

**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.**

Decision Points: A Case Study of Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements for an approved directed research project.

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.

05 May 2016

Following Al Qaida's September 11, 2001 attacks that targeted Washington D.C., and New York City, the United States and allies responded swiftly against suspected Al Qaida members and their Taliban sponsors in Afghanistan. The U.S led response involved rapid military action in Afghanistan and eventually included a 'whole-of-government' attempt to defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan and Al Qaida and associated movements around the globe. This inaptly titled 'Global War on Terrorism' has lasted almost fifteen years with a cost to the U.S. of over \$1.7 trillion and nearly 6,900 lives.¹ Despite these efforts and sacrifices, violent Islamic extremism remains a persistent global threat with no end in sight. Although the U.S. has achieved countless tactical victories over violent Islamic extremist organizations, the lack of a comprehensive strategy that includes a well-defined purpose and end state has hindered success. The initial military response to the Al Qaida attacks illustrates the importance and limitations of crisis action planning and the need for development and implementation of a deliberate comprehensive plan that is continuously assessed and improved. Within this context, the decision to deploy Marines to Southern Afghanistan to conduct operations with Special Operations Forces (SOF) indicates the dynamic nature of national-level decision-making during the initial stages of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and the Marines' subsequent tactical success demonstrates the competence and flexibility of U.S. naval expeditionary forces.

Although U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) was a mature theater in 2001 due to recurring military operations associated with Iraq, Iran, and the maintenance of security in the Arabian Gulf, not all CENTCOM Service Components were equally established or capable. U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT), located in Bahrain, was CENTCOM's only forward deployed component headquarters in 2001. NAVCENT was prepared and positioned to

¹ Niall McCarthy, "The War On Terror Has Cost Taxpayers \$1.7 Trillion," Forbes, February 03, 2015 and Megan Hickey and Laura Santhanam, "How many Americans have died in U.S. wars?" PBS NewsHour, May 24, 2015.

support OEF due to a history of regular operations supporting U.S. efforts during the Tanker War and the first Gulf War, ensuing missions to enforce United Nation's (UN) sanctions against Iraq, and responding to Al Qaida's terrorist attacks within the region. Unlike NAVCENT's well-established forward deployed headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command (MARCENT) was located in Hawaii and maintained small support staffs in Tampa and Bahrain. NAVCENT's establishment of Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58 (TF-58) to meet emerging requirements during the first phases of OEF demonstrates the importance of a mature Service Component. The ability of the Navy and Marine Corps to develop an ad hoc staff to pull together the efforts of two Amphibious Ready Groups/Marine Expeditionary Units (ARG/MEUs) and successfully deploy and employ those forces over 400 nautical miles inland with limited information and intelligence is remarkable and worthy of detailed examination. Although national level crisis action planning failed to achieve strategic success, NAVCENT support was critical to the establishment and tactical success of TF-58 and compensated for the underdeveloped capabilities of the MARCENT component. This paper will examine the decision to establish TF-58, NAVCENT's support to TF-58, the task force's evolving mission and integration with SOF, and potential lessons for future planners.

Long before the start of OEF, the NAVCENT Commander, Vice Admiral Charles W. Moore, and his staff were comfortable with the continuous operations in CENTCOM's area of responsibility (AOR). Moore and his staff were responsible for coordinating support to Operation Southern Watch, conducting Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO), ensuring force protection throughout the region, and working closely with coalition partners to deter and counter Iranian aggression in the Arabian Gulf.² Although these operations were routine,

² David Winkler, *Amirs, Admirals and Desert Sailors: Bahrain, the U.S. Navy, and the Arabian Gulf*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007) pp. 146-147, 182-183.

NAVCENT personnel had a heightened sense of vigilance prior to OEF due to the successful October 2000 Al Qaida attack on the USS Cole in the port of Aden, Yemen and threat reporting indicating the growing likelihood of an impending attack.³ The increased concerns regarding an attack were answered with increased force protection measures throughout the AOR and also resulted in NAVCENT cancelling the Boxer ARG/11th MEU's June 2001 participation in Exercise Infinite Moonlight in Jordan.⁴ Although the location and damage of the 9/11 attacks surprised Moore and his staff, they were well-prepared to respond and conduct essential missions in support of OEF.

NAVCENT launched the first salvos of OEF on October 7, 2001 with 46 Tomahawk Land Attack Missile (TLAM) strikes from surface combatants and U.S. and Royal Navy submarines to suppress Taliban air defenses.⁵ NAVCENT added to these strikes by quickly and effectively coordinating with the Combined Forces Air Component Commander (CFACC) to integrate F-14 and F/A-18 airstrikes from the USS Enterprise, Carl Vinson, and Theodore Roosevelt operating in the Northern Arabian Sea with Air Force B-1B and B-52 bombers from Diego Garcia and B-2s from Missouri.⁶ This NAVCENT support was instrumental to the tactical success of U.S. and coalition ground forces operating in Afghanistan. In fact, during the initial 76 days of operations against Al Qaida and the Taliban, aircraft operating from U.S.

³ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, Thomas H. Kean, and Lee Hamilton, The 9/11 Commission report: final report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, p.254-277, Washington, D.C.

⁴ Director of Naval History, "USS Cleveland Command History 2001," p. 3, accessed February 01, 2016, <http://www.history.navy.mil/content/dam/nhhc/research/archives/command-operation-reports/ship-command-operation-reports/c/cleveland-lpd-7-iii/pdf/2001.pdf>.

⁵ Gordon Peterson, "Committed to Victory," Sea Power, March 13, 2002, accessed February 01, 2016, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/645767/posts>.

⁶ Benjamin S. Lambeth, "American Carrier Air Power at the Dawn of a New Century," RAND Corporation, 2005, accessed February 01, 2016, pp. 11-12, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2005/RAND_MG404.pdf.

carriers conducted 4,900 strike sorties or approximately 75 percent of the overall total.⁷ In addition to airstrikes, NAVCENT demonstrated flexibility by employing the USS Kitty Hawk as a staging base for SOF personnel and helicopters prior to their insertion into Afghanistan.⁸ This rapid, adaptive and effective support was essential to initial SOF ground operations against Al Qaida and the Taliban, and illustrates NAVCENT's robust and well-developed capability.

Although NAVCENT was a forward deployed and proficient CENTCOM component at the start of OEF, MARCENT did not have the same capabilities. Unlike the Navy, which invested significant resources to ensure the utility of their component to the CENTCOM Commander, the Marine Corps considered CENTCOM an "economy of force theater."⁹ This Service perspective resulted in MARCENT comprising one of three organizations operating under the Commander of Marine Corps Forces, Pacific (MARFORPAC), Lieutenant General Earl Hailston who was located at Camp Smith in Hawaii. Hailston supported CENTCOM's requirements through small staffs located in Tampa near CENTCOM headquarters and in Bahrain for coordination with NAVCENT. Hailston also assigned the MARFORPAC Deputy Commander, Brigadier General John Castellaw as responsible for day-to-day MARCENT requirements. These decisions likely had a direct impact on the timing and manner of employment of Marines in the initial stages of OEF.

On September 11, 2001, Castellaw was attending the Joint Flag Warfighting Course at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama and did not arrive in Tampa to participate in CENTCOM planning until 15 September following a quick return to Hawaii.¹⁰ The Marine Corps decision to under resource MARCENT along with Hailston and Castellaw's absence during initial planning

⁷ Ibid., p. 28.

⁸ Ibid., p. 37.

⁹ Nathan Lowrey, *From the Sea: U.S. Marines in Afghanistan, 2001-2002* (Washington, D.C.: United States Marine Corps History Division, 2011), p. 26.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 27.

efforts likely contributed to the Marines' exclusion from initial operations. CENTCOM planning began quickly following the Al Qaida attacks and on 12 September, the CENTCOM Commander, General Tommy Franks had concluded that Afghanistan was unsustainable for Marine amphibious forces, and ground operations would require U.S. Army forces supported by Air Force logistics.¹¹ Since CENTCOM did not have a standing military plan for operations in Afghanistan, this initial crisis action planning, developed with limited intelligence and without a well-defined end state, had a significant impact on the overall mission and the concept of operations in Afghanistan and the region.

The 9/11 attacks were quickly attributed to Al Qaida, and the National Command Authority (NCA) swiftly directed CENTCOM to begin planning a military response against Al Qaida and the Taliban in Afghanistan. However, the initial NCA guidance did not establish a clear end state, but rather called for the defeat of Al Qaida and the Taliban and rapidly evolved into what the Bush Administration would term the "Global War on Terrorism." The reaction of the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld on the day of the attacks suggests that he immediately considered conducting military operations in Iraq as well as Afghanistan. According to CBS News, notes taken by Rumsfeld aides provide some insight into his thoughts.

Best info fast. Judge whether good enough hit S.H. [Saddam Hussein] at the same time. Not only UBL [Usama bin Laden]. Go massive, sweep it all up. Things related and not.¹²

Additionally, a recently declassified 30 September 2001, memorandum from Rumsfeld to President Bush titled, "Strategic Thoughts" provides useful insight into the overall strategic concept for the U.S. Global War on Terrorism.

The U.S. strategic theme should be aiding local peoples to rid themselves of terrorists and to free themselves of regimes that support terrorism. U.S. Special Operations Forces and

¹¹ Ibid., p. 34.

¹² David Martin, "Plans for Attack Began on 9-11," CBS News, September 4, 2002.

intelligence personnel should make allies of Afghanis, Iraqis, Lebanese, Sudanese and others who would use U.S. equipment, training, financial, military and humanitarian support to root out and attack the common enemies...It would instead be surprising and impressive if we built our forces up patiently, took some early action outside of Afghanistan, perhaps in multiple locations, and began not exclusively or primarily with military targets but with equip-and-train activities with local opposition forces coupled with humanitarian aid and intense information operations...A key war aim would be to persuade or compel states to stop supporting terrorism...If the war does not significantly change the world's political map, the U.S. will not achieve its aim. There is value in being clear on the order of magnitude of the necessary change. The USG should envision a goal along these lines:

- New regimes in Afghanistan and another key State (or two) that supports terrorism (to strengthen political and military efforts to change policies elsewhere).
- Syria out of Lebanon.
- Dismantlement or destruction of WMD capabilities in (redacted).
- End of (redacted) support for terrorism.
- End of many other countries' support or tolerance of terrorism.¹³

Another recently declassified Rumsfeld memorandum titled, "Strategic Guidance for the Campaign Against Terrorism," and issued on 3 October 2001 provided the senior leadership within the Department of Defense (DOD) increased clarification on the threats, strategic objectives, means, strategic concept, and campaign elements. The document outlined the strategic objectives against terrorist organizations, states that support those terrorist organizations, and non-state entities, such as financial institutions, criminal groups, corporations and foundations. Rumsfeld makes clear that operations in Afghanistan are a limited part of a much broader effort and includes the following aims:

- Further attacks on the United States are prevented; capability in place to mitigate effects of terrorist attacks.
- Terrorist organizations no longer capable of conducting attacks; states eliminate terrorist activities within their borders.
- No state has the resolve or ability to continue harboring, sponsoring or otherwise supporting terrorists of global reach.

¹³ The Office of the Secretary of Defense, Memorandum for the President, "Strategic Thoughts," September 30, 2001, accessed February 01, 2016, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB358a/doc13.pdf>.

- Non-state entities do not support terrorism or are no longer viable; terrorist organizations cut off from other non-state entities and unable to receive financial and other types of support.¹⁴

During this dynamic crisis action planning process, without being directed and without a clearly articulated mission or end state, Special Operations Command, Central (SOCCENT) developed an unconventional warfare (UW) plan for Afghanistan and briefed it to Franks shortly after the 9/11 attacks.¹⁵ U.S. Army Special Forces doctrine outlined seven phases for a U.S. sponsored insurgency: psychological preparation, initial contact, infiltration, organization, buildup, combat operations, and demobilization. The doctrine specified that the State Department or the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) generally took the lead in the first three phases and SOF and DOD took the lead in the next three phases: organizing the insurgent forces; buildup (training and equipping the insurgent forces); and conducting combat operations with the insurgents.¹⁶ Franks endorsed SOCCENT's UW plan and subsequently briefed the SOF-focused plan to the Joint Chiefs and Secretary of Defense on 20 September 2001.¹⁷

The Service Chiefs did not fully support Frank's plan as they thought it was under resourced and accepted too much risk to the mission.¹⁸ Remarkably, the next day, just before Frank's meeting with the National Security Council, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James Jones and the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Vern Clark, met privately with Franks to reassure him of their support.¹⁹ Following their meeting, Franks met with Rumsfeld and stated that, "We should not allow narrow-minded four-stars to advance their share of the

¹⁴ The Office of the Secretary of Defense, Memorandum, "Strategic Guidance for the Campaign Against Terrorism, October 3, 2001, accessed February 01, 2016, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB358a/doc15.pdf>.

¹⁵ United States Special Operations Command, "Global War on Terrorism, Operation Enduring Freedom, Afghanistan," Historical Publication, 2007.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁷ Lowrey, p. 39.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

budget at the expense of the mission.”²⁰ Shortly thereafter, on 24 September, Clark and Jones drafted and sent a memorandum to Rumsfeld outlining their Services’ capability to establish and provide “an integrated Navy-Marine Corps Maritime Strike Force” composed of an amphibious ready group and a carrier battle group.²¹ It is likely that this option would have been developed and discussed during initial planning in Tampa, rather than following the presentation of the plan, if the Marine Corps had better resourced their service component in CENTCOM.

Since MARCENT’s capabilities were significantly limited, primary planning for potential Marine Corps missions was not done in Tampa or Bahrain, but by the 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade Commander, Brigadier General Mattis and his small staff, who were participating in CENTCOM’s Bright Star Exercise in Egypt.²² In early October 2001, Castellaw travelled to Egypt to observe the exercise and took time to meet with Mattis to discuss the potential of establishing a composite amphibious brigade to support OEF.²³ At the completion of the exercise, Mattis flew to Bahrain and met with Vice Admiral Moore on 27 October. Without a mission, but with a strong desire to get into the fight, Mattis and his staff began working with the NAVCENT staff to gain situational awareness of ongoing events in Afghanistan and the region and begin developing potential course of action for employment of an amphibious brigade.

During the same time, Joint Special Operations Task Force-North (JSTOF-N), also known as Task Force Dagger working with the CIA, was making rapid progress with the indigenous Northern Alliance to combat Al Qaida and the Taliban in northern and central Afghanistan. Based on this progress and pressure from the NCA to achieve a quick victory, Lieutenant General Newbold, the Joint Staff’s director of operations, and Lieutenant General

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., pp. 66-67.

²³ Ibid., p. 70.

Abizaid, the Joint Staff's director of plans and policy, recommended to General Meyers, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that other fronts be opened in southern and eastern Afghanistan.²⁴ Interestingly, on October 17, Rumsfeld placed additional pressure on Myers to demonstrate DOD capabilities. According to a recently declassified memorandum, Rumsfeld writes to Myers:

Does the fact that the Defense Department can't do anything on the ground in Afghanistan until CIA people go in first to prepare the way suggest that the Defense Department is lacking a capability we need? Specifically, given the nature of our world, isn't it conceivable that the Department ought not to be in a position of near total dependence on CIA in situations such as this?²⁵

Likely based on the mounting pressure to achieve a rapid victory and the necessity to demonstrate additional DOD capabilities, Myers sent a message to Franks at the end of October encouraging him to open a second front in southern Afghanistan.²⁶ Franks eventually complied with the request and on 31 October, CENTCOM tasked NAVCENT with the somewhat ambiguous mission to conduct three to five raids during a thirty day period to disrupt Taliban command and control in southern Afghanistan.²⁷

Importantly, Moore understood that planning and executing this mission would require the direct leadership of a competent and experienced ground commander. Despite the likely pressure Moore received from the Navy to provide a key combat leadership opportunity for a Navy flag officer, on 1 November he established Naval Expeditionary Task Force 58 and placed the organization under Mattis' command.²⁸ This task force would be comprised of the

²⁴ Ibid., p.76.

²⁵ Office of the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld to General Myers, Working Paper, "Afghanistan," October 17, 2001, accessed February 01, 2016, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB358a/doc19.pdf>.

²⁶ Lowrey, p. 76.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 80.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 79-80.

Amphibious Squadrons 1 and 8 along with the associated 15 and 26 Marine Expeditionary Units. See figure 1 below for an overview of TF-58 command relationships.²⁹

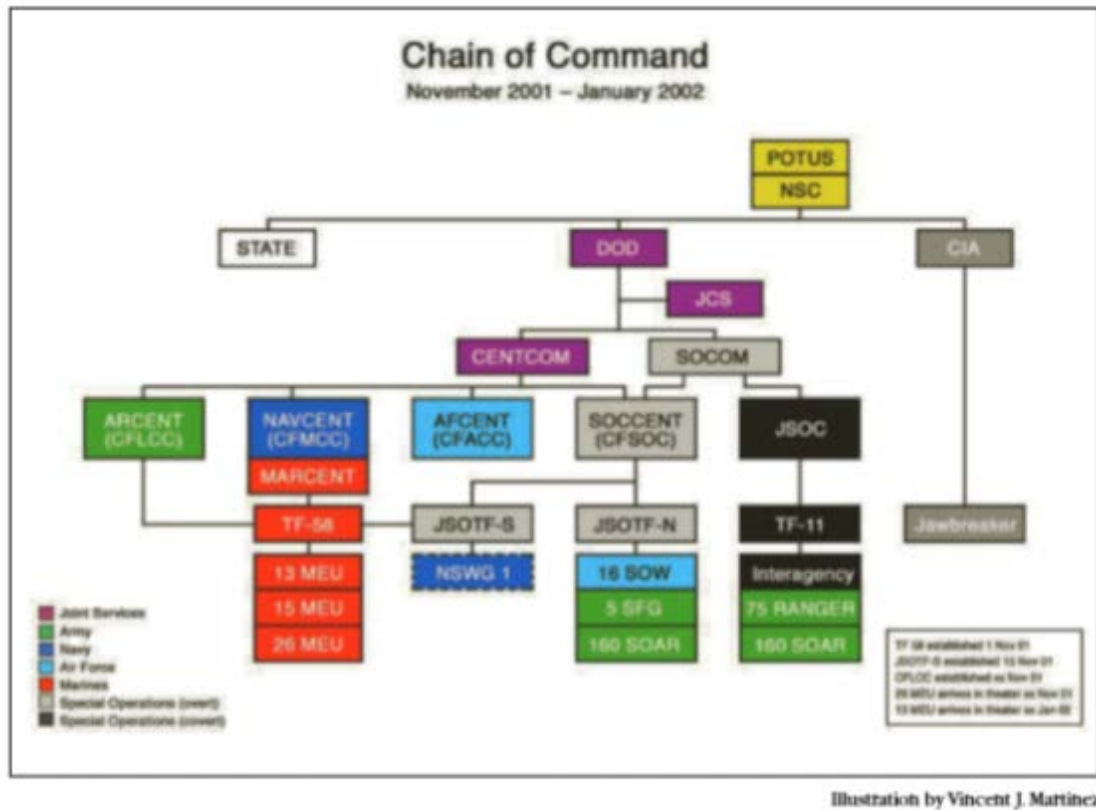


Figure 1: Overview of the TF-58 command relationships

Moore's decision was important and fortunate because Mattis' personal influence, strong leadership, and ability to thrive in a chaotic environment directly impacted the success of TF-58. Additionally, Mattis' personal relationship with Captain Robert Harward, the commander of Naval Special Warfare Group 1 would play an essential role in TF-58 operations. Mattis and Harward had known each other for years and on the same day Mattis was given command of TF-58, he unexpectedly encountered Harward in Bahrain.³⁰ The two commanders discussed their current situation and realized that they could establish a mutually beneficial relationship.

²⁹ This illustration is taken from Lowrey, p. 91.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 92.

Harward was in the process of forming Joint Special Operations Task Force South (JSOTF-S) also known as Task Force K-Bar and was in need of aircraft, logistics and communications that his command did not yet possess. Mattis recognized that partnering with TF K-Bar he would provide TF-58 with a useful strategic reconnaissance capability and more importantly he would gain access to the special operations community that was dominating operations in Afghanistan.³¹

Due to MARCENT's limited capabilities, Mattis and his small staff relied heavily on NAVCENT personnel and infrastructure as well as recently gained access to SOF resources to support initial planning efforts. In fact, Mattis traveled to Bahrain without an intelligence officer and relied on NAVCENT intelligence personnel to provide initial situational awareness and planning support. During the first week of planning, TF-58 relied solely on NAVCENT intelligence personnel to provide analysis and updates on the enemy situation in southern Afghanistan and present potential raid targets for review. Mattis' staffing philosophy and the lack of a command ship or other space available for a large brigade staff ensured that the TF-58 staff remained small, but capable. Task Force 58's staff, including liaison officers, reached a peak of forty, but averaged thirty-two individuals.³²

As a result of this constraint, the staff continued to rely heavily on support from NAVCENT, the organic capabilities within the ARG/MEUs, and theater, service and national level organizations during the duration of operations. For example, the TF-58 intelligence section expanded from zero during the first week of planning to four officers by D-Day on 25 November 2001.³³ In order to meet the intelligence requirements of the TF-58 commander and

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., p. 82.

³³ Christopher Fatheree, "Intelligence Reachback Requires Analysts Forward," U.S. Naval War College, p. 3, May 09, 2003.

staff, these four officers coordinated with NAVCENT and TF K-Bar as well as conducted intelligence reachback with Marine Corps Intelligence Activity (MCIA), the National Ground Intelligence Center (NGIC), the National Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA) – now known as the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), and the Joint Intelligence Center at CENTCOM (JICCEN).³⁴ TF-58's small N2 section was able to coordinate with the two ARG/MEUs and these external agencies using NAVCENT's robust communications technology. Their ability to conduct daily secure video teleconferences with the two MEU intelligence sections and external intelligence organizations proved to be critical.³⁵ These organizations provided indispensable intelligence analysis and products that drove and supported TF-58 planning and operations throughout the conduct of operations.

This intelligence support was essential to TF-58 N2's coordination and development of over 120 potential raid targets in southern Afghanistan.³⁶ As each of the targets was reviewed by the TF-58 commander and staff, it became clear that viable targets would be difficult to locate since many of the potential objectives did not have detailed information while others had already been raided by coalition SOF units.³⁷ During planning, it became increasingly apparent to the commanders and their staffs that conducting long-range amphibious raids was not as practical or effective as establishing a forward operating base (FOB) in southern Afghanistan. Mattis and his subordinate commanders discussed several potential options for a FOB, and by 10 November a desert airstrip about 100 miles southwest of Kandahar was chosen as the location.³⁸

This airstrip was well-known to SOF and Marine planners because it was designated as Objective Rhino and subsequently raided on 20 October 2001 by elements of TF Sword, a

³⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁶ Lowrey, p. 97.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 98-99.

composite organization consisting of special mission units from U.S. Joint Special Operations Command and special operations forces from the United Kingdom.³⁹ In support of this raid, the 15th MEU served as TF Sword's designated quick reaction force and was prepared to provide additional support as necessary.⁴⁰ TF Sword's successful airborne raid on Objective Rhino provided TF-58 with useful information regarding the details of the desert airstrip and its limited infrastructure. Importantly, the raid also demonstrated that the airstrip could support C-130s. After approximately 200 Army Rangers parachuted with Air Force Special Tactics Squadron personnel into what turned out to be an essentially unoccupied objective, they conducted a survey of the landing strip and MC-130s landed to extract the raid force.⁴¹ Interestingly, CENTCOM and land component planners later indicated that logistical constraints prevented the employment of heavier Army ground forces and the Marines offered the only short-term option for opening a southern front because they were expeditionary, already in theater, and willing to land KC-130s at Rhino, while the Air Force refused to land until a 12-mile security perimeter had been established around the landing strip.⁴²

With the initial objective now clear, TF-58 began detailed planning in conjunction with their subordinate commanders and staffs. The initial plan included SOF forces providing initial reconnaissance and surveillance on the Rhino airstrip and Kandahar airport which were the two primary objectives. Following the SOF insertion, 15th MEU would secure Rhino and the 26th MEU would flow through Rhino to seize Kandahar airport. Finally, when ordered, the Marines would interdict Taliban and Al Qaida forces along Highway Route 1, the main road linking the

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 58 and 98. See also, United States Special Operations Command, "Global War on Terrorism, Operation Enduring Freedom, Afghanistan," Historical Publication, pp. 89-90, 2007.

⁴⁰ Lowrey, pp. 60-63.

⁴¹ United States Special Operations Command, "Global War on Terrorism, Operation Enduring Freedom, Afghanistan," Historical Publication, p. 90, 2007.

⁴² Lowrey, p. 99.

major cities in southern Afghanistan.⁴³ The planners quickly determined that they would need a location in Pakistan to conduct an amphibious offload and at least one additional location to serve as an intermediate support base for staging forces and refueling transiting aircraft.⁴⁴

Mattis had already traveled to Pakistan in early November when he paid a surprise visit to the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan, Wendy Chamberlain. During that initial visit, Chamberlain forcefully questioned Mattis regarding his presence at the embassy and was impressed by his candor when he replied with a grin that he had come with a thousand of his best friends to “go to Afghanistan to kill some people.”⁴⁵ Mattis returned to Pakistan on 17 November to brief Major General Farooq Ahmed Kahn, the chief of plans of the Pakistani Joint Headquarters Staff on the concept of operations and gain additional Pakistani support with an offload location and an intermediate support base. Mattis was able to overcome years of poor relations between the U.S. and Pakistan through his continued candor and personal commitment to maintain open and honest communications with the Pakistanis. The Pakistanis agreed to allow TF-58 to conduct an offload during hours of darkness at Pasni and offered access to a small airstrip already in use by SOF that was located in Shamsi, which was about 45 miles south of the Afghan border, 212 miles northeast of Pasni, and 196 miles southeast of Rhino.⁴⁶ The Pakistanis also offered Mattis use of the Jacobabad airfield in western Pakistan which was already in use by the U.S. to support combat search and rescue and aerial refueling requirements. See figure 2 below for an overview of these key locations.⁴⁷

⁴³ Ibid., p. 99.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 99-101.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 94.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 103.

⁴⁷ This figure is taken from Lowrey, p. 112.



Diagram by Col Nathan S. Lowrey

Map depicting the seizure of Forward Operating Base Rhino and subsequent TF-58 deployments in Afghanistan.

Figure 2: Overview of the locations of TF-58 operations

The importance of Mattis' outreach and interaction with the Pakistani military leadership was captured in the CENTCOM Liaison Team to Pakistan draft after action report from October 2001 to March 2002. The report mentions the need to overcome the previously strained U.S.-Pakistan relationship and the need for senior coalition officers to make an effort to build relationships

with their Pakistan counterparts.⁴⁸ Unfortunately the report goes on to state that some of the senior U.S. leadership waited four months into OEF before visiting Pakistan and even then, those visits would only last a few hours, sending a signal to Pakistan that their support was not truly valued or important.⁴⁹ The after action report specifically cites Mattis' actions as exemplar.

The effort made by the Commander of TF-58 is an example of the high return on investment of effective rapport building. He made four separate trips to Pakistan and actively sought the advice and counsel of senior Pakistan Military leadership in planning and executing operations. Likewise, he invited senior Pakistan officers to visit Kandahar to gain an appreciation and understanding of U.S. force requirements.⁵⁰

Mattis maintained a strong relationship with the Pakistani senior leadership through transparency and providing details of every operation prior to mission execution.⁵¹ Mattis' ability to gain Pakistani cooperation was essential to TF-58's tactical success and cannot be overstated.

Due to the extreme distances from the offload and intermediate locations to Objective Rhino, TF-58 required C-130 and C-17 support to deploy personnel and vehicles. To meet the necessary lift requirements, TF-58 requested and received two additional C-130s beyond the four assigned.⁵² Additionally, TF-58 worked with NAVCENT and liaison officers at the air operations center in Saudi Arabia to request twenty essential Air Force C-17 sorties during the first three days of the operation. Although the Air Force pilots wanted to get in to the fight and demonstrate the C-17's capabilities in combat, U.S. Transportation Command was reluctant to allow the aircraft to operate in southern Afghanistan due to antiaircraft threat.⁵³ When Mattis was told that the operation could be in jeopardy due to these concerns, he approached the Joint Forces Air Command and threatened that he would alert the press that the Air Force's newly

⁴⁸ CENTCOM Pakistan LNO Team, "After Action Draft," March 2002.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Lowrey, pp. 101-103.

⁵² Thomas Bowditch, "Marine Corps Operations in Afghanistan: Key Themes and Implications for Transformation," Center for Naval Analysis, p. 10, November 2002.

⁵³ Lowrey, p. 101.

acquired and expensive C-17s could not accomplish its advertised mission.⁵⁴ Following this exchange, Mattis was able to receive the C-17 lift support necessary.

It is important to note that Mattis also had an earlier conversation with General T. Michael Mosley, the commander of Combined Forces Air Component Command, in which he guaranteed Mattis his complete support. This conversation resulted in a strong partnership and impacted TF-58's employment. According to Mattis,

I walked in on him with [my] map, and it showed some ships out on the ocean and a big arrow going to Afghanistan. I wasn't quite sure where I was going to go, I hadn't figured it out yet. He took one look at it and thought, "Three to four hundred nautical miles," and immediately he registered the danger, the risk we were going to be taking. And General Mosley, at that point, said, "I'm going to take your two Marine air liaison officers out of the [sensitive compartmented information facility]...and put them up here on the [command] deck, and if you get in any trouble, you just call them, and I'll turn every airframe in the air over your head."...and based on the trust I had in General Mosley...I left my artillery behind for the first time in an assault wave in my some 30-odd years in the Marines...[It] defined how many more assault troops I could pack in on that critical first and second day [of the assault].⁵⁵

The relationships Mattis built with Mosley, Harward, Farooq and other key leaders proved to be essential and directly affected TF-58's operations. It is important to consider that in conducting this coordination, Mattis was not only serving as the tactical commander of TF-58, but essentially acted as the Marine component commander. Mattis' competence and strong leadership along with his ability to recognize and proactively resolve key issues prior to them becoming insurmountable were instrumental in TF-58's success.

As detailed planning was conducted for all phases of the operation, Mattis issued his planning guidance for Phase III, which is also known as the "Dominate the Enemy" phase of the operation. This guidance provides useful insight into what was understood by the TF-58 commander and staff as the purpose of the operation, the assumptions, evolving command

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 96.

relationships, rules of engagement, and the friendly and enemy centers of gravity and vulnerabilities.⁵⁶ The assumptions ranged from the amount of logistics and aircraft available to the accessibility of Pasni and Shamsi for operations. TF-58's identification of the CENTCOM and NAVCENT intent demonstrates the broad and unrefined guidance they received from their higher headquarters. "Maintain pressure against Taliban/AQ [in the] vicinity of Kandahar. Support opposition forces. Apprehend or kill leaders. Open Kandahar airfield. Facilitate follow-on forces. Facilitate humanitarian assistance."⁵⁷

Regarding command relationships, the planning guidance recognized that by day three of the operation, TF-58 could either remain under the tactical and operational control of NAVCENT as the Joint Forces Maritime Component Command (JFMCC) or control could be transferred to the Joint Forces Land Component Command (JFLCC).⁵⁸ The guidance went on to emphasize the importance of maintaining liaison with JFLCC regardless of command relationships and that coordination with TF Dagger, TF Sword and other SOF elements would be critical. Mattis also declared that air fires would dominate fire support planning and artillery would only be brought in if necessary depending on the dynamics of the situation. Importantly, he went on to explain that the friendly center of gravity involved moral, intellectual and physical elements, and emphasized the importance of maintaining the moral high ground, and the need to operate at the top of their game due to the extreme distances and overall situation.⁵⁹

Mattis' planning guidance also provides useful insight into his understanding of the enemy. The guidance identifies the enemy center of gravity (COG), the likely enemy reactions and vulnerabilities.

⁵⁶ Clarke Lethin notes, "Commander's Planning Guidance – Ph. III," TF-58 N3A/N-5 Afghanistan, 2002.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Enemy COG: Taliban has suffered unrelenting setbacks for over a month. Opposition forces have capitalized on U.S. firepower, but may have reached a culminating point north of Kandahar. Enemy's COG is their ratio of forces against those opposing and their internal lines anchored on their tribal/spiritual home.

This enemy will fight. Must be ready to plaster the enemy with maximum fires. Use combined arms, but individual soldiering must be top notch.

This enemy knows the terrain and will get in close. All hands must be ready for close combat on the ground. The enemy is best on the defense and in close fighting. He also has an abundance of mines to draw upon.

The Al Qaida/Arab fighters are the elite and most committed enemy. They have demonstrated no desire to surrender in southern Afghanistan.

Enemy vulnerabilities: If we can draw the enemy out of prepared defenses by seizing something he values, or by cutting him off, we may be able to annihilate him as he moves against us. If he remains on the defense, we will exploit his vulnerability to air attack. If we can dislodge him, our air forces can hit him as he moves away.⁶⁰

This estimate of the enemy illustrates the limited understanding of the Taliban and Al Qaida during the initial stages of OEF. Future events would demonstrate that the senior Al Qaida and Taliban leadership along with a significant number of followers would not make a final stand in what was considered their tribal and spiritual center in Kandahar, but would flee across the border into Pakistan. Although the U.S. worked closely with Pakistan to attempt to seal the border, the vastness of the area and the limited forces available ensured that a significant number of enemy forces would escape. Despite their previous support to the Taliban, the Pakistani military deployed over eighty-one battalions in an attempt to seal the western border between Pakistan and Afghanistan and apprehended several hundred Taliban and Al Qaida personnel including 250 high value individuals.⁶¹ The ability of the Taliban and Al Qaida to avoid a "final stand" in southern Afghanistan by successfully withdrawing into Pakistan enabled them to

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Hooman Peiman, *Falling Terrorism and Rising Conflicts*, Greenwood, p. 14, 2003 and CENTCOM Pakistan LNO Team, "After Action Draft," March 2002.

continue to fight and conduct an insurgency that has lasted to the current day. Although TF-58 would achieve significant tactical success in Afghanistan, strategic victory in the “Global War on Terrorism” would elude U.S. and coalition forces.

As detailed planning was completed, Mattis and a portion of his staff departed Bahrain on 20 November 2001, and embarked on the USS Peleliu with the 15th MEU.⁶² That evening, the 15th MEU Commander and his staff provided a final confirmation brief to Mattis and D-Day was set for 23 November 2001.⁶³ The initial phase of operations began on 21 November, with the insertion of approximately 20 SEALs from TF K-Bar into Objective Rhino to conduct reconnaissance and surveillance.⁶⁴ Interestingly, Mattis postponed D-Day for 24 hours as he waited for an execute order from his higher headquarters. The delay was created by CENTCOM staff members and senior critics within the Marine Corps who second guessed the ability of TF-58 to operate with the available fuel resources available in Pakistan. After confirming with his logistics officer that he had enough fuel, Mattis released his own execute order on 24 November, directing seizure of Objective Rhino at 2000 on 25 November.⁶⁵ The mission was executed as planned with few glitches and was a tactical success. Although this tactical success would not translate into a strategic success, senior leaders thought the Taliban and Al Qaida were on the verge of defeat. Ironically, General Franks, who was tracking the Marines progress in southern Afghanistan remarked, that this was the “beginning of the end.”⁶⁶ Franks did not anticipate that the Taliban and Al Qaida would escape in large numbers across the Pakistan border or that the U.S. would go on to fight a counterinsurgency in Afghanistan for the next 15 years.

⁶² Lowrey, p. 108.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 109.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 111.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.113.

Although TF-58 had established objectives and explained the concept of operations to CENTCOM, the media attention associated with the landing of the Marines brought to light the ambiguity of their purpose in southern Afghanistan. On 26 November, Secretary Rumsfeld declared that TF-58's "purpose is to establish a forward operating base of operations to help pressure the Taliban forces in Afghanistan, to prevent Taliban and Al Qaida terrorists from moving freely about the country."⁶⁷ He would go on to explain that, "you could use it [the FOB] for humanitarian purposes...for special operations...for the inflow of troops."⁶⁸ Rumsfeld further responded to reporters' questions:

The purpose of the forward operating base is to give us a capability to be an awful lot closer to the core objectives we seek. Now, we all know what those are. We're interested in the destruction of the Al Qaida network, and we're interested in the destruction of an illegitimate Taliban government, which has abused people in this country for a long, long time. Now we can either do that...by making seven-, eight-, and nine-hour trips, or we can provide ourselves a forward operating base to do precisely what I described...I don't know how long that base will be there. It is not an invasion of Afghanistan. As soon as our work is finished, it certainly will be removed...and it was decided...by the combatant commander, Tommy Franks, that it would be helpful to have a base there from which a variety of things could be done, rather than simply using people in and out of a special operations nature.⁶⁹

Also on 26 November, General Myers, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, commented on the Taliban's likely course of action, but did not mention the Marines in future operations in Kandahar. He responded to reporters:

Omar seems to be trying to organize the fighting of the Taliban, and bin Laden, on the other hand, seems to be concentrating on hiding....Again, in Kandahar it's sort of the last bastion, we think, of Taliban resistance. You get mixed reports on whether they're about ready to leave and give up or not. I will go with the secretary on this, in that, from Omar's standpoint, we think...they'll dig in and fight, and perhaps to the end.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 126.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 127.

When Franks was asked similar questions regarding the situation in Kandahar and the future employment of the Marines on 27 November, he responded,

The Marines will be used exactly as the secretary said yesterday and I said today. They're within about 70 or 80 miles of Kandahar. Their very presence does in fact provide pressure, but I will not characterize the intent of them being there as a force to attack Kandahar. That simply is not the case. That's not why we put them there.⁷¹

These statements along with a confusing and unnecessary force cap of approximately 1100 personnel placed on TF-58 during initial operations demonstrate the lack of unified and thorough planning and coordination at the national and theater levels.⁷² The lack of unified direction and purpose at the theater and national levels created a needless operational pause and temporarily inhibited TF-58's ability to move aggressively against enemy forces in Kandahar.⁷³ Despite these challenges, TF-58 successfully executed operations and on 30 November, as planned, the tactical control of TF-58 elements in Afghanistan transferred from Vice Admiral Moore at NAVCENT to Lieutenant General Paul Mikolashek, the commander of the combined forces land component command (CFLCC).⁷⁴

While under the tactical control of CFLCC, TF-58 continued to demonstrate competence and flexibility during successful missions that included interdicting lines of communication along Highway 1, seizing Kandahar International Airport, securing the American Embassy in Kabul, detaining hundreds of prisoners of war, providing support to SOF during several sensitive site exploitation missions throughout Afghanistan, and conducting special reconnaissance missions. See figure 3 below for a graphical overview of these mission locations. These diverse operations lasted until TF-58 was relieved by the U.S. Army's TF Rakkasan and was

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., pp. 126-128.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 131.

disestablished on 26 February 2002. Although TF-58 demonstrated tremendous flexibility in accomplishing a wide-range of missions, the Marines were unable to participate in one critical operation due to limited mobility, lack of cold weather uniforms and equipment, and CENTCOM's limited desire to commit conventional ground forces to the area.⁷⁵

In early December, intelligence reporting indicated that Osama bin Laden and approximately 1,200 followers were located in the mountainous Tora Bora region of Afghanistan about 35 miles southwest of Jalalabad and nearly 400 miles northeast of FOB Rhino. Although Mattis developed and proposed a plan for the Marines' employment along the Afghan border that could prevent the escape of Taliban and Al Qaida forces, TF-58 did not receive an execute order for the mission.⁷⁶ During planning for the operation, Mattis' staff determined that C-17 support to move the force would require an airbase far from the identified location, and that KC-130 support would require a week to move all of the forces.⁷⁷ The lack of deliberate planning and focused direction for employment of conventional forces at the national and theater levels likely contributed to the Marines delayed arrival, the unnecessary operational pause, and the inability to employ the force at Tora Bora to prevent the escape of key Al Qaida and Taliban leadership.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 207-210.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Thomas Bowditch, "Marine Corps Operations in Afghanistan: Key Themes and Implications for Transformation," Center for Naval Analysis, p. 14, November 2002.

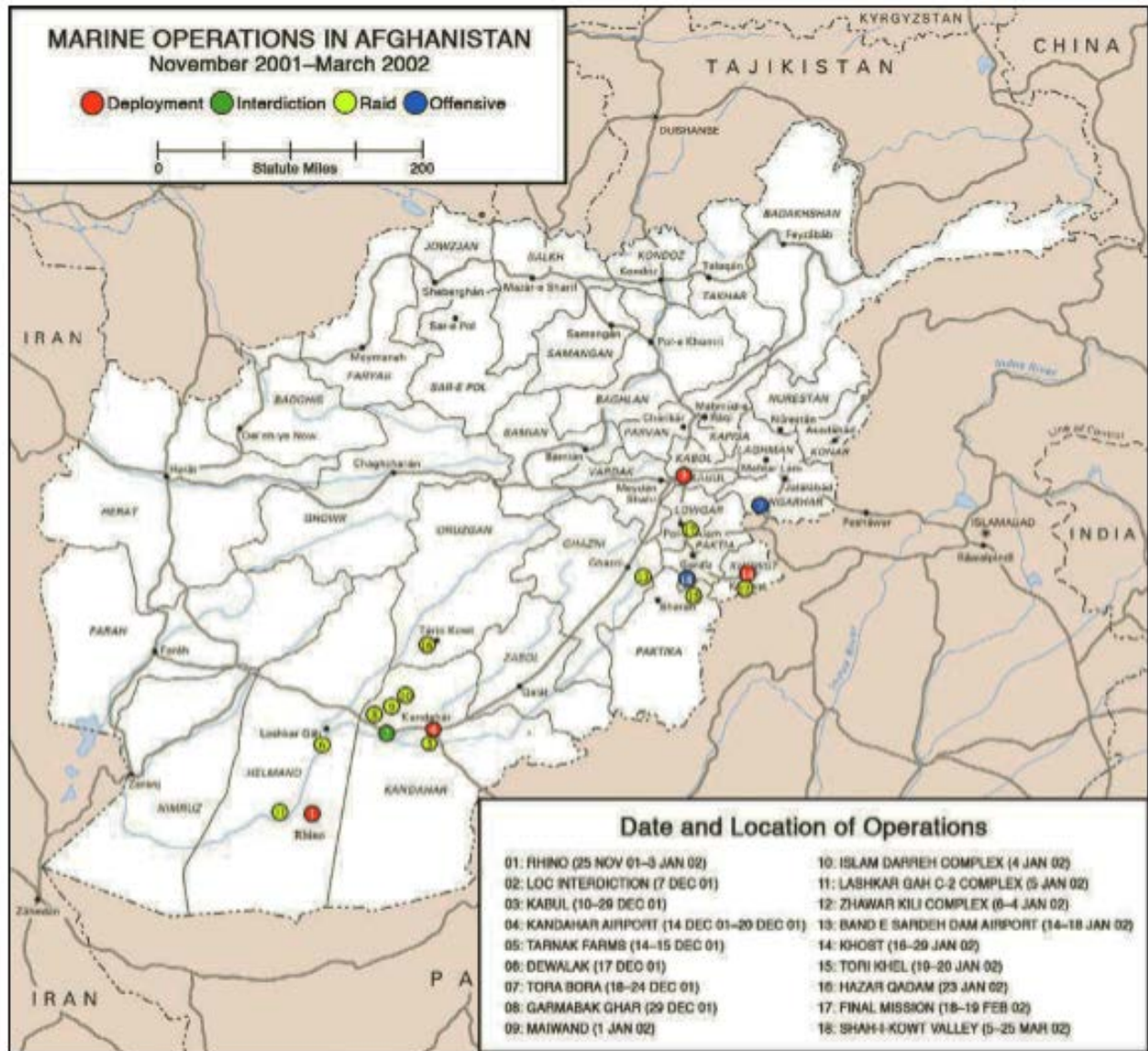


Diagram by Vincent J. Martinez

Figure 3: Map depicting TF-58 Operations from November 2001 to February 2002⁷⁸

During the entirety of TF-58's operations in Afghanistan, NAVCENT continued to provide essential logistics and intelligence support. In particular, CTF-53, NAVCENT's organic logistical command delivered over 18 million gallons of ships' fuel, 2 million gallons of aviation

⁷⁸ Figure 3 is taken from Lowrey, p. 154.

fuel, and 10,000 pallets of supplies to forces attached to TF-58.⁷⁹ In addition to coordinating the reload of critical TLAMs and precision guided munitions for ships and aircraft supporting OEF, CTF-53 also ensured TF-58 received timely and tailored support. As an example, CTF-53 coordinated the rapid movement of nearly 250 Light Anti-tank Weapon (LAW) rocket from Camp Doha, Kuwait to TF-58 in Afghanistan on short notice.⁸⁰ The two ARGs also provided extensive support to TF-58 with the Peleliu ARG demarking more than 1,700 personnel, 180 vehicles, and 267 short tons of cargo and the Bataan ARG offloading over 1,800 personnel, 70 vehicles and 400 short tons of cargo.⁸¹ Importantly, the brigs on the Peleliu and Bataan served as holding cells for over 20 suspected Taliban and Al Qaida detainees.⁸² Additionally, when tensions increased between Pakistan and India creating the possibility of war in late December 2001, Vice Admiral Moore and his staff examined alternatives for resupplying TF-58 without the use of Pakistani infrastructure.⁸³ Moore recognized that logistics would be the critical requirement for TF-58 most impacted by instability in Pakistan and any resupply would need to be coordinated with CFLCC and likely need to go through Iran.⁸⁴

NAVCENT also continued to serve as the hub for linking the intelligence analysts ashore with the MEUs to theater, service and national intelligence organizations. The intelligence personnel assigned to NAVCENT worked closely with recently arrived reserve personnel and MARCENT officers in Bahrain to provide uninterrupted intelligence support. As an example, prior to TF-58's seizure of the Kandahar International Airport on 13 December 2001, NAVCENT intelligence personnel coordinated with national level intelligence organizations to

⁷⁹ Lowrey, p. 134.

⁸⁰ Commander Task Force Five Three, "End of Month Report for November 2001," 06 December 2001.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 134-135.

⁸² James Wombwell, "NAVCENT Brief Notes: VADM Moore/VADM Keating Briefs", notes from Pakistan-India Planning Conference, 17 December 2001.

⁸³ James Wombwell, "NAVCENT Brief Notes: VADM Moore/VADM Keating Briefs", notes from Pakistan-India Planning Conference, 26 December 2001.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

obtain the blueprints of the airport, which had been built by the Afghan government with U.S. consultants in the late 1950s.⁸⁵ This type of assistance combined with dedicated and tailored support especially from MCIA and NGIC ensured the tactical success of TF-58.⁸⁶

It is important to recognize that NAVCENT's support to TF-58 continued throughout the duration of the unit's operations in Afghanistan despite a significant increase in CENTCOM requirements. From November 2001 through February 2002, as the NCA continued to construct a plan for the Global War on Terrorism, resources increasingly flowed into the NAVCENT AOR. In addition to the three U.S. aircraft carriers and two ARG/MEUs, by mid-December NAVCENT also had an Italian, French and a UK aircraft carriers operating under the JFMCC.⁸⁷ By 21 December 2001, NAVCENT had a total of 102 coalition warships operating in the Indian Ocean including ships from nine coalition countries.⁸⁸ The increase in ships brought a commensurate requirement for moving materiel, as demonstrated by the tenfold increase in the amount of cargo moved in Bahrain from September to December 2001.⁸⁹ In addition to the influx of ships, NAVCENT received approximately 11,000 mobilized reserve personnel to assist in operations throughout the AOR.⁹⁰ The increased presence of ships and personnel enabled NAVCENT to expand operations in support of increased CENTCOM tasking.

The additional CENTCOM tasking included planning for continued operations throughout the AOR. The Global War on Terrorism was indeed intended to be global and driven by intelligence. As senior U.S. military leadership thought operations in Afghanistan were drawing to a successful end, they directed planners to begin looking at other potential Al Qaida

⁸⁵ Based on author's personal experience while assigned to the NAVCENT intelligence staff and supporting TF-58 from October 2001 to February 2002.

⁸⁶ Fatheree, p. 11.

⁸⁷ NAVCENT Staff document, "NAVCENT Top 25 Events," January 2002.

⁸⁸ Ibid., and e-mail from Greg Hilscher to Gregory Cruze, "Data for CINC brief to POTUS on US-Coalition Ships in the AOR," 06 February, 2002.

⁸⁹ Commander Task Force Five Three, "End of Month Report for January 2002," 13 February 2002.

⁹⁰ E-mail from Ronald Quave to Gregory Cruz, "VTC Notes for 02/22," 22 February, 2002.

operating areas. Due to intelligence reports indicating that Al Qaida maintained a regular presence in Sudan, Somalia, and, Yemen prior to the 9/11 attacks, the NCA directed intelligence gathering and planning for operations in the Horn of Africa. Beginning on 2 November 2001, NAVCENT began conducting reconnaissance and surveillance flights in the Horn of Africa to gather intelligence and attempt to determine the presence and location of Al Qaida personnel.⁹¹ Although the Horn of Africa was considered the “next front” by the senior CENTCOM leadership, by January 2002, Vice Admiral Moore considered it a “dry hole” and not worth the cost.⁹² In addition to gathering intelligence and planning operations in the Horn of Africa, NAVCENT began conducting “leadership interdiction operations” throughout the AOR. This requirement stemmed from the potential outflow of suspected Taliban and Al Qaida personnel from Afghanistan to other locations in the region via sea. These interdiction operations became a portion of maritime interdictions operations that included 871 queries, 406 boardings, and 36 diverts from September to December 2001.⁹³ The ability of NAVCENT to successfully balance and meet these additional requirements can be traced directly back to the significant commitment the U.S. Navy made prior to the 9/11 attacks to develop a robust navy component in support of CENTCOM.

There are several important lessons that can be pulled from the following areas related to TF-58: (1) the NCA and CENTCOM’s decision to introduce Marines into southern Afghanistan, (2) Vice Admiral Moore’s decision to establish TF-58 and place a Marine Brigadier General in command, (3) the disparity in capability between the Navy and Marine component commands, and (4) Brigadier General Mattis’ aggressive leadership and decision to work closely with SOF,

⁹¹ NAVCENT Staff document, “NAVCENT Top 25 Events,” January 2002.

⁹² James Wombwell, “NAVCENT Brief Notes: VADM Moore/VADM Keating Briefs”, notes from Pakistan-India Planning Conference, 11 January 2002.

⁹³ E-mail from Neil Hansen to James Wombwell, “MIO Stats Since September 11,” 17 March 2002.

Pakistan military leaders and other commanders. The NCA and CENTCOM's eventual decision to commit Marines to southern Afghanistan was not based on a thorough analysis of likely enemy courses of action and the application of military power to effectively counter expected Taliban and Al Qaida's actions. Instead, Marines were placed in Afghanistan based on crisis action planning at the national and theater levels, a rapidly changing tactical situation, and service influence to demonstrate the capabilities of naval expeditionary forces. The significant trauma inflicted on the U.S. population by the 9/11 Al Qaida attacks placed pressure on the NCA to take rapid military action against the Taliban and Al Qaida in Afghanistan. This rush to action led to the piecemeal and unfocused commitment of forces to fight a "Global War on Terrorism" and may have contributed to the escape of enemy forces into Pakistan and the ongoing insurgency. Although the U.S. did not achieve the rapid strategic victory desired, TF-58 and other forces achieved momentous tactical success throughout Afghanistan.

Vice Admiral Moore's decision to establish TF-58 and select Brigadier General Mattis as the commander should not be taken for granted. Although it is currently unknown how much influence General Jones, Admiral Clark and other senior Marine Corps and Navy leaders had on Vice Admiral Moore, but his decisions had a significant impact on the tactical success of the Marines in Afghanistan. Moore could have been risk-averse or less aggressive and avoided employing the Marines in order to maintain the force to serve in the traditional role of theater reserve. This conservative option would have been attractive considering the developing enemy situation and the potential for additional attacks against U.S. allies in the region. Moore also could have chosen to commit only one MEU and maintain the other for potential contingencies. Additionally, Moore's decision to select Mattis, a Marine Brigadier General, as the commander of a naval expeditionary task force instead of a senior navy officer demonstrated boldness and an

understanding of the ground combat nature of the mission. This decision had a significant impact because of Mattis' competence, solid leadership, and his ability to successfully plan, coordinate and conduct operations that involved multiple MEUs and SOF elements transitioning from the tactical control of the JFMCC to the JFLCC and back again. Moore's selection of Mattis, who was well-prepared for the challenges of tactical command, also ensured that despite MARCENT's limited capabilities, the essential Marine Corps' Service component requirements were addressed.

A Center for Naval Analysis (CNA) report from November 2002 provides an insightful study of how TF-58 overcame component challenges. Unlike the Navy, which made a significant investment in personnel, infrastructure and training to support CENTCOM, the Marine Corps assumed risk with limited support to the CENTCOM AOR. The report explains that several important component functions, such as advising the Combatant Commander on the proper use of Marine Corps forces, protecting MAGTF assets from being improperly used by other components, and ensuring adequate logistics flow at the operational level all fell upon Mattis and his staff.⁹⁴ The CNA study continued,

In the absence of an in-theater Marine component commander and staff, the amphibious command (CTF-58) found himself dual-hatted as both the Marine Corps Service component and warfighter – a warfighter response for a Naval task force and executing Marine Corps component-level functions for most of the conflict until the MARCENT staff arrived in theater in early spring 2002. While the practical solution is often to dual-hat the warfighter, it's clear, based on the degree to which the small TF-58 staff was stretched in terms of both geography and focus, that this arrangement was not the optimal choice for executing Marine Corps component functions in OEF.⁹⁵

Although the ability of Mattis and his staff to successfully and simultaneously meet all warfighting and component requirements demonstrated their competency, professionalism and

⁹⁴ Thomas Bowditch, "Marine Corps Operations in Afghanistan: Key Themes and Implications for Transformation," Center for Naval Analysis, p. 16, November 2002.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

dedication, the need for a capable Marine Corps component was evident. The significant investment the Marine Corps made in MARCENT since the conclusion of TF58 operations, including the assignment of a dedicated 3-star commander in 2012, indicates the service's recognition and appropriate response to these issues.

Lastly, it is important to recognize that Brigadier General Mattis' personal leadership, competence, aggressiveness and professionalism directly contributed to the tactical success of TF-58. Mattis' ability to rapidly anticipate and resolve potential issues before they became insurmountable was essential in such a dynamic situation. His aggressive and can-do leadership style ensured that the TF-58 staff remained focused on the essentials and that TF-58 received the necessary support from external organizations. The strong relationships he built with SOF, CFACC, the Pakistani leadership, and other key leaders also directly contributed to TF-58's success. Furthermore, the trust Mattis built with Moore and the confidence he exhibited in interactions with Franks and other senior leaders ensured that when difficulties arose, he was given the latitude necessary to accomplish the evolving missions assigned to TF-58. The individual leader can make a difference and in the case of TF-58, Mattis' personal leadership was a critical element of success.

In conclusion, TF-58 offers a unique case study that demonstrates the importance of clearly defining the strategic mission and purpose and linking tactical operations to accomplish that mission. The unrefined and evolving purpose assigned to TF-58 enabled them to accomplish a broad set of missions, but the lack of direction may have limited their ability to have a more strategic impact against Al Qaida and the Taliban. Despite these possible limitations, the bold decisions made by Vice Admiral Moore and Brigadier General Mattis enabled clear tactical success and demonstrated the unique capabilities of a naval expeditionary

task force. The TF-58 case study also illustrates the need for a capable and forward-deployed Marine component which was subsequently recognized and addressed by the Marine Corps. Additionally, the integration with SOF and the relationships Mattis developed with the Pakistan military and other key leaders demonstrates the importance of developing mutually beneficial partnerships that are built on trust and confidence.

A note on sources: this research paper was made possible through the generous funding of the Naval War College Holland M. Smith Chair and written after conducting comprehensive archival research at the Navy History and Heritage Command Navy Yard in Washington D.C. and the Gray Research Center in Quantico, Virginia. The paper includes recently declassified information as well as material from primary source documents not previously examined.

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