

The War on Terror - Afghanistan

BLUF: The War on Terror, also known as the Global War on Terrorism, has been an official international military campaign launched by the United States government and its allies after the attacks on 11 September 2001. The focus of the campaign was primarily Sunni armed fundamentalist groups located throughout the Muslim world. The most prominent targeted groups have been al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, the Taliban, and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. When the Trump Administration further withdrew U.S. military support in 2019, over 7000 American troops have been killed fighting the war on terror. The U.S. officially began military action in Afghanistan in October 2001.

GENERAL STORY: After 9/11, the Bush 43 Administration authorized air and missile strikes on terrorist targets in Afghanistan. *Operation Enduring Freedom* (OEF) lasted from 7 October 2001 to 31 December 2014. The war ebbed and flowed during the Bush 43 years as the U.S. forces hunted for Osama bin Laden, who eventually escaped into Pakistan. A controversial aspect of the war began with the extraditing of terrorist prisoners to Guantanamo Bay for interrogations. These interrogations involved torture methods that drew sharp public criticism.

When Barack Obama assumed the U.S. presidency in 2009, the mission remained the same. In 2011, American forces found and killed Osama bin Laden. To make good on a campaign promise, Osama began winding down operations in 2013. By the end of 2014, troop levels dropped to 20,000. Under the new title, *Operation Freedom's Sentinel*, there were still about 13,000 U.S. troops in the country at the end of 2019. The cost of the war in Afghanistan by the end of 2019 has cost the U.S. about \$2 trillion.

MARINE STORY: Marines began staging in Pakistan and Uzbekistan on Afghanistan's border as early as October 2001 in preparation for *Operation Enduring Freedom*. The 15th and 26th Marine Expeditionary Units were some of the first conventional forces into Afghanistan in support of *Operation Enduring Freedom* in November 2001. Since then, Marine battalions and squadrons have been rotating through, engaging Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces. Marines of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit flooded into the Taliban-held town of Garmsir on 29 April 2008, in Helmand Province, in the first major American operation in the region in years. In June 2009, 7,000 Marines with the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade deployed to Afghanistan to improve security and began *Operation Strike of the Sword* the next month. In February 2010, the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade launched the Afghan Campaign's largest offensive since 2001, the Battle of Marjah, to clear the Taliban from their key stronghold in Helmand Province. As a fully operational force, the Marines withdrew from Helmand Province in 2014.

QUESTIONS

1. Why has the War on Terror lasted so long?
2. Despite operational drawdowns in 2014, why are U.S. forces still in Afghanistan?
3. How the traditional mission of the Marine Corps remained the same during the War on Terror?

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