

A different kind of war? September 11 and the United States' Afghan War

COLIN McINNES*

'This will be a different kind of conflict against a different kind of enemy'
(President George W. Bush, 15 September 2001)¹

Abstract. The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the US response have been widely described as heralding a new kind of war. For over a decade previous to 11 September, however, a body of literature had developed arguing that during the 1990s a new kind of warfare had begun to emerge for the West. This article examines whether 11 September and its immediate aftermath – the US campaign in Afghanistan – confirmed these trends, or whether it really did constitute a different kind of war. It does so through a four-part framework: that during the 1990s wars were localised; that the enemy was not a state but a regime or individual leader; that civilian deaths should be minimised; and that wars were fought on behalf of the West by professionals, but that the risks to these forces should also be minimised.

The terrorist attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001 and the US response have been widely described as heralding a new kind of war.² For over a decade previous to 11 September, however, a body of literature was developing concerning what Martin van Creveld has called 'the transformation of war' and Mary Kaldor 'new wars'.³ Although this literature is fairly disparate, it is united in arguing that during the 1990s a new kind of warfare began to emerge (or, for some, had already emerged). For much of the twentieth century war in the West had been dominated by the experience and the fear of total war. Even so-called 'limited wars'

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¹ 'Washington File: President Bush's radio address Sept. (sic) 15 on terrorist attacks', p. 1. Available at: <<http://www.usembassy.org.uk/bush76.html>>, accessed on 19 September 2001.

² See, for example Carl Conetta, *Strange Victory: A Critical Appraisal of Operation Enduring Freedom and the Afghanistan War*. Project on Defense Alternatives Research Monograph no. 6, 30 January 2002, p. 3 and fn. 2 p. 35. Available at: <<http://www.comw.org/pda/0201strangevic.html>>, accessed on 14 February 2002. For a dissenting view, see Lawrence Freedman, 'The Third World War?', *Survival*, 43:4 (Winter 2001), pp. 66–7.

³ Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: Free Press, 1991); Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (London: Polity, 1999). Other examples of this literature include: Lawrence Freedman, *The Revolution in Strategic Affairs* Adelphi Paper 318 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for IISS, 1998); Michael Ignatieff, *Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2000); Edward Luttwak, 'Towards Post-Heroic Warfare', *Foreign Affairs*, 74:3 (1995), pp. 109–22, and 'A Post-Heroic Military Policy', *Foreign Affairs*, 75:4 (1996), pp. 33–44; Colin McInnes, 'Spectator Sport Warfare', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 20:3 (2000), pp. 142–65. It is important to distinguish between the 'transformation of war' debate and that concerning the revolution in military affairs. The latter focuses largely upon the impact of technology, especially information technology, upon military means. The transformation of war debate looks at broader changes in the international system and in society, as well as changes in technology, upon the character and experience of war.

fought by Western powers outside Europe were fought in the shadow of total war. By the end of the Cold War, however, a consensus was emerging that major war between Western powers was obsolete and that the era of total war was over.⁴ The West still engaged in military operations on a regular basis but their character was fundamentally different.

What this article addresses is whether 11 September and its immediate aftermath – the US campaign in Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom – confirmed those trends which were emerging in the 1990s, or whether it really did constitute a different kind of war. Some caution must be used, not only due to the temporal proximity to the two events but also in generalising from such a limited base. Not least it is uncertain how the wider US-led ‘war against terrorism’ will develop. Nevertheless 11 September and Operation Enduring Freedom can be usefully compared with the ‘new wars’ of the 1990s. To do this, I adopt a four-point framework based on key features of Western military operations in the 1990s.⁵ The first of these is that wars no longer spread geographically but were localised, not only in terms of the fighting but in their impact as well. As a result the West intervened in conflicts *without* the risk of war spreading to the West itself. NATO’s intervention in Kosovo, American intervention in Somalia and Haiti, even coalition operations in the Gulf, did not lead to the war spreading to the West, nor was this risk seen as a serious possibility. In part the inability of local conflicts to escalate into more general war was because there was no global conflict into which they could be subsumed. During the Cold War, local conflicts such as those in the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and South-East Asia acquired global dimensions due to superpower rivalry. But the lack of a global conflict in the 1990s meant that there was no wider context for escalation. Wars also lacked escalatory potential due to the lack of military capabilities. Not only was the United States the sole military superpower, meaning that any conventional military conflict with it would almost certainly end in defeat, but few states possessed the capability to launch attacks outside their own region. The threat of long-range missiles developed by so-called rogue states was still some way off (nevertheless prompting a revival of interest in strategic defences), while terrorism appeared confined to the ‘threat within’.

The second element in the transformation of war concerns the nature of the enemy. In the age of total war the enemy was the opposing state and its people. Propaganda demonised not only enemy leaders but also enemy soldiers and society *en masse*. A ‘literature of atrocity’ appeared with the purpose of dehumanising the

⁴ For example, van Creveld, *Transformation of War*; Carl Kayser, ‘Is War Obsolete?’, *International Security*, 14:4 (1990), pp. 42–64; Michael Mandelbaum, ‘Is Major War Obsolete?’, *Survival*, 40: 4 (1998/9), pp. 20–38; John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: the Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

⁵ This analysis is taken from my *Spectator-Sport War: The West and Contemporary Conflict* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), especially pp. 51–78.

⁶ See for example, Daniel Pick, *War Machine: The Rationalization of Slaughter in the Modern Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 145; Samuel Hynes, *The Soldier’s Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (London: Pimlico, 1998), p. 225. There is some evidence questioning the extent to which this was always the case. That a people rather than regime was identified as the enemy varied somewhat even in the two World Wars. John Dower for example has argued that in the Second World War the Americans viewed the Nazi regime as the enemy while ordinary Germans were not held to blame. At the same time Americans viewed the Japanese people as the enemy. John Dower, *War Without Mercy* (London: Faber, 1986).

enemy.⁶ On the Eastern Front in the Second World War, the Germans *en masse* were seen as the enemy by the Soviets; for Germany the Jewish people were to be eradicated in their entirety; while the willingness of the British to bomb German cities (and to a lesser extent, German bombing of British cities) suggests that the people were considered to be the enemy. During the 1990s however, the enemy was no longer portrayed as the state but as a regime or even an individual leader. The comments of President Clinton during the Kosovo crisis are typical: 'Our quarrel is not with the Serbs in Serbia, it is not with the Serbs in Kosovo, it is not with Serbian Americans; it is with the leadership who believes it is alright to kill people and to uproot them and to destroy their family records and to erase any record of their presence in a land simply because of their ethnic heritage'.⁷ In Britain, the Foreign Secretary Robin Cook made a similar point in a message to the Serb people: '[NATO's bombing] is not intended against the Serbian people. It is not intended to undermine your country . . . our objective has been to strike against the power-base of President Milosevic . . . I bitterly regret having to enter into conflict with your country. It started because President Milosevic chose to ignore our warnings and conduct the most awful cruelty in Kosovo. It can end when he calls a halt to that cruelty, and lets the people of Kosovo, and the people of Yugoslavia, have the peaceful and prosperous future they deserve.'⁸ In this shift from counter-state to counter-regime, Western politicians explicitly distance themselves from presenting the people – Serbs, Somalis, Iraqis or whomever – as the enemy. Indeed the people are often presented as suffering under a repressive regime. The target therefore is not the state but the leadership, what it values and its ability to maintain a grip on power.

Third, and closely related to this, was the attempt to minimise collateral damage. Considerable efforts were made to avoid causing collateral damage, efforts which were much publicised by Western leaders. US Secretary of Defense William Cohen commented about the 1998 air strikes against Iraq, for example, that 'We've taken great care to minimize casualties amongst innocent civilians in our strikes. . . . To the extent that there are civilian casualties, only Saddam and his brutally destructive regime are to blame'.⁹ After the first night of NATO bombing in the Kosovo conflict, Prime Minister Tony Blair reported 'we have done everything we can to minimise civilian damage'.¹⁰ Despite the effort given over to minimising collateral damage, mistakes still occurred. The strong reaction to such mistakes was in part

⁷ President William S. Clinton, 'Address to humanitarian relief organisations, Dearborn, Michigan, 16 April 1999', p. 1. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/www/policy_remarks/1999/990416_clinton_kosovo.html>, accessed on 12 June 1999.

⁸ Robin Cook, 'Message to the Serb people', FCO News, 1 April 1999. Available at: <<http://195.166.119.98/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029391629&a=KArticle&aid=1013618396812>>, accessed on 25 September 2002.

⁹ William S. Cohen, 'Department of Defense News Briefing, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), 19 December 1998', p. 1. Available at: <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Dec1998/t12201998_t1219coh.html>, accessed on 12 June 2002.

¹⁰ 'Prime minister reports on first night of Operation "Allied Force"'. Edited transcript of doorstep interview by the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, Berlin, 25 March 1999. Available at: <<http://195.166.119.98/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029391629&a=KArticle&aid=1013618396569>>, accessed on 25 September 2002.

due to raised expectations – that when the rhetoric of precision was coupled to powerful images of bombs hitting targets with unnerving accuracy, an expectation developed that collateral damage should not occur. This however can only be a partial explanation. After all, it was not the West that suffered from collateral damage but the enemy. Part of the explanation therefore has to do with the changed identification of the enemy. If the enemy was no longer the people but a regime or leadership, then bombs that missed did not hit the ‘enemy’ but innocent civilians. In the Second World War there were few qualms about causing collateral damage because ultimately it was still the enemy that suffered. But when bombs missed their targets in Belgrade or Baghdad in the 1990s, it was the innocent and the vulnerable that suffered. Another part of the explanation is that a tacit bargain had been struck whereby, if the enemy population was no longer targeted then Western society similarly should not be placed at risk. If the West attacked civilian targets or caused collateral damage, then this might have made Western society a legitimate target; such actions would have invited retaliation in kind. But by avoiding enemy civilians and by minimising collateral damage, the West may have been encouraging, consciously or not, the enemy to reciprocate and create a norm of non-combatant immunity.¹¹

Finally, if society participated in war during the age of total war, then in these new wars it had no such desire. Instead society spectated. Wars were no longer fought by nations in arms, rather they were fought by representatives on the field of battle. War was no longer an obligation of citizenship but the business of professionals. Those involved had chosen to be so through a career choice and accepted unlimited liability as part of their professional contract. By making war the business of professionals, Western societies absolved themselves from some of the responsibility of placing them in harm’s way. For those involved, war was their chosen occupation and death and injury an occupational hazard. The social contract that formed part of Clausewitz’s trinitarian perspective on war was replaced by a business relationship.¹² The costs of war were also reduced by the comparatively small numbers involved, usually a few thousand.¹³ Wars were fought by a small fraction of the West, limiting not only exposure to suffering but also the sense of participation and shared endeavour. But even though the numbers involved were small the political impact of casualties might nevertheless be considerable: the military may be our representatives, but they are *our*

¹¹ This norm is also codified in international humanitarian law, as recently seen in the opinion given by the International Court of Justice on nuclear weapons. See Theo Farrell and Helene Lambert, ‘Courting Controversy: International Law, National Norms and American Nuclear Use’, *Review of International Studies*, 27:1 (2000), pp. 309–26.

¹² Martin Shaw, *Post-Military Society* (London: Polity, 1991); see also Christopher Coker, *Humane Warfare* (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹³ Although there were exceptions to this, most notably the 1990/1 Gulf War which saw some two million service personnel deployed by the coalition. See Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, vol. 4: *The Gulf War* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996), p. 114. Interestingly, the United Task Force deployment to Somalia at the end of 1992 is often portrayed as a major deployment, but the numbers involved – some 28,000 US troops – pale into insignificance with Desert Storm and were roughly half of the number of British casualties on the infamous first day of the Somme. Somalia may have been a major deployment in the context of the 1990s, but in the context of total war it was slight.

representatives. In Bosnia and Somalia each American soldier was politically significant and as a consequence their exposure to risk was also minimised.¹⁴

September 11

At 08.45 local time on 11 September 2001, a hijacked American Airlines passenger jet was flown into the north tower of the World Trade Center in New York City. Eighteen minutes later a second hijacked aircraft was flown into the south tower. Just under an hour after the first attack, a third hijacked aircraft was flown into the Pentagon in Washington DC causing part of it to collapse. At 10.05 the south tower of the World Trade Center collapsed, followed at 10.28 by the north. At 10.10 a fourth hijacked aircraft crashed in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, south of Pittsburgh.¹⁵ It was immediately apparent that the death toll from these concerted attacks would be high, the shock compounded by the fact that the vast majority would be ordinary citizens working in two of the West's major cities. The peculiarly evocative images – of a clear blue sky, gleaming aircraft, white buildings, the black smoke and red fireballs from impact; of the almost graceful collapse of both towers; of the survivors, some barely recognisable as human beings, emerging from the devastation; of the cloud of dust and debris obscuring the lower half of Manhattan – were transmitted globally by a media quickly on the scene. Almost as evocative was the rhetoric that followed, not least the analogies with Pearl Harbor, suggesting a fundamental transformation in American foreign policy as well as in the nature of threats faced by the United States.¹⁶

¹⁴ Cori Dauber, 'Implications of the Weinberger Doctrine for American Military Intervention in a Post-Desert Storm age', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 22:3 (2001), pp. 76–8. On casualty intolerance, see James Burk, 'Public Support for Peacekeeping in Lebanon and Somalia: Assessing the Casualties Hypothesis', *Political Science Quarterly*, 114:1 (1999), pp. 53–78. Clearly casualty intolerance is a limitation rather than an absolute, and if interests and consensus are high, then states may be willing to accept high casualties (as the United States was in the Gulf War). But when either interests or consensus are missing, then this acceptance may be low and the loss of even a few service personnel will be sufficient to force a change in policy over military involvement. There is, however, some evidence to suggest that public tolerance for casualties is higher than nervous administrations give it credit for. Theo Farrell, for example, concludes that in Somalia 'The American public did not give up, its leaders did'. Theo Farrell, 'America's Misguided Mission', *International Affairs*, 76:3 (2000), p. 591.

¹⁵ The events were widely reported in the broadsheets on the following day. The account here is taken from the CNN chronology, available at <<http://cnn.com/2001/US/09/11/chronology.attack>>, accessed on 28 May 2002, and from that given by the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in his statement to the House of Commons on 14 September 2001. 'We need to mourn the dead; and then act to protect the living', Statement by the Prime Minister 14 September 2001', p. 2. Available at: <<http://www.number-10.gov.uk/news>>, accessed on 19 September 2001. It was speculated, not least by the US Administration itself, that the target for the third aircraft had not been the Pentagon but the White House. See 'Washington File: Powell calls for global coalition against terrorism', 12 September 2001, p. 5. Available at <<http://www.usembassy.org.uk/terror141.html>>, accessed on 19 September 2001.

¹⁶ For a discussion of this view, see Michael Cox, 'American Power Before and After 11 September: Dizzy with Success?', *International Affairs*, 78:2 (2002), pp. 261–76. For dissenting views see John G. Ikenberry, 'American Grand Strategy in the Age of Terror', *Survival*, 43:4 (Winter 2001), pp. 19–34. Steve Smith, 'The United States will emerge from this as a more dominant world power', *The Times*, 19 September 2001. Stanley Hoffman, 'On the War', *The New York Review of Books*, 1 November 2001. Available at: <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/14660>>, accessed on 9 January 2002.

To a certain extent such attacks had been presaged. In 2000 the US National Commission on Terrorism had reported that ‘Today’s terrorists seek to inflict mass casualties, and they are attempting to do so both overseas and on American soil’.¹⁷ In April 2001, the US State Department began its report *Patterns of Global Terrorism* by arguing that ‘terrorism continues to pose a clear and present danger to the international community’.¹⁸ Both reports cited the Taliban regime in Afghanistan as a sponsor of terrorism, while the State Department’s *Patterns of Global Terrorism* report specifically mentioned Osama bin Laden.¹⁹ Prior to 11 September, at least one FBI agent had raised concerns over Middle Eastern enrolments at US flight schools and just weeks before 11 September the President himself received a briefing on the possibility of an imminent attack.²⁰ Attacks against US targets were also hardly new, particularly the 1998 attacks against embassies in east Africa (which killed 224 people, including 12 Americans, and injured perhaps 5,000 more), the 12 October 2000 attack against the USS Cole (which killed 17 US sailors) and the thwarted attack over the Millennium. Nor was the attempted hijacking of US aircraft new – in 1995 a conspiracy to hijack eleven US aircraft simultaneously over the Pacific had also been thwarted. Most tellingly the World Trade Center had itself been a target of terrorist attack in 1993, with six killed and over a thousand wounded.²¹ To a certain extent, what was surprising on 11 September 2001 was the means used – the National Commission on Terrorism for example had identified a number of possible means of terrorist attack including bio-terrorism and cyber attacks, but not hijacked aircraft being flown into landmark buildings.²² But perhaps most shocking was the combination of the scale of the loss of civilian life, the fact that this was accomplished in the West itself (and particularly in the United States) and the live television coverage – on 11 September most of the world became spectators of terrorism.

Was this war? Initially there was confusion within the Bush Administration over whether the attacks constituted an act of war. US Attorney General Ashcroft on 11 September talked of bringing ‘the people responsible for these acts, these crimes, to justice.’²³ On the same day Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, asked if he considered the attacks to be acts of war, replied ‘What words the lawyers will use to characterize it is for them’.²⁴ In his address to the nation that evening, however, the President

¹⁷ ‘Washington File: Executive Summary, National Commission on Terrorism Report’, 6 May 2000, p. 1. Available at: <http://www.usembassy.org.uk/terror112.html>, accessed on 19 September 2001.

¹⁸ US Department of State Office of the Co-ordinator for Counterterrorism, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2000*, p. 1. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/>, accessed on 19 September 2001.

¹⁹ *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2000*, p. 1; ‘National Commission on Terrorism Report’, p. 2.

²⁰ ‘Press briefing by Ari Fleischer, 15 May 2002’, p. 7. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/05/20020515-7.html>, accessed on 16 May. ‘Press briefing by Ari Fleischer, 16 May 2002’, pp. 1–2. Available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/05/20020516-4.html>.

See also Matthew Engel, ‘Bush warned of hijacks before September 11’, *Guardian*, 17 May 2002, p. 1.
²¹ Steven Simon and Daniel Benjamin, ‘The Terror’, *Survival*, 43:4 (Winter 2001), p. 5; Freedman, ‘The Third World War?’, pp. 85–6.

²² ‘National Commission on Terrorism Report’, p. 2.

²³ ‘Washington File: Administration officials on terrorist attacks’, 11 September 2001, p. 1. Available at: <http://www.usembassy.org.uk/terror139.html>, accessed on 19 September 2001.

²⁴ ‘Washington File: Briefing by Rumsfeld, Shelton on Terrorist Attacks’, 11 September 2001, p. 3. Available at: <http://www.usembassy.org.uk/terror140.html>, accessed on 19 September 2001. One lawyer who had doubts over whether this was war was Marcel Berlins in his weekly column for the *Guardian*, 18 September 2001.

talked of ‘the war against terrorism’.²⁵ The next day he referred to the attacks as acts of war,²⁶ a message repeated in his address to the Joint Session of Congress on 20 September.²⁷ Speaking on 14 September in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister appeared somewhat more circumspect, couching the act in criminal terms and talking of ‘bringing those responsible to account’.²⁸ But over the weekend, in an interview with CNN, he too talked of war: ‘the fact is that we are at war with terrorism . . . it is a war, if you like, between the civilised world and fanaticism’.²⁹

September 11 and the transformation of war

The events of 11 September were shocking in part because they appeared to break the pattern of war established by the West in the 1990s. In the previous decade, war had become something conducted at a safe distance. But on 11 September the attacks were at the heart of the West, against the capital of the United States and against one of its most famous and most visited cities. The President told Congress on 20 September, ‘Our Nation has been put on notice: We are not immune from attack’.³⁰ A new sense of vulnerability emerged,³¹ apparent in the reaction to the anthrax attacks a few weeks later, and quickly led to a range of homeland defence measures including the creation of the Office of Homeland Security under Governor Tom Ridge and a \$20bn package of measures to promote homeland security.³² Nor was this seen as simply an attack on the United States. Not only were citizens of over 80 other nations killed in the attacks of 11 September,³³ but the attacks were portrayed more broadly as attacks upon ‘the free world’, or more usually ‘the

²⁵ ‘Statement by the President in his Address to the Nation’, 11 September 2001. Available at: <<http://www.usembassy.org.uk/bush71.html>>, accessed on 19 September 2001.

²⁶ ‘Washington File: Bush remarks following meeting with his National Security Team’, 12 September 2001, p. 1. Available at: <<http://www.usembassy.org.uk/bush73.html>>, accessed on 19 September 2001.

²⁷ ‘Text: Bush announces start of “War on Terror”: President addresses Joint Session of Congress Sept. 20’, p. 2. Available at: <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2001/09/mil-010920-usia01.htm>>, accessed on 18 February 2002. See also ‘Powell calls for global coalition against terrorism’, p. 3.

²⁸ Blair, ‘We need to mourn the dead’, p. 2. On 12 September the Prime Minister had also been reluctant, when asked, to state that this was war. ‘US attack: Prime Minister’s statement (Weds) including Q&A (sic)’, 12 September 2001, pp. 5–6. Available at: <<http://www.number-10.gov.uk/news>>, accessed on 19 September 2001.

²⁹ ‘Blair: “We are at war with terrorism”’, interview on 16 September with CNN, pp. 1 and 6. available at: <<http://www.pm.gov.uk/news>>, accessed on 19 September 2001.

³⁰ ‘Bush announces start of “War on Terror”’, p. 4.

³¹ See for example ‘Text: President Bush announces military strikes in Afghanistan, 7 October 2001’, p. 2. Available at: <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2001/10/mil-011007-usia01.htm>>, accessed on 18 February 2002. ‘Transcript: Rumsfeld, Myers brief on military operations in Afghanistan, 7 October 2001’, p. 9. Available at: <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2001/10/mil-011007-usia04.htm>>, accessed on 18 February 2002.

³² For a list of some of the more important measures, see ‘The Global War on Terrorism: The First 100 Days’, pp. 21–2. Available at: <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/12/100dayreport.html>>, accessed on 26 February 2002. September 11 also provided a boost for NMD. See for example Michael Sirak, ‘USA weighs outlays for asymmetric threats’, *Jane’s Defense Weekly*, 3 October 2001, p. 3.

³³ ‘The Global War on Terrorism’, p. 3.

civilised world'.³⁴ The implication was clear – it was not simply the United States which was now vulnerable and which might be attacked on its own soil.

If the West's wars in the 1990s had been localised and fought away from the West, then they had also been portrayed as wars against regimes or leaders. Targeting policies had accordingly attempted to minimise civilian deaths, particularly collateral damage. In some senses the attacks of 11 September were also against leadership targets: they were against the United States, the leader of the free world; two of the aircraft were targeted at symbols of US global financial leadership; and one aircraft was targeted at the headquarters of the US military. But this was not discriminate targeting against regimes; it was indiscriminate, with no attempt to minimise civilian deaths. In his 1998 *fatwa*, Osama bin Laden had stated that 'The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies – *civilians and military* – is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it'.³⁵ Nor did the attacks appear to be geared to the downfall of a regime – the target was at best US 'leadership' in a vague sense. Conceivably the downfall of the West was an aim, but this remained unclear. Osama bin Laden's *fatwa*, for example, had called for more specific goals relating to Islam's holy sites as well as the more general injunction that the enemies of Islam be rendered unable to threaten Muslims.³⁶

September 11 also departed from the pattern of warfare established by the West in terms of collateral damage. Whereas the West had taken great pains to avoid unnecessary civilian deaths – albeit not always successfully – the terrorist attacks either did not accept any distinction between legitimate targets and collateral damage, or did not care about it. As the Prime Minister's Official Spokesman, Alastair Campbell, bluntly put it: 'These people had no regard for human life'.³⁷ Nick Wheeler has written, 'What shocked the world about the events of September 11 was that the perpetrators of this act deliberately set out to kill innocent civilians'.³⁸ This stood in stark contrast to the manner in which the West had presented its campaigns in the late 1990s, when efforts had been made to minimise civilian suffering and both President Clinton and Prime Minister Blair had apologised for the suffering which had occurred.³⁹ Almost a year after the attacks of

³⁴ In his prepared statement on 12 September, for example, Tony Blair referred to the attacks as being 'not only on America but on the world'. He then referred to 'the full evil and capability of international terrorism which menaces the whole of the democratic world', before in questions stating that 'The United States has been singled out but there is no doubt that all these terrorists will regard us all as targets... this is an attack on the free and democratic world as a whole'. 'US attack: Prime Minister's statement (Weds) including Q&A (sic)', 12 September 2001, pp. 2 and 5. In his CNN interview on 16 September, the Prime Minister also stated 'What happened on Tuesday was an attack not just upon the United States but upon the free world'. Blair: "We are at war with terrorism"', p. 1.

³⁵ Quoted in Simon and Benjamin, p. 8. Emphasis added. Bin Laden's *fatwah* was published in *Al-Quds al-'Arabi* on 23 February, 1998 and is available at: <<http://www.ict.org.il/articles/fatwah.htm>>, accessed on 25 February 2002.

³⁶ According to Simon and Benjamin, although bin Laden's immediate concerns were with the oppressed state of Muslims and the infidel occupation of Saudi Arabia and the al-Asqa mosque in Jerusalem, he also saw his battle as a war of civilisations, with the United States the principal malefactor. Simon and Benjamin, p. 8.

³⁷ 'Lobby briefing: 11am, Tuesday 18 September 2001, US terror attacks', p. 2. Available at: <<http://www.number-10.gov.uk/default.asp?pageid=4757>>, accessed on 19 September 2001.

³⁸ Nick Wheeler, 'Assigning responsibility for civilian casualties in Operation Enduring Freedom', draft manuscript February 2002, p. 1.

³⁹ See McInnes, *Spectator-Sport War*, pp. 65–8.

11 September, however, estimates of those killed ran at 3,062, the overwhelming majority of them civilians.⁴⁰ According to official US sources, approximately 2,000 children lost a parent on 11 September; one business alone lost 700 civilian employees, leaving 50 pregnant widows.⁴¹ Francois Heisbourg was not alone in wondering what the purpose of this was – for Heisbourg, the attacks were ‘not political in the Clausewitzian sense’.⁴² This instead appeared to be some new form of warfare which passed not only traditional understandings of instrumental force, but acceptable norms of conduct in war. Adam Roberts concluded that ‘The attacks of 11 September should be regarded as falling within the legal category of “crimes against humanity”, which encompasses widespread or systematic murder against any civilian population’.⁴³

The final area of change concerned the risk to Western society. The wars of the 1990s had presented virtually no direct risk to the majority of Western society. But on 11 September that all changed. Suffering was not limited to those directly involved but spread throughout the United States. As Secretary of Health Thompson put it, ‘Every single American lost something today . . . America and all of its citizens share tonight in the grief that has been caused.’⁴⁴ Perhaps most revealing was the sense that life as normal had been interrupted by a new form of insecurity. Although the President attempted to reassure the American people on 11 September that the US was still ‘open for business’,⁴⁵ the next day he stated that ‘it is not business as usual’.⁴⁶ In his address to the Joint Session of Congress on 20 September, President Bush was aware that life had not returned to normal and showed no signs of doing so quickly: ‘It is my hope that in the months and years ahead, life will return almost to normal’.⁴⁷ There is a strong sense that society had been directly affected by the events of 11 September. The majority of Americans may have been spectators to the events on the day itself, but they participated in the suffering. These terrorist acts created not

⁴⁰ According to data held by the Center for Defense Information, as of 21 August 2002 the figures for those killed on 11 September were 2,691 in the World Trade Center and an additional 147 in the two hijacked aircraft which crashed into the twin towers; 125 in the Pentagon and 59 in the hijacked aircraft; and 40 were killed in the hijacked aircraft which crashed in Pennsylvania south of Pittsburgh. See Center for Defense Information Terrorism Project, ‘U.S. and allied casualties: Sept (sic) 11, Operation Enduring Freedom and the anti-terrorist campaign’, p. 1. Available at: <<http://www.cdi.org/terrorism/casualties-pr.cfm>>, accessed on 25 September 2002. The number of emergency workers (mainly firefighters but also paramedics) lost in the World Trade Center has been put at 343; a further 23 police officers and 37 Port Authority police officers were also killed. ‘The global war on terrorism’, p. 5.

⁴¹ ‘The Global War on Terrorism’, p. 5.

⁴² Francois Heisbourg, ‘Europe and the Transformation of World Order’, *Survival*, 43:4 (Winter 2001), p. 143.

⁴³ Adam Roberts, ‘Counter-Terrorism, Armed Force and the Laws of War’, *Survival*, 44:1 (Spring 2002), p. 8.

⁴⁴ ‘Administration officials on terrorist attack’, pp. 1–2.

⁴⁵ ‘Statement by the President in his Address to the Nation’, p. 1.

⁴⁶ ‘Bush remarks following meeting with his National Security team’, p. 1

⁴⁷ ‘Bush announces the start of a “war on terror”’, pp. 5–6. It is interesting in this context to examine the events surrounding the first anniversary of the attacks. In his televised address to the nation for example, President Bush couched his remarks very much in terms of a nation affected and challenged by the events of 11 September. See ‘President’s remarks to the nation, Ellis Island, New York, 11 September 2002’. Available at: <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020911-3.html>>. See also Jonathan Freedland, ‘What really changed?’, *Guardian Weekly*, 12 September 2002. Available at: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/GWeekly/Story/0,3939,790679,00.html>>, accessed on 24 September 2002.

only spectacular images but also rendered the West empathic spectators – that in watching the destruction, the citizens of the West were made aware of their vulnerability to subsequent acts. The attacks on the World Trade Center in particular produced feelings of empathy: these were ordinary citizens working in one of the most famous buildings of one of the most visited cities of the West. Being a spectator was used by the terrorists not to distance the citizens of the West from the attacks, but to bring them closer.

Does this mean that 11 September changed war for the West? There are three possible reasons why it did not. First, the attacks on 11 September were not carried out by the West but by its enemies. Therefore although the *experience* of that day may have been different for those living in the West from, for example, the war in Kosovo, it tells us little about how the West will *conduct* subsequent military operations. This is the focus of the section below. Second, the outrage over 11 September suggests the potency of the framework outlined above. Just as not all wars in the age of total war were ‘total’,⁴⁸ so not all wars in the current age need conform fully to the framework; but when they do not, and in such an extreme manner, then the reaction may be one of outrage. Thus Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida were quickly portrayed as evil precisely because they did not conform to Western ideas of how war should be fought: in rather simplistic terms, it was a case of ‘bad guys cheat’, or of not fighting fair. The worldwide, near universal condemnation which followed the attacks suggested that norms had been broken and that there was a desire to maintain these not dispense with them. Thirdly, 11 September has been described as an ‘asymmetric’ attack.⁴⁹ This form of warfare attempts to deny the enemy a war fought along its preferred lines, offering instead challenges and situations which it finds uncomfortable or unfamiliar. It is often a strategy of the weak against the strong, where they exploit what few advantages they have to create something unexpected to which an enemy has difficulty responding. US strategic preferences are not simply for a Gulf War-type conflict – of a ‘proper’ war involving large scale operations against regular forces in a defined theatre of war, where overwhelming US material superiority can be brought to bear;⁵⁰ more broadly it is for the sort of war identified above, fought away from the West against regimes, not affecting Western societies and causing minimal loss of life. September 11 was an asymmetric attack because it was a negative image of the framework discussed above. The pattern of war developed by the West set the agenda for asymmetric attacks against the West.

The Afghan campaign: Operation Enduring Freedom

The US military response to 11 September began on 7 October 2001. The aims of the campaign in Afghanistan were initially unclear. Two distinct options emerged.

⁴⁸ In his study of the era of total war, for example, Brian Bond has argued that ‘total war is just as much a myth as total victory or total peace’. Brian Bond, *War and Society in Europe, 1870–1970* (London: Fontana, 1984), p. 168. See also Roger Chickering, ‘Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept’, in Manfred W. Boemke, Roger Chickering and Stig Forster (eds.), *Anticipating Total War: the German and American Experiences, 1871–1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 13–28.

⁴⁹ For example, Freedman, ‘The Third World War?’, pp. 64–76.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

The first involved punishing the Taliban for harbouring and collaborating with al-Qaida and was intended to coerce the regime into bringing those involved to justice.⁵¹ The second was to topple the Taliban regime and open up the way for an alternative government that would allow the US direct access to al-Qaida hideouts in Afghanistan. By the eve of the campaign, the Taliban's failure to cooperate with US demands had effectively undermined the first option and the US appeared to be seeking the removal of the regime, both as an act of punishment but also as a deterrent to other states harbouring terrorists.⁵² Planning began when Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld ordered on 12 September the preparation of 'credible military options' to respond to international terrorism. Key to this was US Central Command under General Tommy R. Franks, which was tasked with preparing a warplan for operations in Afghanistan. Franks' concept of operations was presented to President Bush on 21 September and reflected very much the regime removal option: it proposed that 'US Central Command . . . would destroy the Al Qaida (sic) network inside Afghanistan along with the illegitimate Taliban regime which was protecting and harbouring the terrorists.'⁵³ More detailed plans for combat operations, including target sets and force requirements, were presented to Secretary Rumsfeld on 1 October and were authorised by the President the next day. The plan involved 'multiple lines of operation' to be conducted simultaneously rather than sequentially and included targeting the leadership of al-Qaida and the Taliban, attacking the Taliban military, and delivering humanitarian aid. Crucially, Franks' strategy was to avoid 'invading' Afghanistan and to work with rather than against the people – though the extent of such cooperation in the initial stages of the campaign was not obviously great.⁵⁴ Although US ground troops were inserted early on, these were limited in number and drawn from special forces. Operating with the opposition United Front (or 'Northern Alliance'), their role appeared primarily to be one of intelligence gathering and targeting precision-guided munitions launched from US aircraft. A larger ground presence would not only have been problematic given the lack of host nation support in the region (both Muslim Pakistan and the former Soviet republics neighbouring Afghanistan would have had substantial political problems in acting as a base for a US ground force), but for fears of a protracted involvement similar to that following the Soviet Union's 1979 invasion.⁵⁵

The operation began with air strikes against selected military targets and expanded to include strikes against political and infrastructure targets as well as al-Qaida bases. Air strikes were complemented by special forces operations and an ambitious raid by US ground forces against the Kandahar compound of the Taliban's leader, Mullah Omar. US strategy appeared to be attempting to split the already divided Taliban both by strategic strikes and also by affecting its military

⁵¹ See, for example, 'Bush announces start of War on Terror', p. 3.

⁵² Connetta, *Strange Victory*, pp. 7–8. For a list of campaign objectives, see for example 'Transcript: Rumsfeld, Myers brief on military operation (sic) in Afghanistan', 7 October 2001, p. 3. Available at: <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2001/10/mil-011007-usia04.htm>>, accessed on 18 February 2002. Wheeler, p. 1.

⁵³ Franks' SASC Statement, p. 3.

⁵⁴ Franks' SASC Statement, pp. 3–5; Senate Armed Services Committee, General Tommy Franks Witness Statement, 5 February 2002, p. 4. Available at: <<http://www.centcom.mil/news/transcripts>>, accessed on 26 February 2002. Hereafter referred to as Franks' Witness Statement.

⁵⁵ Anthony Davis, 'How the Afghan War was Won', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, February 2002, p. 6.

capabilities, most particularly in the north against the United Front.⁵⁶ By the end of October, however, little appeared to have been achieved. Critics of the campaign became increasingly vocal: the United Front had failed to take the key northern town of Mazar-e Sharif; Taliban support appeared strong in both Afghanistan and areas of neighbouring Pakistan; and a number of targeting mistakes had led to questions over the conduct of the campaign. Although in retrospect the Taliban was under increasing pressure, caught between maintaining its military front in the north and retaining control elsewhere in Afghanistan, the impression elsewhere was of a campaign getting nowhere fast.⁵⁷ It was in this context that in the final week of October, US strategy shifted towards one of 'brute force'.⁵⁸ B-52 bombers began carpet-bombing Taliban positions in support of United Front ground operations. In November the air attacks intensified, on 7 November reaching 120 attack sorties a day.⁵⁹ The sudden collapse of the Taliban, however, was largely unexpected.⁶⁰ On 9 November the key northern town of Mazar-e Sharif fell to United Front troops. The Taliban attempted to retreat south to the source of their political power in the Kandahar region. Command and control however broke down catastrophically and the retreat became a rout, characterised by a succession of defections. On 12 November United Front forces broke onto the Shomali Plain and the next day entered the capital, Kabul. After an agreement signed in Bonn on 5 December, an interim authority was established under Hamid Karzai, and on 20 December UN Security Council Resolution 1386 authorised the establishment of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) under British command. The Taliban attempted to make a stand in Kandahar, but abandoned its home base there on 7 December. A week later US Marine Corps armoured troops moved in to establish control of the airport. The collapse of the Taliban was probably a result of a number of factors, not least the synergy between US air power and United Front ground offensives. But the inherent weaknesses of the Taliban regime also probably played a part. The Taliban was a loose coalition that had failed to grow out of its regional roots. As a result it found itself overextended, lacking popular support and prone to division. When placed under pressure, it began to collapse within itself. It then decided to fall back and regroup around Kandahar. This proved to be a strategic error. Adopting a positional defence made it vulnerable to US air power, while it misjudged the US

⁵⁶ 'Rumsfeld, Myers brief on military operations in Afghanistan', p. 4; Andrew Koch, 'USA's strategy takes shape', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 17 October 2001, p. 2. Connetta, *Strange Victory*, pp. 8–11 and 30; Franks' SASC statement, pp. 5–6; Koch, pp. 2–3; Anthony Davis, 'UF Prepares Northern Offensive', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 17 October 2001, p. 3. For a detailed chronology, see Emily Clark, 'Action Update', Center for Defense Information Terrorism Project. Available at: <<http://www.cdi.org/terrorism/actionupdate-pr.cfm>>, accessed on various dates.

⁵⁷ Connetta, *Strange Victory*, pp. 11 and 30; Lawrence Freedman, 'The Americans have left it too late to send in ground troops before winter', *Independent*, 6 November 2001. Available at: <http://independent.co.uk>, accessed on 7 November 2001.

⁵⁸ The distinction between coercion and brute force is Thomas Schelling's. See his *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 2–3.

⁵⁹ Davis, 'How the Afghan War was Won', p. 9.

⁶⁰ For example, in an article appearing on 14 November, but apparently written on at least 7 November, the otherwise well-informed Anthony Davis wrote from Afghanistan that 'Well-placed sources concede that that capture of Mazar[-e Sharif] will not be easy and despite the advance through Shulgareh and the intense air strikes, the city is unlikely to fall in the immediate future'. It fell on 9 November. Anthony Davis, 'US bombing boosts United Front's ground offensive', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 14 November 2001, p. 3. See also Freedman, 'The Americans have left it too late'.

political aims in hoping for some form of accommodation. The US by now was interested in nothing short of the total overthrow of the Taliban. It was only with the fall of Kandahar that the Taliban fell back on the strategy it was best equipped for and the US least able to deal with, one of guerrilla warfare.⁶¹

With the collapse of Taliban resistance in Kandahar and the establishment of an interim authority in Kabul, most of Afghanistan entered a period of post-conflict reconstruction. For the United States, however, the conflict remained though its nature had changed. General Franks described the mission as now being to 'locate and destroy remaining pockets of Taliban and Al Qaida (sic) fighters and to search for surviving leadership'.⁶² For Franks, much work still needed to be done and some of it very dangerous.⁶³ This resulted in some tension between the Afghans and the United States, especially over continued aerial bombardment. It also led to some instances of US air power being misled by local intelligence and used by warlords to settle old scores.⁶⁴ The overall pattern which emerged however was described by Franks as one of a general low level of activity with occasional 'spikes' of more intense activity.⁶⁵ US ground forces began to play an increasingly significant role in combat operations, including a pitched battle in mid-December at Tora Bora south of Jalalabad.⁶⁶ More significant however was Operation Anaconda which began on 2 March in a 70 square mile rough, mountainous area of the Paktia province around Shah-I-Kot. The operation involved around 2,000 coalition ground troops, including 800–900 Americans, against Taliban and al-Qaida forces estimated as several hundred strong. Franks described the close-quarter fighting as 'very scary', not helped by the difficult conditions, and a number of American soldiers were killed in the fighting.⁶⁷ Although there was some speculation that the United States had allowed Taliban and al-Qaida fighters to gather there so that they could conduct a single decisive battle rather than a series of smaller 'cat and mouse chases',⁶⁸ subsequent operations (including Operation Snipe beginning on April 29 and Operation Condor in May 2002⁶⁹) suggested that this phase of the conflict was still far from over. Nevertheless in the first three months of Operation Enduring Freedom the United States had succeeded in removing the Taliban regime from power; al-Qaida activities had been severely disrupted, though the organisation had not been

⁶¹ Connetta, *Strange Victory*, pp. 11–12 and 30–5; Davis, 'How the Afghan War was Won', pp. 6–11. A possible additional factor was the removal of support from the Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). On the relationship between the Taliban and the ISI, see Tim Judah, 'The Taliban papers', *Survival*, 44:1 (Spring 2002), pp. 69–80.

⁶² Franks' SASC Statement, p. 5.

⁶³ DoD [Department of Defense] News Briefing – General Tommy Franks, 4 January 2002, p. 1. Available at: <http://www.centcom.mil/news/press_briefings/Franks_4Jan.html>, accessed on 6 March 2002. Hereafter referred to as January 4 Briefing.

⁶⁴ Connetta, *Strange Victory*, pp. 15–16.

⁶⁵ January 4 Briefing, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Defense Department Operational Briefing (Tampa, Florida), 14 December 2001, p. 1. Available at: <http://www.centcom.mil/news/press_briefings/FranksDec14.htm>, accessed on 6 March 2002. 4 January Briefing, p. 7.

⁶⁷ USCENTCOM Press Briefing, 4 March 2002. Available at: <http://www.centcom.mil/news/transcripts/Franks_mar04.htm>, accessed on 6 March 2002. Clark, updates for 4–10 March 2002 and 25 February–3 March 2002, accessed on 18 March 2002.

⁶⁸ Clark, update for 4–10 March 2002, accessed on 18 March 2002.

⁶⁹ Clark updates for April 29–May 5, May 8–May 12, May 13–May 19 and May 20–26, accessed on 6 June 2002.

destroyed; it had lost the ability to operate out of a friendly state and at least 11 training camps as well as other facilities in Afghanistan; at least eight of the top al-Qaida leaders were believed dead, although both Osama bin Laden and the Taliban leader Mullah Omar were probably still alive and on the run; and some 3,000–4,000 Taliban troops had been killed along with several hundred ‘Afghan Arabs’ associated with al-Qaida.⁷⁰

The war in Afghanistan: back to the future

The conduct and experience of Operation Enduring Freedom bore many of the hallmarks of Western military operations from the 1990s. Not least, the war was fought in Afghanistan with no direct engagement by Western society at large. In three important respects, however, Enduring Freedom was not as localised as previous Western military operations. First, not only were some of the bombing missions flown from bases in the continental United States (as had been the case in Kosovo⁷¹), but the operation was commanded and controlled from CENTCOM’s base in Tampa, Florida. During Operation Desert Storm, Frank’s predecessor General Norman Schwarzkopf had been based in Saudi Arabia; but for Afghanistan operations were controlled at arms length from within the United States.⁷² This was partly due to the smaller footprint involved, but also a result of advances in technology which allowed Franks not only to video-conference with local commanders, but to ‘see’ the battlefield with ‘unparalleled situational awareness’.⁷³ Second, the US appeared committed to widening the war to a more general attack on terrorism and states supporting terrorists. In his 29 January 2002 State of the Union Address, President Bush stated that ‘Our second goal [in the war against terror] is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction’. The President went on to explicitly identify Iran, Iraq and North Korea as constituting ‘an axis of evil’.⁷⁴ Implicit was the threat that military actions might be considered against these states. A few days earlier, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld had been even more explicit: ‘if we have to go into 15 more countries, we ought to do it’.⁷⁵ Third, a real fear

⁷⁰ The Global War on Terrorism, p. 3; Connetta, *Strange Victory*, pp. 3–4; Franks’ Witness Statement, pp. 5 and 9; January 4 Briefing, p. 1.

⁷¹ Department of Defense, *Report to Congress: Kosovo/Operation Allied Force After-Action Report* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2000), p. 31.

⁷² During military operations in Kosovo, NATO’s commander General Wesley Clark had been based at NATO headquarters in Belgium.

⁷³ Franks’ SASC Statement, p. 7; Franks’ Witness Statement, pp. 31 and 37. At the time of writing there is speculation that, should the US engage in military operations against Iraq, Franks’ headquarters would be moved to the Gulf because of the size of the forces involved.

⁷⁴ ‘President delivers state of the union address’, 29 January 2002. Available at: <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>>, accessed on 6 June 2002.

⁷⁵ Department of Defense News Briefing, Secretary Rumsfeld and General Myers, 16 January 2002. Excerpts available in Project on Defense Alternatives, ‘Wider war watch: the war on terrorism and the impetus to widen it’, entries for 16 January 2002. Available at: <<http://www.comw.org/pda/widerwarwatch/index.html>>, accessed on 14 February 2002. See this web site more generally for an excellent review of the major statements and articles on the possible expansion of the war.

remained that 11 September would not be the last attack on American soil. In May 2002, Vice-President Dick Cheney gave a high profile warning that another terrorist attack was 'almost certain'.⁷⁶ At the time Cheney was almost certainly aware of the arrest of Abdullah al-Muhajir on suspicion of planning a terrorist attack in the United States using a 'dirty bomb', an arrest only made public in June.⁷⁷ Therefore although conventional military operations might be fought elsewhere, asymmetric attacks could be conducted against the United States itself, as well as its allies. Importantly, whereas asymmetric responses in previous conflicts were limited to the theatre of operations (such as the use of Western hostages as a 'human shield' and the release of oil into the Persian Gulf by Saddam during the Gulf War, and ethnic cleansing prompting a mass exodus in Kosovo by the Milosevic regime⁷⁸), after 11 September this no longer appears to be the case.

Operation Enduring Freedom was also similar to operations of the 1990s in that the enemy was couched in terms of a regime (and, in this instance, the terrorists it harboured) rather than the state and the people. Thus the debate over campaign objectives was whether to coerce or remove the regime in Afghanistan,⁷⁹ while leaders on both sides of the Atlantic emphasised that the enemy was not the Afghan people but the Taliban regime and al-Qaida.⁸⁰ As with previous operations the Western narrative was of a people oppressed by a regime, and it was that regime which was the target of military operations. Thus President Bush stated to the Joint Session of Congress that 'America is a friend of the Afghan people',⁸¹ while General Franks talked of 'America's compassion for the suffering Afghan people'.⁸² In case anyone was in any doubt of the oppressed nature of the Afghan people, the Administration detailed how 'Afghanistan's people have been brutalized'.⁸³ As Nick Wheeler has pointed out however, there were limits to this compassion: the humanitarian aid dropped at the beginning of the campaign was dismissed by aid workers as a propaganda stunt; the US was unwilling to commit to ISAF despite the wishes of the interim authority; and warlords amongst the United Front allies were reported as being responsible for human rights abuses against Pashtun civilians in the north.⁸⁴ Such limits had of course been seen in previous Western interventions, most recently in the unwillingness of NATO to commit to an opposed ground entry in Kosovo, and the height at which NATO aircraft operated in that conflict in order to avoid the risk from hand-held SAMs. What matters here though, is that the narrative of oppression is much the same as for previous operations and that the campaign objectives and enemy imaging were couched in terms of the regime rather than the Afghan people.

⁷⁶ As reported by Julian Borger, 'Prepare for attack, Cheney tells US', *Guardian*, 20 May 2002, p. 1.

⁷⁷ Julian Borger, 'US foils al-Qaida "dirty bomb" plot', *Guardian* 11 June 2002, p. 1. The heightened security on the first anniversary of 11 September also revealed a fear of further attacks.

⁷⁸ See, for example, *Kosovo After-Action Report*, p. 6.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 176–7.

⁸⁰ See for example 'Prime Minister's statement in 10 Downing Street, 25 September 2001', available at: <<http://www.number-10.gov.uk/news.asp?NewsId=2619>>, accessed on 26 September 2001. 'Rumsfeld, Myers brief on military operation in Afghanistan', p. 3.

⁸¹ 'President Bush announces military strikes in Afghanistan', p. 1.

⁸² Franks' Witness Statement, p. 1.

⁸³ *The War on Terrorism*, p. 6.

⁸⁴ Nick Wheeler, 'Humanitarian intervention after September 11', draft March 2002.

A third area of similarity concerned the attention paid to minimising collateral damage. General Franks has repeatedly asserted that ‘this has been the most accurate war ever fought in this nation’s history’.⁸⁵ Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld went further: ‘no nation in human history has done more to avoid civilian casualties than the United States has in this conflict’.⁸⁶ To ensure this low level of civilian deaths, not only was a very high proportion of precision-guided munitions used⁸⁷ but there was also tight control over the targeting process such that some Air Force commanders became frustrated that concerns over civilian casualties were hindering military operations.⁸⁸ Nevertheless Carl Connetta estimated that the campaign ‘directly claimed the lives of 1,000 Afghan civilians, probably added more than another 3,000 deaths to the toll of the country’s humanitarian crisis, and certainly produced 500,000 new refugees and displaced persons.’⁸⁹ Deliveries of aid and food were also disrupted at the local level for two to three months in late 2001, causing further suffering.⁹⁰ Indeed Connetta argues that the rate of civilians killed per bomb dropped was higher than in Kosovo.⁹¹ Higher estimates of civilian deaths released by the Taliban regime were quickly discounted as unreliable, though those produced by the US academic Marc Herold received considerably more attention. Herold claimed that up to 4,000 Afghan civilians had been killed by US bombing raids between 7 October 2001 and 1 January 2002, and that the US ‘directly targeted certain civilian facilities deemed hostile to its war intent’.⁹² Although Herold’s data has been criticised as lacking in rigour,⁹³ it is nevertheless clear that a substantial number of Afghans died as a result of US bombing raids, not least in a series of high profile ‘mistakes’. These included the bombing of a UN de-mining facility, an attack on a Red Cross food convoy and the double bombing of a Red Cross food distribution centre. Nor did controversy end

⁸⁵ Franks Witness Statement, p. 22. See also January 4 Briefing, p. 6.

⁸⁶ Embassy of the United States of America, Press Release 30 October 2001, ‘Excerpt: Rumsfeld says Taliban to blame for casualties’, p. 1. Available at: <<http://www.usa.or.th/news/press/2001/nrot113.htm>>, accessed on 23 January 2002. For a series of official statements on avoiding civilian deaths, see US Department of State, ‘Fact sheet: U.S. military efforts to avoid civilian casualties, 25 October 2001’, p. 2. Available at: <<http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/01102503.htm>>, accessed on 1 January 2002.

⁸⁷ Franks Witness Statement, p. 25. See also Franks’ SASC Statement, p. 8. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard Myers, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that, in early 2002, nearly 60 per cent of all munitions used had been precision-guided, compared to 10 per cent in the 1990/1 Gulf War. Franks Witness Statement, p. 1.

⁸⁸ Wheeler, ‘Assigning responsibility’, p. 9; Roberts, ‘Counter-Terrorism’, p. 19. Air Force misgivings over the emphasis being placed on avoiding civilian casualties were not new. During Kosovo a number had expressed similar concerns, most notably the commander of the air operation, USAF Lieutenant General Michael Short. See John A. Tirpak, ‘Short’s View of the Air Campaign’, *Air Force Magazine*, 82:9 (1999), p. 3. Available at: <<http://www.afa.org/magazine/watch/0999watch.html>>, accessed on 20 January 2000.

⁸⁹ Connetta, *Strange Victory*, p. 20. See also Carl Connetta, *Operation Enduring Freedom: Why a Higher Rate of Civilian Bombing Casualties*, Project on Defense Alternatives Briefing Report no.11, revised version 24 January 2002, p. 2 and Appendix 1. Available at: <<http://www.comw.org/pda/0201oef.html>>, accessed on 15 February 2002. Connetta’s estimates of 1,000 to 1,300 civilian casualties by the end of 2001 is broadly in line with estimates from Human Rights Watch and by Reuters. Connetta, *Operation Enduring Freedom*, p. 2.

⁹⁰ Connetta, *Strange Victory*, p. 22.

⁹¹ Connetta, *Operation Enduring Freedom*, p. 2.

⁹² Professor Marc W. Herold, ‘A dossier on civilian victims of United States’ aerial bombing of Afghanistan: a comprehensive accounting’, December 2001, p. 9. Available at: <<http://www.pubpages.unh.edu/~mwherold>>, accessed on 2 January 2002.

⁹³ Connetta, *Operation Enduring Freedom*, p. 2.

with the fall of Kabul: on 29 December an attack purportedly on Taliban and al-Qaida leaders in the village of Qalai Niazi killed up to 107 villagers; a convoy of tribal elders *en route* from Paktia to the inauguration of the interim authority were mistakenly attacked by US aircraft, killing up to 65; on 1 July, during Operation Full Throttle, 48 civilians were killed and 117 wounded in attacks on villages in the home province of Mullah Omar.⁹⁴ Attacks such as these prompted expressions of concern from within Afghanistan, including from some within the new government, as well as from US allies in the coalition.⁹⁵ In response to these criticisms the Bush Administration deployed several arguments: that some civilian deaths were inevitable in war, though regrettable, but that the US had worked harder than any previous belligerent to minimise such deaths; that the Taliban deliberately placed civilians at risk by deploying military assets in civilian buildings, including mosques and by using villages as human shields; that leadership targets and in particular al-Qaida targets were often located in residential areas making collateral damage more likely; and that ultimate responsibility for civilian deaths lay not with the US but with those who started the war.⁹⁶ Additional, less readily acknowledged reasons may have included the particular weapons and aircraft used being less accurate than in Kosovo; the poor and unreliable nature of some of the intelligence; the problem of how to respond rapidly but with certainty to targets of opportunity (particularly once the Taliban were on the run and became intermingled with refugee flows); and difficulties in targeting small groups of guerrilla fighters mingling with the civilian population.⁹⁷ Some remained unconvinced that the United States had done enough to meet some of the more stringent criteria for a 'just' or 'humanitarian' war;⁹⁸ nevertheless it is clear that the rhetoric emphasised a concern over minimising civilian casualties, that a major attempt had been made to limit non-combatant deaths, and that Connetta's figure of 1,000 to 1,300 accidental civilian deaths in the first few months stands in stark contrast not only to the deliberate targeting of civilians on 11 September, but to civilian deaths in the era of total war.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ See Clark, 'Action update'. For Centcom's response, see 'Unclassified Executive Summary: Investigation of civilian casualties, Oruzgan province, Operation Full Throttle, 30 June 2002'. Available at: <http://www.centcom.mil/News/Reports/Investigation_Oruzgan_Province.htm>, accessed on 24 September 2002.

⁹⁵ Connetta, *Strange Victory*, pp. 10 and 20; Peter Foster, 'US bombs "kill 107 villagers"', *Daily Telegraph*, 2 January 2002. Available at: <<http://portal.telegraph.co.uk>>, accessed on 21 January 2002; Edward Cody, 'Civilian deaths mustn't stall air campaign, U.S. envoy argues', *International Herald Tribune*, 9 January 2002. Available at: <<http://www.iht.com>>, accessed on 21 January 2002.

⁹⁶ January 4 briefing, p. 6; 'The global war on terrorism', p. 7; Franks' Witness Statement, p. 22; 'U.S. military efforts to avoid civilian casualties', pp. 1–2; Wheeler, 'Assigning responsibility', pp. 1–2 and 18; Connetta, *Strange Victory*, p. 10.

⁹⁷ Connetta, *Operation Enduring Freedom*; Bearak, 'Uncertain Toll in the Fog of War', p. 1.

⁹⁸ For example, neither Roberts, 'Counter-Terrorism', nor Wheeler in 'Assigning responsibility', appear wholly convinced that the United States had done all it could to have minimised civilian deaths, while Herold accuses the US of a form of racism – the differential value of life – in preferring to save the lives of its own citizens over those in Afghanistan. Herold, 'Dossier on civilian victims', p. 6.

⁹⁹ By mid-2002 however, the rhetoric from Washington over civilian casualties was less apologetic and somewhat more dismissive over civilian deaths, as seen in the reaction to the 1 July killings. The extent and reasons behind this are unclear, but one possible reading of the reaction to 1 July is that, the US having adopted a simple binary formulation of 'those not with us are against us', then there is somewhat less concern over killing or injuring villagers in regions thought to be hostile to the US. In these instances, civilians are not innocent victims but of hostile intent. See for example 'Unclassified Executive Summary: Investigation of civilian casualties, Oruzgan province, Operation Full Throttle, 30 June 2002'. If correct, then this would of course indicate a departure from the framework identified above, but evidence for this is at present slight.

Finally, Operation Enduring Freedom also demonstrated a high level of concern for the lives of coalition, and particularly US service personnel. That this would be the case was not necessarily immediately apparent from the initial bravado of Administration officials. After meeting his top national security advisers at Camp David on 15 September, President Bush stated ‘The United States will do what it takes to win this war’. Attorney General Ashcroft echoed these sentiments: ‘we’re going to get them, no matter what it takes’.¹⁰⁰ Two days later at the Pentagon, the bullish mood was still with the President, stating that the US was ‘ready to defend freedom at any cost’.¹⁰¹ But four months on Congress was praising General Franks for the low loss of life in Afghanistan.¹⁰² Indeed by early January only two US service personnel had lost their lives due to enemy fire (one of whom was a CIA operative),¹⁰³ and although the loss of life began to increase as the US became more directly involved in ground operations, the rate of increase was still slow.¹⁰⁴ Central to this was General Franks’ decision not to invade Afghanistan but to rely on the combination of US air power and United Front ground forces, supported by limited numbers of coalition special forces on the ground.

Finding willing local allies appeared to be developing as a feature of US operations, allowing fewer US forces to be placed in exposed and dangerous situations on the ground. As a number of commentators have pointed out, the precedent for cooperation with the United Front lay with the KLA in Kosovo.¹⁰⁵ The parallel however is not exact. In particular, NATO’s relationship with the KLA was at best at arms length, whereas in Afghanistan the US coordinated its operations with the United Front. The United Front had a status which the KLA never enjoyed and became an integral element of US strategy in Afghanistan.¹⁰⁶ More important for the general point, however, is that it is not clear that reliance on local ground forces was a preferred strategic option. The initial degree of coordination between the US and the United Front was quite limited and it was only with the change in strategy to one of brute force in late October 2001 that closer air-ground coordination appeared, with US air power directly and consistently supporting United Front ground operations. Further, despite the success of a coordinated strategy in overthrowing the Taliban, relying on local allies had also produced problems. The United Front’s rush to take Kabul had been against US wishes, and reflected the degree to which local interests may override those of the US. In the attack on Tora Bora, local Afghan forces had performed poorly, allowing

¹⁰⁰ ‘Washington File: 15–09–01 Bush says U.S. will do “whatever it takes” to defeat terrorists’, pp. 2–3. Available at: <<http://www.usembassy.org.uk/bush77.html>>, accessed on 19 September 2001.

¹⁰¹ ‘Washington File: 17–09–01 Bush says U.S. proud to lead fight against terrorism’, pp. 1–2. Available at: <<http://www.usembassy.org.uk/bush79.html>>, accessed on 19 September 2001.

¹⁰² See for example comments by Senators Dayton and Sessions in Franks’ Witness Statement, pp. 18 and 22.

¹⁰³ January 4 Briefing, p. 2; Connetta, *Strange Victory*, p. 5. Connetta also claims (p. 5) ‘at least’ a dozen more accidental US deaths.

¹⁰⁴ During the major combat involved in Operation Anaconda, for example, the number of US service personnel killed in action increased to nine, US CENTCOM Press Briefing, 4 March 2002, p. 1. For a detailed and up to date breakdown of casualties see the CDI database, ‘US and allied casualties’.

¹⁰⁵ For example, Connetta, *Strange Victory*, p. 18; Freedman, ‘The Americans have left it too late’.

¹⁰⁶ Although some have argued that in the final days of the campaign, NATO aircraft did support directly KLA operations. See for example, Daniel A. Byman and Matthew C. Waxman, ‘Kosovo and the Great Air Power Debate’, *International Security*, 24:4 (2000), pp. 28–9.

al-Qaida fighters to escape and appearing unwilling to risk their own lives for US interests. By Operation Anaconda the US had learnt the lesson that there are limits on the extent to which local ground forces can be used in support of US operations. Their political agenda may be different and their combat motivation lacking. For Anaconda, the US preferred to use their own troops despite the increased risk, suggesting that the strategy of using local ground forces in coordination with US air power may have only limited application.

By the end of the 2001 over 3,000 US troops were on the ground in Afghanistan, mostly special forces, and their role was being hailed as a major element in the coalition's success.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, as the guerrilla phase developed major US combat formations were deployed on the ground in Afghanistan, including elements of 10th Mountain Division and 101st Airborne Division, and combat operations involving a thousand or more troops began to occur. Nevertheless the ground commitment was limited in comparison with both the Gulf War and, to take a guerrilla campaign from a previous age, Vietnam. The number of US service personnel placed in harm's way was comparatively small; US ground forces were 'not going to be an occupation army'; nor were they willing to play a role in ISAF.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

The US conduct of operations in Afghanistan demonstrated many similarities with operations from the previous decade. Not least, the war was localised in Afghanistan; the enemy was identified as the Taliban regime and the al-Qaida terrorist organisation, with the Afghan people portrayed as suffering under an oppressive regime; there were significant efforts to minimise collateral damage; and US casualties were kept low. Although the US did deploy ground forces into Afghanistan, running a heightened risk of casualties, this was only done in significant numbers when the Taliban had been beaten and when air power alone could not deal with the remaining enemy forces. Even then numbers involved were a few thousand and therefore on a similar scale to those deployed in the Balkans, not the tens of thousands in the Gulf War or Vietnam. An important qualification, however, concerns the localisation of the war. Although Operation Enduring Freedom was limited to Afghanistan, the 'war on terror' holds the possibility of spreading in two important respects. First, US officials have repeatedly made the point that Afghanistan was not the only state harbouring terrorists and that subsequent operations against other states are possible. Second, further terrorist attacks by al-Qaida within the United States in retaliation for US attacks in Afghanistan are possible – as the May 2002 arrest of Abdullah al-Mujahir on suspicion of planning a 'dirty bomb' attack, and the heightened security surrounding the first anniversary of the terrorist attacks suggests. This represents a very different form of asymmetric warfare from that seen

¹⁰⁷ For example, Franks' Witness Statement, pp. 11 and 25. This stands in sharp contrast to a generation earlier when Franks' predecessor, General Norman Schwarzkopf, had been sceptical over the value of special forces in the Gulf War. See General Sir Peter de la Billiere, *Storm Command* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), pp. 191–2.

¹⁰⁸ Franks' Witness Statement, pp. 3 and 7.

in Kosovo or the Gulf War and one which would clearly not be localised to the region.

Whereas the campaign in Afghanistan bore many similarities with Western military operations from the previous decade, 11 September initially appears to be very different. In particular the fact that the attacks were conducted in the United States itself and deliberately targeted against civilians made the attack different not only from the conflicts of the 1990s but from recent terrorist attacks as well (most notably the bombings of the East Africa embassies and the attack on the USS Cole). But in two important respects 11 September does demonstrate continuity with the new wars of the 1990s. First, 11 September constitutes an asymmetric attack that reflects a negative image of the type of war fought by the West. In other words, the pattern or character of war established by the West in the 1990s provides a basis for understanding the asymmetric attack of 11 September. It is not that the pattern has been undermined; rather it has been reversed, much as the term 'asymmetry' might suggest. Second, 11 September was not the first terrorist attack to be attempted against large numbers of US civilians: the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center, the 1995 attempt to hijack passenger jets over the Pacific and the thwarted attack over the millennium all predated 11 September. The difference was that on 11 September the plan worked. The idea of US invulnerability in the post-Cold War world had been a myth which was shattered on 11 September. But the failure of previous attacks should not obscure the fact that US civilians were targets in the 1990s; and just as these attacks did not invalidate ideas concerning the transformation of war, nor does 11 September.