

## CHAPTER 3

# FIGHTING THE WAR ON TERROR

*I said to the Taliban, turn them over, destroy the camps, free people you are unjustly holding. I said, you've got time to do it. But they didn't listen. They didn't respond, and now they're paying a price. They are learning that anyone who strikes America will hear from our military, and they're not going to like what they hear. In choosing their enemy, the evildoers and those who harbor them have chosen their fate.*

—President George W. Bush, October 17, 2001

Shortly after taking office, the President directed a fundamental reappraisal of U.S. defense strategy. No one doubted the fact that the United States had the most effective armed forces in the world. The issue was whether changes in the world were creating a dangerous mismatch between the U.S. military capabilities that had proven so effective in dealing with past threats and the requirements posed by the new challenges looming on the horizon.

The Department concluded that changes in the security environment outweighed the continuities and that fundamental shifts in U.S. strategy were needed. The Department concluded that uncertainty and surprise were defining characteristics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century security environment. Although every conflict will involve different circumstances and present its own challenges, some lessons for the future can be drawn from recent events.

Tragically, these conclusions were validated by the horrific attacks of September 11. The terrorists achieved the element of surprise by exploiting the openness of our society to kill thousands of innocents on the territory of the United States. The country faced a new kind of war. No war plan or doctrine provided clear guidance on how to respond. Yet, in the first phase of the war against terrorism, the men and women of the Armed Forces showed the kind of ingenuity and courage needed to win decisively in Afghanistan—characteristics essential to carrying forward this success in the next phases of the war and to transforming the military to cope in the longer term with the new challenges of a dangerous world.

## *Launching a War on Terrorism*

In his address to the joint session of Congress on September 20, the President explained that the stakes in the conflict were freedom and the American way of life and that the war against terrorism would not be short or easy and would involve the danger of future attacks and casualties on the home front as well as the battlefield.

Just as important, the President articulated a fundamentally new approach to stopping terrorism when he announced, “Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated.” And not just the terrorists would be held accountable. The President stated, “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.” The course set by the President was a fundamental departure in international security policy.

From the outset, the President made clear that this would be a different kind of war and that it would involve more than just military force. At the same time the armed forces prepared to take the war to our enemies, it was clear that more than military force alone was needed to win the war. The President established the White House Office of Homeland Security to coordinate a government-wide effort to improve the security of the home front. American diplomats forged different coalitions of nations willing to engage in the war on terrorism in a variety of ways. Law enforcement agencies, at home and abroad, worked around the clock to uproot terror networks and disrupt potential attacks. Financial regulators and law enforcement combined forces to deprive terrorists of sources of financial support. The Reserves and the National Guard patrolled U.S. skies and bolstered the security of airports and other public places. The U.S. intelligence community redoubled efforts to gain needed intelligence and prepared for a series of covert actions. U.S. foreign assistance agencies—and even America’s school children—mobilized resources to help feed starving families in Afghanistan.

In his State of the Union Address on January 29, President Bush reaffirmed his strategic vision. He stressed that, far from ending in Afghanistan, the

war against terrorism was only beginning. “Our Nation will continue to be steadfast and patient and persistent in the pursuit of two great objectives,” he explained. “First, we will shut down terrorist camps, disrupt terrorist plans, and bring terrorists to justice. And, second, we must prevent the terrorists and regimes who seek chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons from threatening the United States and the world.”

President Bush pointed out that the threat remained acute because terror camps existed in at least a dozen countries and thousands of terrorists who were trained in Afghanistan remain at large. He emphasized the importance of moving simultaneously on several fronts: “While the most visible military action is in Afghanistan, America is acting elsewhere. We now have troops in the Philippines, helping to train that country’s armed forces to go after terrorist cells that have executed an American, and still hold hostages. Our soldiers, working with the Bosnian government, seized terrorists who were plotting to bomb our embassy. Our Navy is patrolling the coast of Africa to block the shipment of weapons and the establishment of terrorist camps in Somalia.” And he highlighted the need to take action to prevent future attacks: “I will not wait on events, while dangers gather. I will not stand by, as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world’s most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world’s most destructive weapons.”

The war aims and strategy, set forth by the President, are clear and comprehensive. The Department has accepted this challenge and call to action, and has set forth to carry out his orders.

### ***First Engagement: Liberating Afghanistan and Denying Terrorists Sanctuary***

On October 7, less than one month after the terrorist attacks in New York, Washington and in the skies over Pennsylvania, the United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, the first military action in that country in what would be a broad and sustained campaign utilizing every element of American influence and power.

The Secretary of Defense outlined the objectives of the military operations:

- To make clear to the Taliban leaders and their supporters that harboring terrorists is unacceptable and carries a price;
- To acquire intelligence to facilitate future operations against al Qaeda and the Taliban regime that harbors the terrorists;
- To develop relationships with groups in Afghanistan that oppose the Taliban regime and the foreign terrorists that they support;
- To make it increasingly difficult for the terrorists to use Afghanistan freely as a base of operation;
- To alter the military balance over time by denying to the Taliban the offensive systems that hamper the progress of the various opposition forces; and
- To provide humanitarian relief to Afghans suffering truly oppressive living conditions under the Taliban regime.

By the end of October, U.S. heavy bombers were pounding frontline Taliban troops around Mazar-i Sharif and other key locations. U.S. military might, in conjunction with coalition partners on the ground, brought liberation from Taliban rule to key cities in rapid succession: to Mazar-i Sharif on November 10, to Kabul on November 16, to Konduz on November 26, and to Kandahar on December 7. By December 14, U.S. Marines entered Kandahar Airport. Within two months of the initiation of action, U.S. forces and its coalition partners achieved their initial objective, creating the conditions for sustained anti-terrorist and humanitarian relief operations in Afghanistan. The brutal Taliban regime was rapidly removed from power and the groundwork was laid for the return of law, good governance, and basic human rights.

Initial successes in Afghanistan were the direct result of a new style of warfare. Special Operations Forces, working with anti-Taliban Afghan forces on the ground, effectively leveraged long-range air power launched from carriers in the Arabian Sea, land bases in the region, and even the

continental United States. Similarly, a combination of intelligence assets provided U.S. forces with persistent surveillance of Afghanistan and the movement of enemy forces. Special Operations Forces on the ground provided indispensable human intelligence. Manned and unmanned surveillance aircraft patrolled the skies. The combination of radar systems, electro-optical and infrared cameras, and signals intelligence collection systems on board these aircraft developed a common operational picture for U.S. forces and guided attacks against al Qaeda and Taliban targets.

The battle for Mazar-i Sharif—which set in motion the collapse of the Taliban regime—demonstrated the potential of highly networked joint operations. By linking AC-130 gunships, Predators, Global Hawks, and JSTARS, Operation Enduring Freedom has demonstrated that high pay-offs result from early network-centric warfare concepts of operations. The Special Operations Forces on the ground, as well as sophisticated overhead reconnaissance systems, served as a network of sensors that provided a picture of the battlefield. This permitted coalition forces to combine a wide variety of existing military capabilities—ranging from advanced laser-guide weapons to old B-52s updated with modern electronics—and to coordinate them with the most rudimentary weapon system: men on horseback. Dramatically improved communications between pilots and Special Operations Forces on the ground reduced the time it took from a soldier identifying a target to an aircraft attacking it from hours to minutes.

Even after the fall of the Taliban regime, the task in Afghanistan is far from complete. U.S. forces continue in the dangerous mission of rooting out Taliban and al Qaeda elements hiding in the mountains. In addition, the United States will help the new government of Afghanistan.

### ***Initial Lessons Learned***

In the few months it took to topple the Taliban regime, U.S. forces proved highly adaptable. They went to war in Afghanistan without an on-the-shelf plan in a very difficult environment. They showed ingenuity in tackling the challenges of operating half way around the world in some of the most forbidding terrain on the planet. And the fact that a key breakthrough at Mazar-i Sharif was secured by the first American cavalry charge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century merely underscores the point. This capacity for adaptation is a

precious commodity. It will be essential not only in the ensuing phases of the war against terrorism but also in transforming the Armed Forces to cope with the very different challenges that will emerge in the future.

Already some of the important lessons of the war in Afghanistan are clear. This conflict does not present a model for the next military campaign, which in all likelihood will involve very different circumstances and impose very different demands. This is true both for future engagements in the war against terrorism and for future operations more generally. Nevertheless, some lessons can be drawn from recent events and can be applied to the future.

First, wars in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will increasingly require use of all elements of national power—economic, diplomatic, financial, law enforcement, and intelligence, as well as both overt and covert military operations.

Second, the ability of forces to communicate and operate seamlessly on the battlefield will be critical to our success in future wars. The victories in Afghanistan were won by “composite” teams of U.S. Special Forces on the ground, working with Navy, Air Force and Marine pilots in the sky. Special Forces identified targets, communicated targeting information, and coordinated timing of air strikes through interoperable data links—with devastating consequences for the enemy.

Third, wars are best fought by coalitions of the willing—but they should not be fought by committee. The mission must determine the coalition. The coalition must not determine the mission.

Fourth, defending the United States requires prevention and sometimes preemption. It is not possible to defend against every threat, in every place, at every conceivable time. The only defense against is to take the war to the enemy. The best defense is a good offense.

Fifth, the United States must rule nothing out in advance—including the use of ground forces. The enemy must understand that the United States will use every means at its disposal to defeat him and that it is prepared to make whatever sacrifices are necessary to achieve victory. In short, for a persuasive deterrent, the United States must lean forward, not back. And the enemy must see that.

Sixth, victory in the war against terrorism requires steady pressure on the enemy, leaving him no time to rest and nowhere to hide. This means that the United States should give no strategic pauses that would allow the enemy breathing room or time to regroup. In Afghanistan, this has proved to be the more humane course because it brought a more rapid end to the brutality of Taliban rule. Ultimately, it means bringing the war to an end earlier, with fewer casualties on all sides.

Seventh, the new and the high-tech have not totally replaced the old and conventional. In Afghanistan, precision-guided bombs from the sky did not achieve optimal effectiveness until the United States placed old-fashioned boots on the ground to tell the bombers exactly where to drop their munitions. Putting U.S. Special Forces on the ground early to assist with reconnaissance, communications and targeting dramatically increased the effectiveness of the air campaign.

Eighth, the United States must link military operations directly with humanitarian assistance, radio broadcasts, rewards, and other efforts to help the local population and rally them to the U.S. cause.

Ninth, and finally, American leaders must be straight with the American people. Tell them the truth—and when you can't tell them something, tell them that you can't tell them. The American people understand what their Armed Forces are trying to accomplish and what is needed to get the job done. They also understand that this war is not going to be easy. And they must know that—good news or bad—their leaders will tell it straight. The enormous public support for the war effort stems from the bond of trust and common purpose that has been forged between the people and the President. This bond is a key to victory.

While much can be learned from this initial engagement in the war against terrorism, the United States must not make the mistake of believing that terrorism is the only threat of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Terrorism is a deadly asymmetric threat but not the only possible one. The next threat could be from missiles or cyber attack. Moreover, the rise of asymmetric threats does not preclude the possibility that in the future great regional powers will seek to challenge the United States or its allies and friends by conventional means. Even as the United States wages the war against

terrorism, it must prepare for challenges beyond this war. The Armed Forces must be prepared for the next war—a war that could be nothing at all like the one they must fight today. And DoD must balance a wider range of risks.