



Coalition forces offload from U.S. Army Chinook during Operation Torii

U.S. Air Force (Jeremy T. Lock)

Tora Bora Reconsidered

LESSONS FROM 125 YEARS OF STRATEGIC MANHUNTS

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Prior to the raid on Abbottabad, Pakistan, in May 2011, the seminal event in the 13-year hunt for Osama bin Laden was the operation to capture or kill the Saudi terrorist at Tora Bora in December 2001. Although the operation started with great anticipation due to reports that bin Laden and al Qaeda's senior leadership were surrounded in a remote mountain fortress, anticipation turned to frustration as bin Laden's fate remained uncertain after 2 weeks of intense bombing, and frustration turned to recriminations when bin Laden

appeared alive on a videotape on December 27. Unfortunately, much of the debate on this operation has been marked by partisan finger-pointing and bureaucratic score-settling, generating more heat than light and doing future U.S. commanders and policymakers a grave disservice.

But the killing of bin Laden allows for more measured analysis of what went wrong in the hunt for the al Qaeda leader than was possible while he remained on the run. This analysis is important, as the operational problems posed by strategic manhunts remain relevant given the continued pursuit

of Ayman al-Zawahiri and other al Qaeda leaders, as well as the ongoing hunt for Lord's Resistance Army commander Joseph Kony by U.S. special operations forces (SOF) and our Ugandan allies.

This article analyzes the failure to capture or kill bin Laden at Tora Bora in the context of the broader history of strategic manhunts. Starting with the 16-month Geronimo Campaign in 1885–1886, the United States has deployed forces abroad a dozen times with the operational objective of apprehending—dead or alive—one man. The lessons learned from these historical campaigns offer a fuller perspective of the challenges posed by such operations, and especially the hunt for bin Laden in December 2001. In particular, history suggests that the number of troops deployed has little effect on whether an individual is successfully targeted, and that the conventional wisdom that bin Laden escaped from Tora Bora because there were too few U.S. troops present is a canard contradicted by 125 years of strategic manhunts.

The Tora Bora Operation

After the Taliban's hold on Afghanistan began to disintegrate in the face of the U.S. air campaign and the Northern Alliance's ground assault in mid-November 2001, bin Laden and al Qaeda's fighters fled southeast from Jalalabad toward the Pakistan border. Their destination was Tora Bora (Pashto for "black dust"), a series of cave-filled valleys in the White Mountains where ridgelines rose from wooded foothills to jagged, snow-covered peaks separated by deep ravines. The Tora Bora complex covered an area roughly 6 miles wide and 6 miles long and had withstood numerous Soviet offensives in the 1980s. Moreover, bin Laden was intimately familiar with the terrain. In 1987, he used bulldozers from his family's construction company to build a road through the mountains and later fought his first battle against the Soviets at the nearby village of Jaji. During the years before September 11, bin Laden kept a house in a settlement near Tora Bora and routinely led his children on hikes from Tora Bora into the Parachinar region of Pakistan that juts into Afghanistan on the southern slope of Tora Bora. Thus, Tora Bora afforded bin Laden the option of fighting or fleeing.

Elements of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) paramilitary team codenamed

Jawbreaker established a command center in a schoolhouse in the foothills near Tora Bora. Satellite imagery and photographs from reconnaissance planes showed deep snow stacking up in the valleys and passes, leading the team to conclude that bin Laden would not be able to leave the mountains any time soon. Consequently, the plan for Tora Bora closely resembled the operations that had broken the Taliban lines north of Kabul: CIA paramilitary operatives and U.S. SOF would infiltrate the area to identify targets for bombing, which would clear the way for Afghan militias to advance. However, the Northern Alliance had neither the capacity nor the desire to push as far south as Jalalabad. Consequently, team leader Gary Berntsen was forced to rely on local warlords. One was Hazaret Ali, a Pashai tribal leader who had distinguished himself as a field commander in the war against the Soviets, and the other was Haji Zaman, a recently returned exile whose base of operations during the anti-Soviet jihad had been Tora Bora but who was a fierce rival of Ali's.

By December 4, the first observation post was established on a mountaintop overlooking the Milewa Valley, and over the next 3 days about 700,000 pounds of ordnance were dropped on al Qaeda positions. On December 9, a 40-man detachment arrived at the base of Tora Bora. Under the command of a major who would later publish a memoir under the pseudonym "Dalton

On December 16, numerous reports of genuine surrenders came into the schoolhouse, and by the next day, the battle of Tora Bora was over. Estimates of al Qaeda fighters killed ranged from 220 to 500, although the real number was likely higher as the bombing literally obliterated or buried the bodies of large groups of fighters. Fifty-two fighters, mostly Arabs, were captured by the Afghans, and another hundred were captured crossing the border into Pakistan. Yet there was no sign of the campaign's target. Bin Laden's fate remained unknown until December 27, when he appeared on videotape. Despite being left-handed and typically gesturing with both hands while speaking, a visibly aged bin Laden did not move his entire left side in the 34-minute video, suggesting he had sustained a serious injury during the battle.

"I am a poor slave of God," he said resignedly. "If I live or die the war will continue."¹ The hunt for bin Laden would last for almost another decade until it reached its climax on a cloudless night in a quiet neighborhood in Abbottabad.

Not Enough Boots on the Ground?

The most persistent criticism of the bin Laden manhunt as executed at Tora Bora is that the Bush administration failed to deploy enough U.S. troops and thereby let bin Laden escape certain capture or death. On December 3, 2001, CIA team leader Gary Berntsen sent a request to the agency's

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Fury," the operators were supplemented by 14 Green Berets, 6 operatives, a few Air Force specialists, and a dozen British commandos. The bombardment—which included over 1,000 precision-guided munitions and a 15,000-pound BLU-82 "Daisy Cutter" bomb—continued for another week, and on at least two occasions directly targeted bin Laden. Although SOF could hear the frantic, anguished cries of the al Qaeda operatives via a captured radio, the Afghan militias withdrew each night from the ground gained during the day in order to break their Ramadan fast. Haji Zaman further complicated the siege by opening surrender negotiations with al Qaeda that were likely a stalling tactic for the terrorists to escape.

headquarters asking to assault the cave complexes at Tora Bora and block escape routes. He also appealed directly to the head of U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) SOF during a meeting in Kabul on December 15. Similarly, Brigadier General James Mattis, commander of the Marines in Afghanistan, reportedly asked to send the 1,200 Marines stationed near Kandahar into Tora Bora. But USCENTCOM denied all requests for more troops. Consequently, as Peter Bergen concluded, "there were more American journalists at the battle of Tora Bora than there were U.S. soldiers."²

USCENTCOM commanders cited three broad arguments for why troop levels were kept so low during the operation. First,

former Deputy Commander of USCENTCOM Lieutenant General Mike DeLong argued, “The simple fact is, we couldn’t put a large number of our troops on the ground [at Tora Bora].”³ The roads from Jalalabad to Tora Bora were horrible and ran through villages loyal to the Taliban and al Qaeda, making the stealthy or efficient deployment of large numbers of U.S. troops improbable. Moreover, the weather conditions at Tora Bora’s high altitudes and the lack of potential landing or drop zones for air insertion and resupply would have made such a mission dangerously unpredictable and logistically unprecedented.

Second, USCENTCOM Commander General Tommy Franks later explained: “I was very mindful of the Soviet experience of more than ten years, having introduced

was kept on the sidelines,” while “bin Laden and an entourage of bodyguards walked unmolested out of Tora Bora and disappeared into Pakistan’s unregulated tribal area.”⁶ Bergen similarly concluded, “The Pentagon’s reluctance to commit more American boots on the ground is a decision that historians are not likely to judge kindly.”⁷ Even former Bush administration defense official Joseph Collins noted, “It was the lack of expert infantry that allowed Osama bin Laden to escape at Tora Bora.”⁸

Yet even where USCENTCOM’s logic is questionable, the history of strategic manhunts suggests that a larger U.S. ground force would *not* have significantly increased the chances of capturing bin Laden at Tora Bora, as additional troops have never been a guarantor of success in similar campaigns.

it would have taken 9,000 to 15,000 U.S. troops to completely cordon off the 100 to 150 potential escape routes out of Tora Bora

620,000 troops into Afghanistan.”⁴ USCENTCOM believed that the deployment of large-scale U.S. forces would inevitably lead to conflict with Afghan villagers and alienate our Afghan allies. Both Ali and Zaman had made it clear that eastern Afghans would not fight alongside the American infidels, and Major Fury was “convinced that many of Ali’s fighters, as well as those of his subordinate commanders such as Zaman and Haji Zahir, would have resisted the marines’ presence and possibly even have turned their weapons on the larger American force.”⁵

Finally, General Franks firmly believed that the light-footprint approach—U.S. airpower supporting indigenous ground forces—had already succeeded in overthrowing the Taliban and would succeed in Tora Bora too. Franks was concerned that taking the time to introduce significant numbers of U.S. ground forces would disrupt the momentum of the coalition-Afghan offensive, thereby giving bin Laden a chance to slip away.

In the ensuing decade, a conventional wisdom regarding the operation has formed. The Democratic staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee argued in a 2009 report that “The vast array of American military power, from sniper teams to the most mobile divisions of the Marine Corps and the Army,

For example, the 1916 Punitive Expedition to apprehend Pancho Villa deployed twice as many troops as the 1885–1886 Geronimo Campaign used operating over the same terrain in northern Mexico—11,000 versus 5,000. Yet it was the earlier, smaller campaign that was successful. Similarly, both Operation *Just Cause* to arrest Panamanian strongman Manuel Noriega and the United Nations operation in Somalia targeting warlord Mohammad Farah Aideed involved approximately 20,000 troops pursuing individuals in urban environments. Yet the former succeeded in capturing Noriega while the latter failed to capture Aideed. And in 1967, 16 American Green Berets trained the 200 Bolivian rangers who captured (and later executed) Che Guevara. Thus, it is clear that some variable other than troop strength explains the difference between success and failure in past manhunting campaigns.

In reality, because of the need for operational surprise, smaller is often better in strategic manhunts. In 1886, when General Nelson A. Miles ordered Lieutenant Charles Gatewood not to go near the hostile Chiricahua Apaches with fewer than 25 soldiers, Gatewood disobeyed, later recalling: “Hell, I couldn’t get anywhere near Geronimo with twenty-five soldiers.”⁹ One Marine officer serving in the 1927–1932 hunt for Nicaraguan

insurgent leader Augusto Sandino noted, “Large bodies of troops had not the mobility necessary to overtake bandit groups and force them to decisive action.”¹⁰ The initial plan to capture Mohammad Farah Aideed in June 1993, codenamed Caustic Brimstone, called for a small force of 50 operators to be deployed to Mogadishu to capture the clan leader. And a raiding force was eschewed altogether on June 7, 2006, for fear it would tip off Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s lookouts, leading to the F-16 strike that killed the al Qaeda in Iraq leader.

Beyond historical considerations, the specific conditions at Tora Bora undermine the conventional wisdom regarding inadequate troop strength. In an early December meeting at the White House, President George W. Bush asked Hank Crumpton, the CIA official heading the agency’s Afghan campaign, whether the Pakistanis could seal their side of the border during the Tora Bora operations. “No sir,” Crumpton said. “*No one has enough troops to prevent any possibility of escape in a region like that.*”¹¹ Indeed, if we apply the planners of March 2002’s Operation *Anaconda* assumption that between 90 and 100 troops were required to block each pass out of comparable terrain in the Shah-i-Kot Valley, then it would have taken 9,000 to 15,000 U.S. troops to completely cordon off the 100 to 150 potential escape routes out of Tora Bora, a number that was logistically impossible to deploy there in December 2001. Moreover, Major Fury noted that “We had to operate in virtual invisibility to keep Ali on top of the Afghan forces,” and that “It would have been a major slap in Ali’s face” had thousands of Rangers and Marines shown up. If the Afghan militias “didn’t turn on [U.S. forces] then they definitely would have gone home.”¹²

Two historical operations conducted over the same terrain provide counterfactuals that refute this conventional wisdom. In March 2002, 3 months after bin Laden escaped from Tora Bora, roughly 2,000 U.S. troops from 10th Mountain and 101st Infantry divisions, in addition to SOF and U.S.-trained Afghan allies, were deployed to the Shah-i-Kot Valley in eastern Afghanistan to trap several hundred al Qaeda fighters and a suspected senior leader. But as Sean Naylor notes in *Not a Good Day to Die*, “At least as many al-Qaeda fighters escaped the Shahikot as died there,” despite the reliance upon thousands of U.S. conventional



U.S. Air Force (Francisco V. Govea II)

Soldiers fire at targets on Tora Ghar mountains from Luy Kariz, Afghanistan

troops.¹³ And whereas the Bush administration has been faulted for not deploying an additional 800 to 3,000 troops, in the 1930s and 1940s the British hunted the Faqir of Ipi with 40,000 troops over similar terrain in Waziristan but never caught their prey. Thus, it appears troop strength was not the determining variable of success in the bin Laden manhunt.

The Role of Physical Terrain

A better argument for the failure to capture or kill bin Laden at Tora Bora lies in the terrain over which the operation was waged. Describing the difficult terrain, Major Fury told *60 Minutes* concerning attacking bin Laden's position there that on a scale of 1 to 10, "in my experience, it's a ten."¹⁴ Colonel John Mulholland, commander of 5th Special Forces Group in Afghanistan during Operation *Enduring Freedom*, noted, "there was no shortage of ways for [al Qaeda], especially for people who knew that area like the back of their hands, to continue to infiltrate or exfiltrate."¹⁵ Consequently, in 2008 CIA Director General Michael Hayden ascribed the failure

to capture or kill bin Laden to the "rugged and inaccessible" terrain of the border area.¹⁶

Physical terrain is obviously a factor in every military operation, whether a tank battle or SOF raid. Hence, it is true that terrain can play a role in any individual strategic manhunt. Marine officers in Nicaragua, for example, attributed Sandino's ability to elude his pursuers to the unique difficulties of fighting in the inhospitable terrain of Nicaragua's jungles. Similarly, then-USCENTCOM Commander General Joseph Hoar believed the odds were against capturing Aideed due to the warlord's ability to simply disappear into the narrow alleyways of Mogadishu. Yet despite these examples, U.S. forces have captured their quarry in mountains (Geronimo, Che), jungles (Emilio Aguinaldo, Charlemagne Peralt), and urban environments (Noriega, Pablo Escobar). Thus, it would be incorrect to say that any single type of terrain determines success or failure in a strategic manhunt.

Although the terrain of Tora Bora was undeniably a hindrance, it was not the decisive variable in the broader hunt for bin

Laden. Five hundred al Qaeda fighters were killed by U.S. forces at Tora Bora, and the terrain apparently did not save bin Laden from being wounded. During the first 3 years of the manhunt, 1998–2001, bin Laden was not hidden among mountains and caves, but rather lived openly in the plains around Kandahar. Moreover, since the 2007 advent of the "drone war" against al Qaeda in Pakistan's tribal areas, more than half of al Qaeda's top 20 senior leaders have been killed despite the forbidding terrain. Thus, the problem was not merely one of terrain masking bin Laden's movements, but rather of pinpointing his fixed location.

The Centrality of Human Terrain

More important than physical terrain is the *human terrain* over which a manhunt is conducted, which refers to the attitudes of the local population among which the target operates. These attitudes determine the availability of the three variables that historically have proven decisive to the outcomes of strategic manhunts: human intelligence, indigenous forces, and a border across which



U.S. and Canadian soldiers prepare to depart Bagram Air Base to Tora Bora, Operation *Mountain Lion*

U.S. Air Force (D. Myles Cullen)

the target can seek sanctuary. In the case of Tora Bora, each of these variables was slanted against U.S. forces, and it was the inhospitable *human* terrain around Tora Bora that led to the failure to apprehend bin Laden in December 2001.

Human Intelligence. Perhaps the clearest dividing line between successful strategic manhunts and failed campaigns is the ability to obtain actionable intelligence on the target either from the local population or sources within the target's network. Conversely, in every failed strategic manhunt, there has been a distinct inability to obtain intelligence on the targeted individual's movements or location from the local population. Whereas Mexican farmers tipped off the U.S. cavalry to Geronimo's location in August 1886, 30 years later General John J. Pershing complained, "If this campaign should eventually prove successful it will be without the real assistance of any natives this side of" the border. Unfortunately for Pershing, historian Herbert Mason notes, "Going into Chihuahua to lay hands on Villa was like the Sheriff of Nottingham entering Sherwood Forest expecting the peasants to help him land Robin Hood."¹⁷ Alternatively, Saddam Hussein, al-Zarqawi, and more recently Anwar al-Awlaki were successfully targeted

based on intelligence gained from captured members of their networks.

The hunt for bin Laden reinforces these lessons. Although the CIA was working eight separate Afghan tribal networks, and by the time of the September 11 attacks had more than 100 recruited sources inside Afghanistan, these assets could rarely predict where bin Laden would be on a given day. Despite several years of effort, the CIA was unable to recruit a single asset with access to bin Laden's inner circle. As a former senior U.S. counterterrorism official told Peter Bergen, an al Qaeda operative betraying bin Laden would be like "a Catholic giving up the Pope."¹⁸ The territory around Tora Bora was controlled by tribes hostile to the United States and sympathetic to al Qaeda. Villagers turned the places where al Qaeda fighters were buried into shrines honoring holy warriors fighting against the infidels. In the wake of the Taliban's collapse, the "Eastern Shura" became the principal political structure in the region, and its most influential leader was an aging warlord who had welcomed bin Laden at the airport in 1996 upon his return to Afghanistan from the Sudan. Bin Laden had been providing jobs and funding for residents since 1985 through the construction of the trenches, bunkers, and caves in the area.

Since moving back to the region, he had distributed money to practically every family in Nangarhar Province. Noted Milton Bearden, former CIA station chief in Islamabad, bin Laden "put a lot of money in a lot of the right places in Afghanistan."¹⁹

This practice continued after U.S. forces arrived in Afghanistan. At a November 10, 2001, banquet at the Islamic Studies Institute in Jalalabad, nearly 1,000 Afghan and Pakistani tribal leaders rose and shouted "*Zindibad, Osama!*" (Long live Osama!) without prompting. The tribal elders each received a white envelope full of Pakistani rupees, its thickness proportionate to the chief's importance, with leaders of larger clans receiving up to \$10,000. In exchange, the tribesmen promised to help smuggle Afghan and Arab leaders to freedom in Pakistan if escape became necessary. One leader later claimed his village escorted 600 people out of Tora Bora and into Pakistan, receiving between 500 and 5,000 rupees per fighter and family for the use of mules and Afghan guides.

Indigenous Forces. One way in which U.S. forces are able to develop human intelligence is through the use of indigenous forces. Apache and Filipino Macabebe scouts were critical to tracking down Geronimo and

capturing Aguinaldo, respectively. Similarly, it was the U.S.-trained and advised Bolivian Second Ranger Battalion and the Colombian police's "Search Bloc" who apprehended and killed Che and Pablo Escobar. Conversely, U.S. forces were unable to rely on indigenous forces in the unsuccessful hunts for Villa and Aideed.

After 9/11, it appeared the United States would be able to draw upon indigenous forces in its pursuit of bin Laden. Multiple sources suggested the majority of the Taliban opposed him and could possibly be recruited as allies in the manhunt. A Taliban official told a U.S. diplomat in Pakistan that "Taliban leader Mullah Omar is the key supporter of his continued presence in the country, while 80 percent of Taliban officials oppose it." Al Qaeda insider Abu Walid al-Masri later wrote that a "nucleus of opposition" developed among senior leaders of the Taliban who had urged that the Saudi be expelled prior to the September 11 attacks.²⁰ Immediately after September 11, an *ulema* of 1,000 Taliban mullahs formally petitioned Mullah Omar to have bin Laden expelled from Afghanistan to a Muslim country. As one analyst suggested prior to the start of Operation *Enduring Freedom*, "Informants might materialize in faction-ridden Afghanistan, where the extremist Taliban and its outside Arab allies such as bin Laden are much hated in some quarters."²¹

Thus, the United States was not obviously foolish in its choice of allies in the Eastern Alliance: Ali had been fighting with the Northern Alliance against the Taliban for several years, and Tora Bora had been Zaman's own base of operations during the Soviet war before the Taliban forced him into exile. Moreover, simply from a tactical standpoint, it was necessary to work with Afghan allies. As Major Fury observes: "To push forward unilaterally meant that we would be going it alone, without any [mujahideen] guides or security. Without a local guide's help in identifying friend from foe, we would have to treat anyone with a weapon as hostile."²² And after two decades of persistent war, almost everybody in Afghanistan carried a weapon.

Although the decision to rely on Ali and Zaman was defensible at the time, they turned out to be undependable allies. Ali insisted that the Eastern Shura had the final word on what should be done about the Arabs holed up in Tora Bora. He assigned a

commander named Ilyas Khel to guard the Pakistani border, but instead Khel acted as an escort for al Qaeda. "Our problem was that the Arabs had paid him more," one of Ali's top commanders later said. "So Ilyas Khel just showed the Arabs the way out of the country into Pakistan."²³ Zaman's men were from the local Khungani tribe, and many had been on bin Laden's payroll in recent months, hired to dig caves. "We might as well have been asking them to fight the Almighty Prophet Mohammed himself," Major Fury later concluded. "I am convinced that not a single one of our mujh fighters wanted to be recognized in their mosque as the man who killed Sheikh bin Laden."²⁴

Bilateral Assistance. There are two exceptions to the correlation between the use of indigenous forces and success in strategic manhunts. During the 5-year hunt for Sandino in Nicaragua, U.S. Marines trained and officered the Guardia Nacional, which spoke the language and understood Nicaragua's culture. Although the Guardia kept Sandino's insurgency in check through two elections, they and the Marines could never

the ISI paid lip service to U.S. counterterrorism goals, it simultaneously used bin Laden's training camps in Afghanistan to prepare its own allied extremist groups for attacks in Kashmir. CIA Director George Tenet concluded years later that "The Pakistanis always knew more than they were telling us, and they had been singularly uncooperative in helping us run these guys down. . . . That meant not cooperating with us in hunting down bin Laden and his organization."²⁵

In the wake of 9/11, the Bush administration delivered a set of ultimatums warning Pakistan that it was either an ally or enemy in the coming fight. Despite internal opposition, Pervez Musharraf agreed to the U.S. demands and, on his own initiative, even replaced the religiously conservative head of the ISI and his cronies on October 8. Part of Pakistan's responsibility was to intercept al Qaeda and Taliban fighters fleeing into Pakistan. This request from Washington came with little advanced warning, and Pakistan's tribal areas on the Afghan order had been off limits to the Pakistani army since independence. Consequently, the best Musharraf

in every failed strategic manhunt, there has been a distinct inability to obtain intelligence from the local population

capture Sandino, who was able to slip across the border into Honduras whenever things grew too tenuous in Nicaragua's northern departments. Conversely, U.S. forces did not have a comparable indigenous ally during Operation *Just Cause*, but were able to corner Noriega by cutting off his possible avenues of escape during the invasion's initial hours, whether they were his personal yachts and planes or the potential sanctuaries in sympathetic embassies in Panama City. These cases demonstrate the importance of foreign sanctuaries and bilateral assistance in denying safe haven in strategic manhunts.

Given bin Laden's ability to slip across the boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan, a reliable partnership with Pakistan was critical for operational success. As with Mexico during the Punitive Expedition and Honduras during the Sandino affair, however, Pakistan proved an imperfect ally. Prior to 9/11, U.S. intelligence agencies had documented extensive links among Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) directorate, the Taliban, and bin Laden. Although

could manage was to deploy 4,000 "Frontier Forces" to the border, although due to poor logistics these troops did not arrive until mid-December. At the same time, Musharraf rejected allowing U.S. forces into Pakistan in a combat role. Thus, although about a hundred al Qaeda fighters were captured fleeing Tora Bora into Pakistan, this avenue of escape was far from sealed.

In case after case historically, the attitudes of the local population (and by extension the availability and reliability of intelligence and indigenous forces) and neighboring countries proves to be a more important variable in strategic manhunts than troop strength. If the target is perceived as a hero or a "Robin Hood" figure, as the peasants of Northern Mexico and Nicaragua viewed Pancho Villa and Sandino, or as the Habr Gidr clan in Mogadishu viewed Aideed, the protection offered by the local population will thwart almost any number of troops or satellites. Conversely, if the target has committed acts that make him detested in his area of operations—as was the case



U.S., Canadian, and Afghan forces secure landing zone

with Geronimo, Che, Noriega, Pablo Escobar, Saddam, and al-Zarqawi—the lack of sanctuaries and available intelligence will prove decisive. Given the reverence with which Pashtuns in eastern Afghanistan viewed bin Laden in 2001, it is easy to see why an increased U.S. troop presence would not have been decisive.

This is a deeply unsatisfying conclusion for U.S. policymakers as it suggests that some variables critical to operational success are not controlled by U.S. commanders at the outset of a campaign. Instead, factors inherent to the individual and the cultural milieu in which they operate—variables beyond our control at the outset of a strategic manhunt—may be more important. This is frustrating to our modern, cable-driven political culture as it denies the opposition party and pundits an easy target for second-guessing and ridicule.

Yet if the initial raid or strike to capture or kill the targeted individual fails, policymakers must have the patience to allow U.S. commanders to conduct social network analysis of the targeted individual or to reshape the human terrain. The same strategies that make for an effective counterinsurgency strategy also improve the odds of success in a strategic manhunt, or at least increase the probability of a strategically satisfactory outcome even if the quarry is never apprehended. As the 13-year hunt for bin Laden demonstrates, patience is as much of a virtue for strategic manhunts as it is for counterinsurgencies.

Another way policymakers plan for long-term aspects of strategic manhunts

is by preparing the human terrain well in advance of the decision to target an individual. Long-term investments in indigenous forces—especially in partner-nation special operations forces—and the development of human intelligence networks in strategically vital regions, can pay large dividends when emergencies occur that require intervention. Had the United States maintained deeper ties with Pashtun sources in eastern and southern Afghanistan rather than washing its hands of the war-torn nation in the 1990s, it is possible that Osama bin Laden would have been captured or killed well before that quiet night in May 2011. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ Peter Bergen, *The Osama I Know: An Oral History of al-Qaeda's Leader* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 335.

² See Gary Berntsen, *Jawbreaker: The Attack on Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda: A Personal Account by the CIA's Key Field Commander* (New York: Crown, 2005), 290, 306, 314; Mary Anne Weaver, "Lost at Tora Bora," *New York Times Magazine*, September 11, 2005, 54; and Bergen, *The Osama I Know*, 336.

³ Michael DeLong, *Inside CentCom: The Unvarnished Truth About the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2004), 55.

⁴ General Tommy Franks, USA, to the Senate Armed Services Committee, July 31, 2002, quoted in Berntsen, 314.

⁵ See DeLong, 55; and Dalton Fury, *Kill Bin Laden: A Delta Force Commander's Account of*

the Hunt for the World's Most Wanted Man (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 293.

⁶ Senate Foreign Relations Committee Majority Staff, *Tora Bora Revisited: How We Failed to Get Bin Laden and Why It Matters Today* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2009), 2.

⁷ Peter Bergen, *The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict Between America and Al-Qaeda* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 81.

⁸ Joseph J. Collins, "From the Ground Up," *Armed Forces Journal* (October 2006), 46.

⁹ John Upton Terrell, *Apache Chronicle* (New York: World Publishing, 1972), 383.

¹⁰ Julian C. Smith et al., *A Review of the Organization and Operations of the Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua* (n.p., n.d.), 30, as quoted in Neil Macauley, *The Sandino Affair* (Micanopy, FL: Wacahoota Press, 1967), 180.

¹¹ George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2007), 227. Emphasis added.

¹² Author interview with "Dalton Fury," April 22, 2010; and Fury, *Kill Bin Laden*, 293.

¹³ Sean Naylor, *Not A Good Day to Die: The Untold Story of Operation Anaconda* (New York: Berkely Books, 2005), 375.

¹⁴ "Elite Officer Recalls Bin Laden Hunt," *60 Minutes*, October 5, 2008, transcript available at <www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/10/02/60minutes/main4494937.shtml>.

¹⁵ Quoted in Philip Smucker, *Al Qaeda's Great Escape: The Military and the Media on Terror's Trail* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2004), 195.

¹⁶ Hayden quoted in Jason Ryan and Brian Ross, "CIA Chief: Bin Laden Alive, Worried About 'Own Security,'" ABC News, November 13, 2008.

¹⁷ John J. Pershing to Frederick Funston, March 25, 1916, Pershing Papers Box 372; and Herbert Malloy Mason, Jr., *The Great Pursuit: Pershing's Expedition to Destroy Pancho Villa* (New York: Konecky & Konecky, 1970), 83.

¹⁸ Roger Cressey quoted in Peter Bergen, "The Long Hunt for Osama," *Atlantic Monthly*, October 2004, 99.

¹⁹ Milton Bearden quoted in *PBS Frontline: Hunting Bin Laden*, 2001, available at <www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/binladen/interviews/bearden.html>.

²⁰ Bergen, *The Longest War*, 41.

²¹ See Sydney J. Freedberg, Jr., "Special, Short, and Stealthy: The United States Military Actually Has Some Successes Under Its Belt in Snatch-and-Grab Expeditionary Missions," *National Journal*, September 29, 2001, 298.

²² Fury, 190.

²³ Mohammed Musa quoted in Smucker, 110–111.

²⁴ Fury, 287.

²⁵ Tenet, 139–140.