

LESSON #11: Iraqi Freedom & Operation Enduring Freedom

Slide #2: The Iraqi War: Background

Strong international opposition to the Saddam Hussein regime began after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The international community condemned the invasion, and in 1991 a military coalition led by the United States launched the Gulf War to expel Iraq from Kuwait. Following the Gulf War, the US and its allies tried to keep Saddam in check with a policy of containment. This policy involved numerous economic sanctions by the UN Security Council; the enforcement of Iraqi no-fly zones declared by the US and the UK to protect the Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan and Shias in the south from aerial attacks by the Iraqi government; and ongoing inspections to ensure Iraq's compliance with United Nations resolutions concerning Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

The inspections were carried out by the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM). UNSCOM, in cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency, worked to ensure that Iraq destroyed its chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons and facilities. In the decade following the Gulf War, the United Nations passed 16 Security Council resolutions calling for the complete elimination of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. Member states communicated their frustration over the years that Iraq was impeding the work of the special commission and failing to take seriously its disarmament obligations. Iraqi officials harassed the inspectors and obstructed their work, and in August 1998 the Iraqi government suspended cooperation with the inspectors completely, alleging that the inspectors were spying for the US. The spying allegations were later substantiated.

In October 1998, removing the Iraqi government became official U.S. foreign policy with enactment of the Iraq Liberation Act. The act provided \$97 million for Iraqi "democratic opposition organizations" to "establish a program to support a transition to democracy in Iraq." This legislation contrasted with the terms set out in United Nations Security Council Resolution 687, which focused on weapons and weapons programs and made no mention of regime change. One month after the passage of the Iraq Liberation Act, the US and UK launched a bombardment campaign of Iraq called Operation Desert Fox. The campaign's express rationale was to hamper Saddam Hussein's government's ability to produce chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, but U.S. intelligence personnel also hoped it would help weaken Saddam's grip on power.

Following the election of George W. Bush as president in 2000, the US moved towards a more aggressive Iraq policy. The Republican Party's campaign platform in the 2000 election called for "full implementation" of the Iraq Liberation Act as "a starting point" in a plan to "remove" Saddam. However, little formal movement towards an invasion occurred until the 11 September attacks.

Slide #4: Operation Desert Fox

Clinton administration officials said the aim of the mission was to "degrade" Iraq's ability to manufacture and use weapons of mass destruction, not to eliminate it. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was asked about the distinction while the operation was going on:

I don't think we're pretending that we can get everything, so this is – I think – we are being very honest about what our ability is. We are lessening, degrading his ability to use this. The

weapons of mass destruction are the threat of the future. I think the president explained very clearly to the American people that this is the threat of the 21st century. [...] What it means is that we know we can't get everything, but degrading is the right word.

The main targets of the bombing included weapons research and development installations, air defense systems, weapon and supply depots, and the barracks and command headquarters of Saddam's elite Republican Guard. Also, one of Saddam's lavish presidential palaces came under attack. Iraqi air defense batteries, unable to target the American and British jets, began to blanket the sky with near random bursts of flak fire. The air strikes continued unabated however, and cruise missile barrages launched by naval vessels added to the bombs dropped by the planes. By the fourth night, most of the specified targets had been damaged or destroyed and the operation was deemed a success and the air strikes ended.

Slide #12: Operation Iraqi Freedom

The first Central Intelligence Agency team entered Iraq on 10 July 2002. This team was composed of members of the CIA's Special Activities Division and was later joined by members of the US military's elite Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). Together, they prepared for an invasion by conventional forces. These efforts consisted of persuading the commanders of several Iraqi military divisions to surrender rather than oppose the invasion, and identifying all the initial leadership targets during very high risk reconnaissance missions.

Most importantly, their efforts organized the Kurdish Peshmerga to become the northern front of the invasion. Together this force defeated Ansar al-Islam in Iraqi Kurdistan before the invasion and then defeated the Iraqi army in the north. The battle against Ansar al-Islam, known as Operation Viking Hammer, led to the death of a substantial number of militants and the uncovering of a chemical weapons facility at Sargat.

At 5:34 a.m. Baghdad time on 20 March 2003 (9:34 pm, 19 March EST) the surprise military invasion of Iraq began. There was no declaration of war. The 2003 invasion of Iraq was led by U.S. Army General Tommy Franks, under the code-name "Operation Iraqi Freedom", the UK code-name Operation Telic, and the Australian code-name Operation Falconer. Coalition forces also cooperated with Kurdish Peshmerga forces in the north. Approximately forty other governments, the "Coalition of the Willing," participated by providing troops, equipment, services, security, and special forces, with 248,000 soldiers from the United States, 45,000 British soldiers, 2,000 Australian soldiers and 194 Polish soldiers from Special Forces unit GROM sent to Kuwait for the invasion. The invasion force was also supported by Iraqi Kurdish militia troops, estimated to number upwards of 70,000.

"First, ending the regime of Saddam Hussein. Second, to identify, isolate, and eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Third, to search for, to capture, and to drive out terrorists from that country. Fourth, to collect such intelligence as we can relate to terrorist networks. Fifth, to collect such intelligence as we can relate to the global network of illicit weapons of mass destruction. Sixth, to end sanctions and to immediately deliver humanitarian support to the displaced and to many needy Iraqi citizens. Seventh, to secure Iraq's oil fields and resources, which belong to the Iraqi people. And last, to help the Iraqi people create conditions for a transition to a representative self-government."

The invasion was a quick and decisive operation encountering major resistance, though not what the U.S., British and other forces expected. The Iraqi regime had prepared to fight both a

conventional and irregular, asymmetric warfare at the same time, conceding territory when faced with superior conventional forces, largely armored, but launching smaller scale attacks in the rear using fighters dressed in civilian and paramilitary clothes.

Coalition troops launched air and amphibious assaults on the Al-Faw peninsula to secure the oil fields there and the important ports, supported by warships of the Royal Navy, Polish Navy, and Royal Australian Navy. The United States Marine Corps' 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, attached to 3 Commando Brigade and the Polish Special Forces unit GROM, attacked the port of Umm Qasr, while the British Army's 16 Air Assault Brigade secured the oil fields in southern Iraq.

The heavy armor of the U.S. 3rd Infantry Division moved westward and then northward through the western desert toward Baghdad, while the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force moved more easterly along Highway 1 through the center of the country, and 1 (UK) Armoured Division moved northward through the eastern marshland. The U.S. 1st Marine Division fought through Nasiriyah in a battle to seize the major road junction. The United States Army 3rd Infantry Division defeated Iraqi forces entrenched in and around Talil Airfield.

With the Nasiriyah and Talil Airfields secured in its rear, the 3rd Infantry Division supported by the 101st Airborne Division continued its attack north toward Najaf and Karbala, but a severe sand storm slowed the coalition advance and there was a halt to consolidate and make sure the supply lines were secure. When they started again they secured the Karbala Gap, a key approach to Baghdad, then secured the bridges over the Euphrates River, and U.S. forces poured through the gap on to Baghdad. In the middle of Iraq, the 1st Marine Division fought its way to the eastern side of Baghdad and prepared for the attack to seize the city.

On 9 April, Baghdad fell, ending Saddam's 24-year rule. U.S. forces seized the deserted Ba'ath Party ministries and, according to some reports later disputed by the Marines on the ground, stage-managed the tearing down of a huge iron statue of Saddam, photos and video of which became symbolic of the event, although later controversial. Allegedly, though not seen in the photos or heard on the videos, shot with a zoom lens, was the chant of the inflamed crowd for Muqtada al-Sadr, the radical Shiite cleric. The abrupt fall of Baghdad was accompanied by a widespread outpouring of gratitude toward the invaders, but also massive civil disorder, including the looting of public and government buildings and drastically increased crime.

According to the Pentagon, 250,000 short tons (230,000 t) (of 650,000 short tons (590,000 t) total) of ordnance was looted, providing a significant source of ammunition for the Iraqi insurgency. The invasion phase concluded when Tikrit, Saddam's hometown, fell with little resistance to the U.S. Marines of Task Force Tripoli.

In the invasion phase of the war (19 March – 30 April), an estimated 9,200 Iraqi combatants were killed by coalition forces along with an estimated 3,750 non-combatants, i.e. civilians who did not take up arms. Coalition forces reported the death in combat of 139 U.S. military personnel and 33 UK military personnel.

Slide #13: Post Invasion

On 1 May 2003, President Bush visited the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln operating a few miles west of San Diego, California. At sunset, he held his nationally televised "Mission Accomplished" speech, delivered before the sailors and airmen on the flight deck. Bush

declared the end of major combat operations in Iraq, due to the defeat of Iraq's conventional forces, while maintaining that much still needed to be done.

Nevertheless, Saddam Hussein remained at large, and significant pockets of resistance remained. After Bush's speech, coalition forces noticed a flurry of attacks on its troops began to gradually increase in various regions, such as the "Sunni Triangle". The initial Iraqi insurgents were supplied by hundreds of weapons caches created before the invasion by the Iraqi army and Republican Guard.

Initially, Iraqi resistance (described by the coalition as "Anti-Iraqi Forces") largely stemmed from fedayeen and Saddam/Ba'ath Party loyalists, but soon religious radicals and Iraqis angered by the occupation contributed to the insurgency. The three governorates with the highest number of attacks were Baghdad, Al Anbar, and Saladin. Those three governorates account for 35% of the population, but by December 2006 they were responsible for 73% of U.S. military deaths and an even higher percentage of recent U.S. military deaths (about 80%).

Insurgents used various guerrilla tactics, including mortars, missiles, suicide attacks, snipers, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), car bombs, small arms fire (usually with assault rifles), and RPGs (rocket propelled grenades), as well as sabotage against the petroleum, water, and electrical infrastructures.

Coalition efforts to establish post-invasion Iraq commenced after the fall of Saddam's regime. The coalition nations, together with the United Nations, began to work to establish a stable, compliant democratic state capable of defending itself from non-coalition forces, as well as overcoming internal divisions. Meanwhile, coalition military forces launched several operations around the Tigris River peninsula and in the Sunni Triangle. A series of similar operations were launched throughout the summer in the Sunni Triangle. In late 2003, the intensity and pace of insurgent attacks began to increase. A sharp surge in guerrilla attacks ushered in an insurgent effort that was termed the "Ramadan Offensive", as it coincided with the beginning of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

To counter this offensive, coalition forces began to use air power and artillery again for the first time since the end of the invasion, by striking suspected ambush sites and mortar launching positions. Surveillance of major routes, patrols, and raids on suspected insurgents were stepped up. In addition, two villages, including Saddam's birthplace of al-Auja and the small town of Abu Hishma, were surrounded by barbed wire and carefully monitored.

Slide #14: Operation Red Dawn

In summer 2003, the multinational forces focused on capturing the remaining leaders of the former government. On 22 July, a raid by the U.S. 101st Airborne Division and soldiers from Task Force 20 killed Saddam's sons (Uday and Qusay) along with one of his grandsons. In all, over 300 top leaders of the former government were killed or captured, as well as numerous lesser functionaries and military personnel.

Most significantly, Saddam Hussein himself was captured on 13 December 2003, on a farm near Tikrit in Operation Red Dawn. The operation was conducted by the United States Army's 4th Infantry Division and members of Task Force 121. Intelligence on Saddam's whereabouts came from his family members and former bodyguards.

With the capture of Saddam and a drop in the number of insurgent attacks, some concluded the multinational forces were prevailing in the fight against the insurgency. The provisional government began training the new Iraqi security forces intended to police the country, and the United States promised over \$20 billion in reconstruction money in the form of credit against Iraq's future oil revenues. Oil revenue was also used for rebuilding schools and for work on the electrical and refining infrastructure.

Shortly after the capture of Saddam, elements left out of the Coalition Provisional Authority began to agitate for elections and the formation of an Iraqi Interim Government. Most prominent among these was the Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. The Coalition Provisional Authority opposed allowing democratic elections at this time. The insurgents stepped up their activities. The two most turbulent centers were the area around Fallujah and the poor Shia sections of cities from Baghdad (Sadr City) to Basra in the south.

Slide #15: Insurgency Expands

The start of 2004 was marked by a relative lull in violence. Insurgent forces reorganised during this time, studying the multinational forces' tactics and planning a renewed offensive. However, violence did increase during the Iraq Spring Fighting of 2004 with foreign fighters from around the Middle East as well as al-Qaeda in Iraq, an affiliated al-Qaeda group led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, helping to drive the insurgency.

As the insurgency grew there was a distinct change in targeting from the coalition forces towards the new Iraqi Security Forces, as hundreds of Iraqi civilians and police were killed over the next few months in a series of massive bombings. An organized Sunni insurgency, with deep roots and both nationalist and Islamist motivations, was becoming more powerful throughout Iraq. The Shia Mahdi Army also began launching attacks on coalition targets in an attempt to seize control from Iraqi security forces. The southern and central portions of Iraq were beginning to erupt in urban guerrilla combat as multinational forces attempted to keep control and prepared for a counteroffensive.

The most serious fighting of the war so far began on 31 March 2004, when Iraqi insurgents in Fallujah ambushed a Blackwater USA convoy led by four U.S. private military contractors who were providing security for food caterers Eurest Support Services. The four armed contractors, Scott Helvenston, Jerko Zovko, Wesley Batalona, and Michael Teague, were killed with grenades and small arms fire. Subsequently, their bodies were dragged from their vehicles by local people, beaten, set ablaze, and their burned corpses hung over a bridge crossing the Euphrates. Photos of the event were released to news agencies worldwide, causing a great deal of indignation and moral outrage in the United States, and prompting an unsuccessful "pacification" of the city: the First Battle of Fallujah in April 2004.

The offensive was resumed in November 2004 in the bloodiest battle of the war: the Second Battle of Fallujah, described by the U.S. military as "the heaviest urban combat (that they had been involved in) since the battle of Hue City in Vietnam." During the assault, U.S. forces used white phosphorus as an incendiary weapon against insurgent personnel, attracting controversy. The 46-day battle resulted in a victory for the coalition, with 95 U.S. soldiers killed along with approximately 1,350 insurgents. Fallujah was totally devastated during the fighting, though civilian casualties were low, as they had mostly fled before the battle.

Another major event of that year was the revelation of widespread prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib, which received international media attention in April 2004. First reports of the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse, as well as graphic pictures showing U.S. military personnel taunting and abusing Iraqi prisoners, came to public attention from a 60 Minutes II news report (28 April) and a Seymour M. Hersh article in The New Yorker (posted online on 30 April.) Military correspondent Thomas Ricks claimed that these revelations dealt a blow to the moral justifications for the occupation in the eyes of many people, especially Iraqis, and was a turning point in the war.

On 31 January, Iraqis elected the Iraqi Transitional Government in order to draft a permanent constitution. Although some violence and a widespread Sunni boycott marred the event, most of the eligible Kurd and Shia populace participated. On 4 February, Paul Wolfowitz announced that 15,000 U.S. troops whose tours of duty had been extended in order to provide election security would be pulled out of Iraq by the next month. February to April proved to be relatively peaceful months compared to the carnage of November and January, with insurgent attacks averaging 30 a day from the prior average of 70.

The Battle of Abu Ghraib on 2 April 2005 was an attack on United States forces at Abu Ghraib prison, which consisted of heavy mortar and rocket fire, under which an estimated 80–120 armed insurgents attacked with grenades, small arms, and two vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED). The U.S. force's munitions ran so low that orders to fix bayonets were given in preparation for hand-to-hand fighting. It was considered to be the largest coordinated assault on a U.S. base since the Vietnam War.

Hopes for a quick end to the insurgency and a withdrawal of U.S. troops were dashed in May, Iraq's bloodiest month since the invasion. Suicide bombers, believed to be mainly disheartened Iraqi Sunni Arabs, Syrians and Saudis, tore through Iraq. Their targets were often Shia gatherings or civilian concentrations of Shias. As a result, over 700 Iraqi civilians died in that month, as well as 79 U.S. soldiers.

The summer of 2005 saw fighting around Baghdad and at Tall Afar in northwestern Iraq as U.S. forces tried to seal off the Syrian border. This led to fighting in the autumn in the small towns of the Euphrates valley between the capital and that border. A referendum was held on 15 October in which the new Iraqi constitution was ratified. An Iraqi National Assembly was elected in December, with participation from the Sunnis as well as the Kurds and Shia. Insurgent attacks increased in 2005 with 34,131 recorded incidents, compared to a total 26,496 for the previous year.

Slide #12

The Soviet–Afghan War lasted over nine years, from December 1979 to February 1989. Insurgent groups known collectively as the mujahideen, as well as smaller Maoist groups, fought a guerrilla war against the Soviet Army and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan government, mostly in the rural countryside. The mujahideen groups were backed primarily by the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, making it a Cold War proxy war. Between 562,000 and 2,000,000 civilians were killed and millions of Afghans fled the country as refugees, mostly to Pakistan and Iran.

The war derives from a 1978 coup when Afghanistan's communist party took power, initiating a series of radical modernization reforms throughout the country. These reforms were deeply

unpopular among the more traditional rural population and established power structures. The repressive nature of Soviet Afghanistan, which vigorously suppressed opposition including the execution of thousands of political prisoners, led to the rise of anti-government armed groups and by April 1979 large parts of the country were in open rebellion. The ruling party itself experienced deep rivalries, and in September 1979 the President, Nur Mohammad Taraki, was murdered under orders of the second-in-command, Hafizullah Amin, which soured relations with the Soviet Union. Eventually the Soviet government, under leader Leonid Brezhnev, decided to deploy the 40th Army on December 24, 1979. Arriving in the capital Kabul, they staged a coup, killing president Amin and installing Soviet loyalist Babrak Karmal from a rival faction. The deployment had been variously called an "invasion" (by Western media and the rebels) or a legitimate supporting intervention (by the Soviet Union and the Afghan government) on the basis of the Brezhnev Doctrine.

In January 1980, foreign ministers from 34 nations of the Islamic Conference adopted a resolution demanding "the immediate, urgent and unconditional withdrawal of Soviet troops" from Afghanistan. The UN General Assembly passed a resolution protesting the Soviet intervention by a vote of 104 (for) to 18 (against), with 18 abstentions and 12 members of the 152-nation Assembly absent or not participating in the vote; only Soviet allies Angola, East Germany and Vietnam, along with India, supported the intervention. Afghan insurgents began to receive massive amounts of aid and military training in neighboring Pakistan and China, paid for primarily by the United States and Arab monarchies in the Persian Gulf. As documented by the National Security Archive, "the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) played a significant role in asserting U.S. influence in Afghanistan by funding military operations designed to frustrate the Soviet invasion of that country. CIA covert action worked through Pakistani intelligence services to reach Afghan rebel groups." Soviet troops occupied the cities and main arteries of communication, while the mujahideen waged guerrilla war in small groups operating in the almost 80 percent of the country that was outside government and Soviet control, almost exclusively being the rural countryside. The Soviets used their air power to deal harshly with both rebels and civilians, levelling villages to deny safe haven to the mujahideen, destroying vital irrigation ditches, and laying millions of land mines.

The international community imposed numerous sanctions and embargoes against the Soviet Union, and the U.S. led a boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics held in Moscow. The boycott and sanctions exacerbated Cold War tensions and enraged the Soviet government, which later led a revenge boycott of the 1984 Olympics held in Los Angeles. The Soviets initially planned to secure towns and roads, stabilize the government under new leader Karmal, and withdraw within six months or a year. But they were met with fierce resistance from the guerillas, and were stuck in a bloody war that lasted nine years.

In September 1986 the National Compromise Commission (NCC) was established on the orders of Najibullah. The NCC's goal was to contact counter-revolutionaries "in order to complete the Saur Revolution in its new phase." An estimated 40,000 rebels were contacted by the government. At the end of 1986, Najibullah called for a six-month ceasefire and talks between the various opposition forces, as part of his policy of National Reconciliation. The discussions, if fruitful, would have led to the establishment of a coalition government and be the end of the PDPA's monopoly on power. The programme failed, but the government was able to recruit disillusioned mujahideen fighters as government militias. The National Reconciliation did lead

an increasing number of urban dwellers to support his rule, and to the stabilisation of the Afghan defence forces.

While Najibullah may have been the de jure leader of Afghanistan, Soviet advisers still did most of the work after Najibullah took power. As Gorbachev remarked "We're still doing everything ourselves [...]. That's all our people know how to do. They've tied Najibullah hand and foot." Fikryat Tabeev, the Soviet ambassador to Afghanistan, was accused of acting like a Governor General by Gorbachev, and he was recalled from Afghanistan in July 1986. But while Gorbachev called for the end of Soviet management of Afghanistan, he could not resist doing some managing himself. At a Soviet Politburo meeting, Gorbachev said, "It's difficult to build a new building out of old material [...] I hope to God that we haven't made a mistake with Najibullah." As time would prove, Najibullah's aims were the opposite of the Soviet Union's; Najibullah was opposed to a Soviet withdrawal, the Soviet Union wanted a withdrawal. This was understandable, since the Afghan military was on the brink of dissolution. Najibullah thought his only means of survival was to retain the Soviet presence. In July 1986 six Soviet regiments, up to 15,000 troops, were withdrawn from Afghanistan. The aim of this early withdrawal was, according to Gorbachev, to show the world that the Soviet leadership was serious about leaving Afghanistan. The Soviets told the United States Government that they were planning to withdraw, but the United States Government didn't believe it. When Gorbachev met with Ronald Reagan during his visit the United States, Reagan called, bizarrely, for the dissolution of the Afghan army.

On 14 April the Afghan and Pakistani governments signed the 1988 Geneva Accords, and the Soviet Union and the United States signed as guarantors; the treaty specifically stated that the Soviet military had to withdraw from Afghanistan by 15 February 1989. During a Politburo meeting Eduard Shevardnadze said "We will leave the country in a deplorable situation", and talked further about economic collapse, and the need to keep at least 10,000 to 15,000 troops in Afghanistan. Vladimir Kryuchkov, the KGB Chairman, supported this position. This stance, if implemented, would be a betrayal of the Geneva Accords just signed. Najibullah was against any type of Soviet withdrawal. A few Soviet troops remained after the Soviet withdrawal; for instance, parachutists who protected the Soviet embassy staff, military advisors and special forces and reconnaissance troops still operated in the "outlying provinces", especially along the Afghan–Soviet border.

Pakistan, under Zia ul-Haq, continued to support the mujahideen even though it was a contravention of the Geneva Accords. At the beginning most observers expected the Najibullah government to collapse immediately, and to be replaced with an Islamic fundamentalist government. The Central Intelligence Agency stated in a report, that the new government would be ambivalent, or even worse hostile, towards the United States. Almost immediately after the Soviet withdrawal, the Battle of Jalalabad was fought between Afghan government forces and the mujahideen; the government forces, to the surprise of many, repulsed the attack and won the battle. This trend would not continue, and by the summer of 1990, the Afghan government forces were on the defensive again. By the beginning of 1991, the government controlled only 10 percent of Afghanistan, the eleven-year Siege of Khost had ended in a mujahideen victory and the morale of the Afghan military finally collapsed. It didn't help that the Soviet Union was falling apart itself; hundreds of millions of dollars of yearly economic aid to Najibullah's government from Moscow dried up.

In March, Najibullah offered his government's immediate resignation, and following an agreement with the United Nations (UN), his government was replaced by an interim government. In mid-April Najibullah accepted a UN plan to hand power to a seven-man council. A few days later, on 14 April, Najibullah was forced to resign on the orders of the Watan Party, because of the loss of Bagram airbase and the town of Charikar. Abdul Rahim Hatef became acting head of state following Najibullah's resignation. Najibullah, not long before Kabul's fall, appealed to the UN for amnesty, which he was granted. But Najibullah was hindered by Abdul Rashid Dostum from escaping; instead, Najibullah sought haven in the local UN headquarters in Kabul.

Slide #15: Battle of Tora Bora

The Battle of Tora Bora was a military engagement that took place in the cave complex of Tora Bora, eastern Afghanistan, from December 6–17, 2001, during the opening stages of the United States invasion of Afghanistan. It was launched by the United States and its allies with the objective to capture or kill Osama bin Laden, the founder and leader of the militant organization al-Qaeda. al-Qaeda and bin Laden were suspected of being responsible for the September 11 attacks three months prior. Tora Bora is located in the White Mountains near the Khyber Pass. The U.S. stated that al-Qaeda had its headquarters there and that it was bin Laden's location at the time.

Slide #16: Operation Neptune Spear

Osama bin Laden, the founder and first leader of the Islamist terrorist group, Al-Qaeda, was killed in Pakistan on May 2, 2011, shortly after 1:00 am PKT(20:00 UTC, May 1) by United States Navy SEALs of the U.S. Naval Special Warfare Development Group (also known as DEVGRU or SEAL Team Six). The operation, code-named Operation Neptune Spear, was carried out in a CIA-led operation with Joint Special Operations Command, commonly known as JSOC, coordinating the Special Mission Units involved in the raid. In addition to SEAL Team Six, participating units under JSOC included the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne)—also known as "Night Stalkers"—and operators from the CIA's Special Activities Division, which recruits heavily from former JSOC Special Mission Units. The operation ended a nearly 10-year search for bin Laden, following his role in the September 11 attacks on the United States.

The raid on bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan was launched from Afghanistan. U.S. military officials said that after the raid U.S. forces took the body of bin Laden to Afghanistan for identification, then buried it at sea within 24 hours of his death in accordance with Islamic tradition.

Al-Qaeda confirmed the death on May 6 with posts made on militant websites, vowing to avenge the killing. Other Pakistani militant groups, including the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, vowed retaliation against the U.S. and against Pakistan for not preventing the operation. The raid was supported by over 90% of the American public, was welcomed by the United Nations, NATO, the European Union and a large number of governments, but was condemned by others, including two-thirds of the Pakistani public. Legal and ethical aspects of the killing, such as his not being taken alive despite being unarmed, were questioned by others, including Amnesty International. Also controversial was the decision not to release any photographic or DNA evidence of bin Laden's death to the public.

In the aftermath of the killing, Pakistani Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani formed a commission under Senior Justice Javed Iqbal to investigate the circumstances surrounding the attack. The resulting Abbottabad Commission Report, which revealed Pakistani state military and intelligence authorities' "collective failure" that enabled bin Laden to hide in Pakistan for nine years, was leaked to Al Jazeera on July 8, 2013.