is about half that number and resides in the Battalion Landing Team of 1,200 Marines.³⁶ Initially tasked to provide security and support services for the forward operating bases at Camp Rhino and Kandahar International Airport, the Marines also had assumed the mission of building and securing detainee holding facilities. With two large perimeters to secure and an ever-growing detainee population, Marine manpower was already severely taxed.³⁷

There were other conditions, created by factor space, which would have limited the utility of using Marines in the Tora Bora region. Already operating 350 miles inland from its sea base, a redeployment to Tora Bora would have almost doubled the length of TF-58's extended lines of communication. With the airfield at Jalalabad in disrepair, the C-130 and C-17 air bridge that sustained the Marines at Camp Rhino was of questionable utility. The 15th MEU (SOC), the unit TF-58 intended to use in Tora Bora, was on a previously scheduled CENTCOM deployment, planning to operate in the Persian Gulf, when the 11 September attacks occurred. Therefore, its battalion lacked cold weather gear and did not receive mountain warfare training. Both deficiencies would have hampered their

effectiveness in the severe terrain and altitudes of the Tora Bora region.³⁸ Finally, although the Marines were equipped with the extremely capable CH-53E helicopter, their organic lift capacity was degraded. The weeks of operating from the unimproved runway at Rhino had taken its toll on aircraft availability due to the erosive effect the fine desert sand had on rotor blades and engine components. Operations in the high altitudes of the White Mountains would have further decreased the Marines' lift capability due to aerodynamic characteristics of helicopters. The combined effects of limited helicopters and reduced capacity would have created a lift shortfall thwarting the Marines ability to deploy and sustain themselves. Overall, the Marines were not well postured to go to Tora Bora.

The elements of 10th Mountain Division and 101st Air Assault Division, which were at airfields in Uzbekistan and Pakistan respectively, were in a similar position. These units had been requested by CENTCOM to provide security for SOF and CSAR units operating from these bases. Task organized for their initial assigned missions the contingents were small. Also, due to strategic mobility limitations, there were insufficient numbers of transport helicopters deployed with these forces. For example, there were only 700 soldiers from the 101st Air Assault Division providing security at Jacobabad, Pakistan³⁹ and the 10th Mountain Division had deployed to Uzbekistan without its helicopters.⁴⁰ Their limited numbers and mobility would have made the use of Army forces as impracticable a choice as using the Marines for decisive action in Tora Bora.⁴¹

FLEXIBILITY AND BALANCE

In its discussion of Operational Art, Joint Publication 3-0 defines balance as:

The maintenance of the force, its capabilities, and its operations in such a manner as to **contribute to freedom of action and responsiveness**. Balance refers to the **appropriate mix of forces and capabilities** within the joint force as well as **the nature and timing of operations** conducted.⁴²

Because of the force deployment decisions CENTCOM made during the initial stages of Enduring Freedom, the Combatant Commander's flexibility to respond to the deteriorating situation in Tora Bora was limited. Specifically, the decision to rely primarily on Afghan coalition partners as the "ground component" for Enduring Freedom, driven by CENTCOM's desire to minimize United States forces in theater, placed the responsibility for accomplishing one of its main objectives, the elimination of Osama bin Laden, in the hands of foreign forces. By relying predominately on Afghan warlords, whose motivation to capture Osama bin Laden was not as strong as its own, without creating an adequate reserve, CENTCOM did not provide the "appropriate mix of forces and capabilities" as required by the one of the most fundamental elements of operational art, balance. Additionally, because CENTCOM had not brought any conventional reserve forces into theater, they effectively yielded the advantage of factor time to Al Qaeda.

As previously discussed, there were a litany of factor space influences that drove the CENTCOM force choices. That said, there were other options available that might have provided CENTCOM with operational flexibility.

One of these possibilities was to consider strengthening the economic incentives the United States offered to Pakistan. In February 2003, it was noted that the United States had pledged \$200 million to provide Pakistan with debt relief.⁴³ Considering Pakistan's chronic economic problems, a more aggressive use of the economic instrument of power may have reduced President Musharraf's resistance to staging conventional forces at his bases. When compared to the immense sums the United States offered Turkey for the use of its territory to open a second front against Iraq, it does not appear the United States fully leveraged the economic instrument of power.

Another possibility was to introduce a larger conventional force by using one of the other bases of operations in the theater, such as Masirah Island or Diego Garcia, as an intermediate staging base to position forces to respond to possible contingencies. This would have reduced the transit time to the operating area thereby decreasing reaction time. Additionally, in the case of Masirah, helicopter units could have conducted their post strategic lift aircraft build up and then utilized the relatively empty amphibious ships as "lily pads" to conduct the transit to Afghanistan.

Additional amphibious forces, such as the 31st MEU (SOC), the Pacific Command's (PACOM) standing MEU, could have been deployed. Without any requirement for strategic lift or host nation bases and its inherent tactical mobility and sustainability, the use of the 31st MEU (SOC) as an operational reserve could have been accomplished with little or no opportunity cost to CENTCOM. However, due to the relatively slow transit times for amphibious ships, its movement needed to be proactive vice reactive to affect the events at Tora Bora.⁴⁴

The deployment of a robust conventional force package to the theater to serve as an operational reserve would have provided CENTCOM much needed operational flexibility, but would have required them to make hard choices in other areas. As previously stated, strategic lift was at a premium and flowing a Light Infantry Brigade Task Force requires approximately 41 C-17 sorties.⁴⁵ Similarly, sending the 31st MEU (SOC) would have reduced PACOM's forward presence during a time that groups affiliated with Al Qaeda were operating in the Philippines and Indonesia. This would have increased risk in PACOM's Area of Responsibility. Although the opportunity costs, in terms of delays in other force closures and risk assumed elsewhere, would have been high, the impact of eliminating

Osama bin Laden as the head of Al Qaeda would have justified its costs. All of these alternatives would have forced CENTCOM to make hard choices, but given the strategic stakes, they appear to be choices that should have been made.

Since Enduring Freedom is just one campaign in the Global War on Terrorism, CENTCOM planning may have been influenced by economy of force concerns. While it is easy to criticize CENTCOM for not constituting an operational reserve, they may have been already looking past Enduring Freedom to the next campaign. Their reluctance to flow additional conventional forces may have risen from a need to conserve forces for future operations. When one considers that Operation Iraqi Freedom, the campaign to force regime change in Iraq, commenced while Enduring Freedom was still ongoing, it seems probable CENTCOM planners may have had strategic guidance limiting their available forces.

CONCLUSION

Despite the fact Osama bin Laden, one of Al Qaeda's Centers of Gravity, and his top lieutenants are on the run, they “could still inspire followers and design future terrorist attacks.”⁴⁶ CENTCOM had a chance to deal Al Qaeda a decisive blow when Osama bin Laden returned to Tora Bora. CENTCOM was not able to deliver the blow because it did not have a branch plan to respond to a failure by the ATF. Therefore, an operational reserve was not available to bolster the failing ATF and bin Laden escaped. The exact reason for this oversight will not be known until the planning documents are declassified, however, it is apparent that factor space considerations played an important part in CENTCOM's planning.

The Global War on Terrorism is just beginning and many more campaigns will be required before the desired end state is achieved. The exact lines of operations the United States will take during this war are still unknown, however, one can be certain that the battles

will often fall within the "arc of instability," the region from Northern Africa, through South West and Central Asia, down to the Islands of Indonesia and the Philippines, where Islamic militancy is clashing with other cultures. Fighting within this region will recreate many of the same factor space challenges CENTCOM planners faced during the initial stages of Enduring Freedom: extended lines of communication, host nation restrictions, hostile indigenous populations, and shortfalls of strategic lift. To mitigate these factor space considerations, the United States may once again be tempted to rely on surrogate forces to act as its ground component. The temptation will be strong as the use of proxies relieves many of the pressures created by factor space. If the United States decides to use surrogate forces in the future, it must increase its probability of success by providing an operational reserve comprised of United States forces. By doing this it will maintain its flexibility by ensuring a balanced force will still be available if its surrogates prove unreliable.

The importance of balance is a lesson that planners should have learned from previous operations. Two recent examples are the failure to deploy armor forces to Somalia and the refusal to consider the employment of ground forces during Operation Allied Force in Kosovo. In both these cases, political considerations limited force deployment options that reduced the effectiveness of the overall joint force. In Somalia, the decision contributed to the loss of 18 soldiers and the revamping of United States policy. In Kosovo, taking ground forces off the table extended the operation and increased the number of casualties.

All of these decisions were made in the fast pace decision cycles of crisis planning. It is easy to analyze and critique these decisions with the benefit of hindsight and in the benign atmosphere of the school house. The intent of this paper is not to criticize the planners but to capture the lessons learned to avoid the same pitfalls in the future.

NOTES

¹ Tommy R. Franks, "Statement," U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, Conduct of Operation Enduring Freedom, Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services, 7 February 2002, accessed at LexisNexis Congressional <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/congcomp/document>> [21 April 2003].

² George W. Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People," September 20, 2001, Accessed at <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/print/20010920-8.html>> [21 April 2003].

³ Franks, Conduct of Operation Enduring Freedom.

⁴ National War College, Combating Terrorism in a Globalized World: Report by the National War College Student Task Force on Combating Terrorism, (Washington, D.C., 2003), 16-17; Milan Vego, "What can we learn from Enduring Freedom?" *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, July 2002, accessed at ProQuest <<http://proquest.umi.com/>> [27 March 2003].

⁵ "Initial Planning Perceptions," Lessons Learned No. 21741-80588, 14 December 2001. Unclassified. Unclassified. Joint Universal Lessons Learned (JULLS). Accessed at <<http://recluse.centcom.smil.mil/jullssearch/>> [16 April 2003].

⁶ General Tommy R. Franks, "Statement," U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, Operation Enduring Freedom, Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services, 31 July 2002, accessed at LexisNexis Congressional <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/congcomp/document>> [8 April 2003].

⁷ Scott Baldauf and Scott Peterson, "Closing in on the elusive bin Laden," *Christian Science Monitor*, 26 November 2001, 1.

⁸ Milan Vego, Operational Warfare, (Newport, RI: Naval War College Publication NWC 1004, 2000), 33.

⁹ "Hazardous Flight Environment at the FOB," Lessons Learned No. LLCC0-02611, 26 January 2002. Unclassified. Navy Lessons Learned Database (NLLDB). Available on NLLDB CD-ROM 200202. [9 April 2003].

¹⁰ "An Introduction to Afghanistan," CALL Handbook No. 02-8: Operation Enduring Freedom Tactics, Techniques and Procedures, accessed at <<http://call.army.mil/products/handbook/02-8/02-8ch3.htm>> [7 April 2003] and "The World Factbook 2002, Afghanistan," accessed at <<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/af.html>> [23 April 2003].

¹¹ Due to its very limited border with Afghanistan (less than 50 miles at the isolated far end of the Wakhan Corridor), China will not be treated as a bordering nation of Afghanistan for this paper. CALL Handbook No. 02-8.

¹² Assad Khan, "Pakistan-An Enduring Friend," *Marine Corps Gazette*, June 2002, 34-35.

¹³ Khan³⁴; Franks, Operation Enduring Freedom. Ultimately, Pakistan would be used extensively as a staging area even for conventional forces as evidenced by the Marine Corps' use of the airfields at Shamsi and Jacobabad, plus the utilization of a landing beach and an airfield near Pasni, to support their seizure of Camp Rhino, a forward operating base southwest of Kandahar. However, this was an exception and the staging of forces in Pakistan was done at night, to reduce visibility to local Pakistanis. Additionally, it was sequenced in such a way that the entire movement from ship to shore and then into Afghanistan was normally accomplished

during one cycle of darkness. This enabled the Marines to maintain the smallest possible footprint inside of Pakistan.

¹⁴ Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Lessons of Afghanistan*, (Washington, D.C.: The CSIS Press, 2002), 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁶ Bryan Bender, Kim Burger and Andrew Koch, "Afghanistan: first lessons," *Jane's Defense Weekly*, 19 December 2001 [journal on-line]; Accessed at <<http://www4.janes.com/search97/vs.vts?action=View&VdkVgwKey=/content1janesdata/>> [11 April, 2003]

¹⁷ In addition to using multiple aircraft carriers to overcome the lack of shore bases for fighter and attack aircraft, CENTCOM also used U.S.S. Kitty Hawk (CV 63), without its air wing embarked, to serve as an Afloat Forward Staging Base for Special Operations Forces. This decision increased CENTCOM's operational freedom by allowing it to conduct direct action missions against the high value Taliban targets despite the limits imposed by cooperating Muslim nations. The first of these missions was a raid directly into Mullah Omar's compound on the night of 19 October 2001. Additionally, the SOF use of Kitty Hawk enabled CENTCOM to maintain a higher level of Operational Security (OPSEC) than would have been possible if these raids were launched from a Pakistani Airfield. Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, "U.S. special forces hit two targets inside Afghanistan," *Chattanooga Times Free Press* (Tennessee), 21 October 2001, LexusNexus Academic, [2 May 2003]

¹⁸ Bill Gertz, "Uzbekistan to let U.S. deploy at airfield; Accord permits limited use of base near Afghan border," *Washington Times*, 6 October 2001, sec. a, p. A1.

¹⁹ Thom Shanker and Steven Lee Myers, "PENTAGON; U.S. SPECIAL FORCES STEP CAMPAIGN IN AFGHAN AREAS," *New York Times*, 18 October 2001, sec. a, p.1.

²⁰ "Theater Airlift Plan," Lessons Learned No. 21240-18700, 11 Dec 2001. Unclassified. Joint Universal Lessons Learned (JULLS). Accessed at <<http://recluse.centcom.smil.mil/jullssearch/>> [16 April 2003]; "Expedient Runway Repair/Construction Capability," Lessons Learned No. 38023-80258, 09 June 2002. Unclassified. Joint Universal Lessons Learned (JULLS). Accessed at <<http://recluse.centcom.smil.mil/jullssearch/>> [16 April 2003].

²¹ "Operation Enduring Freedom - Order of Battle" Global Security, accessed at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/enduring-freedom_orbat-01.htm> [23 April 2003].

²² "Availability of Strategic Airlift," Lessons Learned No. 54381-95775, 9 June 2002. Unclassified. Joint Universal Lessons Learned (JULLS). Accessed at <<http://recluse.centcom.smil.mil/jullssearch/>> [16 April 2003].

²³ Ahmed Rashid, "The Taliban: Exporting Extremism," *Foreign Affairs* 78, no.6, (November/December 1999): 23.

²⁴ Donald H. Rumsfeld, "Statement," U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, Operation Enduring Freedom, Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services, 31 July 2002, accessed at LexisNexis Congressional <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/congcomp/document>> [8 April 2003].

²⁵ Franks, Operation Enduring Freedom.

²⁶ There were obviously many other influences that effected the CENTCOM planners' Course of Action. Some of these would have included, the Maximum on Ground of the various airports used as bases of operations, the United States desire to minimize casualties (US and Afghan) and requirements anticipated during the Global War on Terrorism. However, a detailed examination of these influences is beyond the scope of this paper.

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- ²⁷ Franks, Conduct of Operation Enduring Freedom.
- ²⁸ Rashid, 24.
- ²⁹ Phillip Smucker, "How bin Laden Slipped the net," *Hamilton Spectator* (Canada), 7 March 2002, LexisNexis Academic, [27 March 2003].
- ³⁰ Thom Shanker, "Rumsfeld will send more GI's into caves: Searches called key to ending al-Qaeda," *San Diego Union Tribune*, 22 December 2001, LexisNexis Academic, [2 May 2003].
- ³¹ John F. Burns, "THREATS AND RESPONSES: THE MANHUNT; 10-month Afghan Mystery: Is bin Laden Dead or Alive," *New York Times*, 30 September 2002, LexisNexis Academic, [4 April 2003].
- ³² Bradley Graham, "Unfinished Business in Proxy War; Relying on Afghan Allies Said to Cost U. S. Control," *Washington Post*, 6 January 2002, LexisNexis Academic, (30 April 2003); Smucker.
- ³³ Greg Wilcox and Gary I. Wilson, "Military Response to Fourth Generation Warfare in Afghanistan," 5 May 2002, accessed at <http://www.d-n-i.net/fcs/wilson_wilcox_military_reponses.htm>, [5 April 2003].
- ³⁴ Michael E. O'Hanlon, "A Flawed Masterpiece," *Foreign Affairs* 81 no. 3 (May/June 2002): 57.
- ³⁵ Michael R. Gordon and Eric Schmitt, "A NATION CHALLENGED: THE MILITARY; U.S. PUTTING OFF PLAN TO USE G.I.'S IN AFGHAN CAVES," *New York Times*, 27 December 2001. LexisNexis Academic, [1 May 2003]; Robert Burns, "Marines await orders to scour al-Qaeda caves; Tora Bora might yield enemy secrets," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, 21 December 2001, LexisNexis Academic, [2 May 2003].
- ³⁶ 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit / 15 MEU, Global Security, <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/usmc/15meu.htm>>[23 April 2003]
- ³⁷ Michael R. Gordon and Eric Schmitt, "A NATION CHALLENGED: THE MILITARY; U.S. PUTTING OFF PLAN TO USE G.I.'S IN AFGHAN CAVES," *New York Times*, 27 December 2001. LexisNexis Academic, [5 May 2003]
- ³⁸ Major J. Robert Smullen. <smullenrj@tecom.usmc.mil> "re:RFI" [E-mail to James K. LaVine <lavinej@nwc.navy.mil>] 27 April 2003. Major Smullen was the Operations Officer for BLT 1/1 the Ground Combat Element of the 15th MEU (SOC) during Operation Enduring Freedom.
- ³⁹ "Marines make way for Soldiers: Airborne unit to take reins of Kandahar base," *Army Times*, 14 January 2002, 12.
- ⁴⁰ Major Shawn T. Prickett. <pricketts@nmwc.navy.mil> "10th MT in Afghanistan." [E-mail to James K. LaVine <lavinej@nwc.navy.mil>] 4 May 2003. Major Prickett worked in the 10th Mountain Division G-3 Air Shop during this period.
- ⁴¹ Evidence of the impact on operational mobility due to the lack of helicopter lift can be found in after action reports that indicate that Marine Corps helicopters, which remained in Afghanistan to support the joint force after their infantry counterparts had returned to shipping, provided essential aviation support to units external to the Marine Corps. "Air Assets Coordination and Availability," Lessons Learned No. 30539-30863, 28 February 2002. Unclassified. Joint Universal Lessons Learned (JULLS). Accessed at <<http://recluse.centcom.smil.mil/jullssearch/>> [16 April 2003].
- ⁴² Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, Joint Pub 3-0, (Washington DC: 10 September 2001), III-13.

⁴³ "Musharraf Says Pakistan's Support For War On Terror Will Continue" *Inside Defense*, accessed at <http://www.insidedefense.com/secure/defense_docnum.asp?f=defense-2002>. [25 April 2003].

⁴⁴ If the 31st MEU (SOC) had left its homeport it may have had a similar cold weather gear problem as the 15th MEU (SOC). Additionally, their BLT most likely would not have been through Mountain Warfare Training.

⁴⁵ Stan DeGeus, *Force/Capabilities Handbook* (Newport RI: Naval War College Publication NWC 3153G, 2002), 20.

⁴⁶ O'Hanlon, 58.

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