

Air Power Against Terror: America S Conduct Of Operation Enduring Freedom

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the United States' military response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, was launched on October 7, 2001. The operation, initially aimed at toppling the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and disrupting Al-Qaeda's terrorist network, evolved into a protracted military engagement that spanned over two decades. This article examines America's conduct of OEF, assessing its objectives, strategies, and consequences.

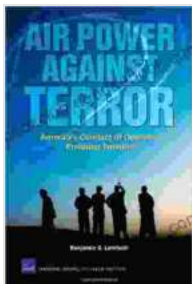
Objectives of OEF

The primary objectives of OEF were:

- **Topple the Taliban regime in Afghanistan:** The Taliban, a fundamentalist Islamic movement, provided safe haven to Al-Qaeda, the terrorist organization responsible for the 9/11 attacks. By overthrowing the Taliban, the United States sought to eliminate Al-Qaeda's base of operations.
- **Capture or kill Osama bin Laden:** Bin Laden, the leader of Al-Qaeda, was the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks. His capture or elimination was a top priority for the United States.
- **Disrupt Al-Qaeda's terrorist network:** OEF aimed to destroy Al-Qaeda's infrastructure, disrupt its communications, and capture or kill its members to prevent future terrorist attacks.

Strategies Employed

The United States employed a combination of military and diplomatic strategies to achieve its objectives in OEF.



Air Power Against Terror: America's Conduct of Operation Enduring Freedom by Benjamin S. Lambeth

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- **Military force:** The United States launched airstrikes against Taliban and Al-Qaeda targets, deployed ground troops to engage in combat operations, and established military bases in Afghanistan.
- **Coalition building:** The United States formed a coalition of over 40 countries to support the OEF mission. These countries provided troops, logistical support, and financial assistance.
- **Diplomacy:** The United States engaged in diplomatic efforts with the Afghan government and other stakeholders to build support for OEF and promote stability in Afghanistan.

Consequences of OEF

OEF had significant consequences for the United States, Afghanistan, and the global community.

For the United States:

- **Military casualties:** OEF resulted in the deaths of thousands of American troops. The physical and psychological toll on veterans and their families was substantial.
- **Financial costs:** The United States spent trillions of dollars on OEF, straining its budget and contributing to national debt.
- **Loss of trust:** The United States' conduct of OEF, particularly the use of torture and the invasion of Iraq, damaged its credibility and trust with allies and the global community.

For Afghanistan:

- **Political instability:** The overthrow of the Taliban led to a period of political instability in Afghanistan. The country faced challenges establishing a stable government and combating insurgent groups.
- **Civilian casualties:** Airstrikes and ground operations during OEF resulted in the deaths of thousands of Afghan civilians.
- **Failed state:** OEF did not fully achieve its objective of establishing a stable and prosperous Afghanistan. The country continued to struggle with poverty, corruption, and conflict.

For the Global Community:

- **Increased terrorism:** OEF did not eliminate the threat of terrorism. Instead, it triggered a backlash that led to the rise of extremist groups such as ISIS.

- **Destabilization of the Middle East:** The invasion of Iraq, a spin-off of OEF, destabilized the Middle East and contributed to regional conflicts.
- **** Erosion of international law:**** The United States' use of torture and its disregard for international humanitarian law during OEF eroded trust in the global legal framework.

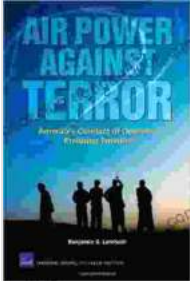
Lessons Learned

OEF served as a costly lesson in nation-building, counterterrorism, and the limits of military power. Key lessons learned include:

- **Complex environments:** Military interventions in complex and fragile societies often lead to unintended consequences.
- **Importance of local support:** Success in nation-building requires the support and cooperation of the local population.
- **Diplomacy and development:** Military action alone cannot solve complex social and political problems. Diplomacy and development assistance are essential for long-term stability.
- **Respect for international law:** Adherence to international law and humanitarian principles is crucial for maintaining legitimacy and credibility.
- **Need for exit strategies:** Planning for an orderly withdrawal is essential to prevent a protracted and costly military engagement.

Operation Enduring Freedom was a significant and complex chapter in American history. While it achieved some of its objectives, such as overthrowing the Taliban and killing Osama bin Laden, it also led to unintended consequences, including prolonged military engagement, loss

of trust, and the rise of extremist groups. The lessons learned from OEF are valuable for future military interventions and for understanding the complexities of counterterrorism and nation-building.



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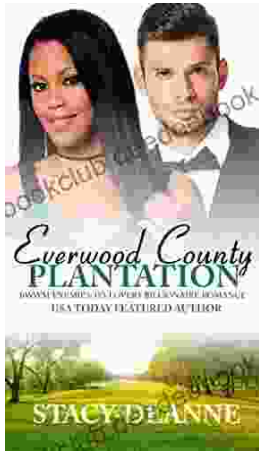
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