

# Turkmenistan

## And the UN Operation “Restore Clarity” 1993



### History and Introduction (1991)

For much of the 18th and early 19th Centuries the area was under feudal rule, bordering upon the Ottoman empire and buffered from the British influence by Afghanistan.

Annexed by Russia between 1865 and 1885, Turkmenistan became a Soviet republic in 1924. It achieved independence upon the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. Extensive hydrocarbon/natural gas reserves are proving a boon to this underdeveloped country but extraction and delivery projects need to be expanded. The Turkmenistan Government is actively seeking to develop alternative petroleum transportation routes to break Russia's pipeline monopoly. President for Life Saparmurat NIYAZOV has been subject to various threats both external from Iran, obliquely from Russia regarding pipelines and also internally from religious-based rivals. The country is

nominally 100% Muslim. Large areas suffer from lack of water and the encroachment of desert. Exports, other than that of hydrocarbons, are limited to woven flying carpets and strong coffee pots – neither of which generates significant income.

Turkmenistan has two UNESCO world heritage sites, Konya-Urgench and Merv, *(that's more than the total in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tadjikistan combined)*. Merv was an ancient city, part of the legendary Silk Road, on the main trading route between Boukhara and Baghdad, during the Soviet era, the modern town of Mary was built adjacent to the ruins of Merv. Mary became the centre of the local province or Welayaty.

## Merv – The Silk Road



Turkmenistan has been committed to the principles of positive neutrality, having steadily pursued a policy of good neighbourliness and wide international cooperation that would serve interests of all sides. At the same time, Turkmenistan as a sovereign state has to permanently think of its national security and strengthening of the army defensive capacity guarantees peace and tranquillity in the country and well-being of it's people [Source: the President for Life's office]. The visit of the defence minister Agegeldi **Mamedgeldiev** to China in early 1993 marked the opening of discussions on co-operation on several fronts including the supply of aid. Full details have not been released.

Creating proper conditions for military service is a serious problem in Turkmenistan. Undernourished soldiers are a common phenomenon in the ranks of the Turkmeni army. It is not uncommon to see hungry soldiers serving on numerous road checkpoints (especially in the border zone) asking drivers of passing vehicles for food. Mullahs are active in leading comment against the President for such conditions. Currently, selective conscription has been employed (18 months service for some 25% of all 18-21 year olds not in full-time education) to service the army. Limited Russian support and manpower has maintained a tactical air force – primarily helicopters - and

recent gifts of equipment mean that Turkmenistan has a small coastal force in the Caspian Sea.

Turkmenistan shares a 744 km border with Afghanistan and one of 1370 km with Iran. The Taliban controls Afghan territory adjacent to Turkmenistan. The following Turkmen military facilities are located near the Afghan border:

**Mary** (also sometimes referred to by its pre-Soviet name of Merv): Located just 60 kilometers north of the Afghan border in the Murgab river valley, the airbase at Mary was, in soviet times, the largest airbase in Central Asia.

Border towns of **Sarakhs** (10 km from the Islamic Republic of Iran border) and **Serkhetabat** (5 km short of the Afghanistani border) have shown some breakdown of central government arrangements.

**Kushka and Takhta-Bazar** are other military bases nearer the Turkmen-Afghan border though these are in very poor condition and their airstrips may now be accessible by rotary wing aircraft only.

Turkmenistan's border with the Islamic Republic of Iran runs within 40km of many of Turkmenistan's major towns and cities. Turkmenistan's major railroad from the Caspian Sea and parallel canal system run for the large part within 30 km of the Iranian border.

## **Stability Issues**

Following the formal dissolution of the former Soviet union, the potential for significant religious-inspired conflict is high with both Taliban and Iranian influences in the south and west of the country respectively. Although several militias appear to have paralleled if not usurped the local army presence there has been little overt action from external sources. The continued draw-down of ex-soviet forces in the region may prove the tipping point in this position.

## **Current Briefing.**

In April of 1993 news of a treaty with China for the construction of oil extraction plants and a new pipeline to the Arabian Gulf via Iran in return for basing privileges for a satellite, or potentially ICBM, control facility was met with disbelief. The Russian government tried to apply direct pressure by blocking the distribution through its pipeline of Turkmenistan's oil production. However, this tactic backfired. Russian service personnel providing pipeline protection forces were confined to base and many were "encouraged" to vacate the country by the burning of their barracks. A faction suggesting closer co-operation if not union with Afghanistan emerged from the religious elements. This faction has gained greatly in power over the last 6 months and is in danger of overturning the government in the southern-most Welayaty of Mary (Merv).

Under the banner of a UN resolution supported by the Turkmenistan government, the USA and others have sent troops to the area to provide a stabilisation force. These have largely been drawn down from units previously involved with the Iraq Gulf War. Russia has declined to provide any material support to the UN mandated force but has

advised that it will be providing support through its own channels. China volunteered to supply troops but the lack of interoperability with the largely NATO standard equipments of the other contingents has meant that so far Chinese aid has been legitimately declined.

The immediate impact of the force arrival was of a series of direct confrontations in the towns of the semi-desert area to the south of Mary resulting in a significant number of casualties – almost all locals. UN elements pressed forward during a 3 month operation “Forest Clearance” however, resistance grew with the casualty count. The extreme south-west of Mary Welayaty has seen local government suborned and replaced with a regime backed by religious elements. The announcement by those elements, effectively ceding from central government control, has led to a full blown revolt, with local armed militias backed by Taliban from over the border.

There are also reports of Iranian-backed elements taking to the streets openly promoting their own solution for the area, but working with other militia groups where common cause appears. Principal amongst the Iranian influence is the Al Quds force.

The Quds force was created during the 1980s Iran-Iraq war as a special unit from the broader Pasdaran forces. During the war it had helped the Kurds fight the Iraqi military. After the war, Quds Force continued to support the Kurds fighting Saddam Hussein. The Quds expanded their operations into other areas, most notably aiding Ahmed Shah Massoud's Northern Alliance against the Soviets during the Soviet war in Afghanistan. There are also reports of the Quds forces lending support to Muslim Bosnians fighting the Serbs. Current direction of the force comes from highest levels within the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

Present UN operations are dedicated to driving these militias from centres of population and returning the province to central government control – exercise “Gathering Chickens”. Turkmeni army resources are limited and most are already deployed in the North or undergoing re-training and are unlikely to be available in strength for up to 12 months. The remaining Russian forces within Turkmenistan protecting the gas pipelines remain generally neutral to the UN exercise, at worse they have openly intervened against any/all forces where the security of the existing pipelines is threatened. It is thought that within the Russian forces, many of whom are not ethnic Russians, there is widespread sympathy for the local mullahs and this has been the reason they had been allowed to remain.

The Terms of Engagement (TOE) for the UN forces vary however, the US version is representative of the majority force and are repeated here as Annex B.

It is clear that certain European NATO Governments have restricted the commitment of their national forces either in terms of geography or action. The Danish field hospital sited in Mary has no combat capacity, the Italian mechanised contingent in Farap undertaking the Turkmeni army training - almost none!

Logistic support for the exercise is by undertaken by road [AH5] from the capital Ashgabat. Ashgabat itself is being supported by elements of the US 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne and Tactical 12<sup>th</sup> Air wing. Limited air-lift into Mary Welayaty via the concrete airfield at Mary and casualty extraction from lesser strips is available. Operations south of Mary

and adjacent to the borders with Afghanistan and Iran (in the areas of Gugsy, Sarakhs and Serkhetabat) are supported by road and tactical air transport from Mary airport and the fortified “Camp Nigel” adjacent (originally the site of the 1930’s British Council summer compound and tennis courts) and named by the Royal Marines after the current HM Ambassador.

The UN sanctioned intervention campaign is limited to 12 months duration in the first instance. The majority of troops expect to be rotated through after a tour of between 4 and 6 months.

US Airpower is limited to that brought in-country originally (carrier borne forces being beyond strike range unless over-flying Iranian airspace), long range intervention by B52 or B1 aircraft and CSAR capabilities provided by USASIACOM. The Russians have indicated that over-flying Russian - or client nation - territory by military aircraft will not be accepted at this time.

## **Epilogue**

**The following accounts of these campaigns (Forest Clearance, Gathering Chickens and their later phases) together with the orbats of the forces involved (Annex A) are taken from notes found in the margins of the Operational diaries and local records recovered during the de-contamination team patrols in the early 2020s.**

PJC.

**Orbats and Intelligence**

**UN Forces assigned Mary Welayaty, Turkmenistan**

**USMC Expeditionary Force comprising:**

**USMC Battalions (21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>) 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Force –**

4 companies under armour (AAV7-P)  
3 companies in HUMVEE  
Scout Platoons  
Fire support teams LAV25  
2 Batteries M119 105mm Light Guns

**USMC Air Assets**

AV8-B, AH-1, CH-53, CH47 aircraft,

**US Army Air Assets**

UH-60

**UK**

2 Coys 2 Para

Chinook HC2 a/c

**Elements Dutch Marine Battalion.**

[J] - arriving in approx 3 months time

**Canadian Army Assets**

2 Troops B Squadron Lord Strathcona's Horse (Leopard 1A4 )

1 Company Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (Mech M113)

**2<sup>eme</sup> REI (French Foreign Legion)**

2 Company strength in VABs

## **Polish Marines**

Company strength in BTR/BMP vehicles

## **1<sup>st</sup> Malaysian Rangers**

1 Coy plus supports, Truck mounted

## **Other UN contingents ..... tba.**

## **Other Forces Present or Inferred**

### **Turkmen Army:**

A small local presence in the Waylayaty (company level at best). The last significant loyal garrison troops are reported to have been expelled from the area some 6 weeks before the arrival of the UN Force by large insurgent militia forces. It is unclear as to the fate of any equipment or other assets abandoned in that withdrawal.

### **Russian Forces (Intel report):**

Company level marine infantry unit with attached Navy aviation personnel (approx 150 all ranks). Ka-29 transport helicopters and local ground transport. Main compound is located approx 2Km NE of the town of Sarakhs adjacent to the regional pipeline pressure boost station which is critical to gas flow through the pipeline.

Other minor Russian forces, specifically Paratroop elements remain in the north of Mary Welayaty at key nodes but capability and capacity is unclear at this time.

The official Russian position is one which disputes the need for UN presence in a former USSR state. However, the continued Chinese/Iranian expansion of influence in the fragile republic suggests that at local level some co-operation may be gained where common aims can be identified.

Roulement of Russian forces in the Waylayaty is due in the coming weeks and the form and extent of the replacement may be a clearer indicator of Russian intentions.

### **Insurgents (Intel Reports and Satellite):**

Irregular Taliban-sponsored/led Militia ground forces of 400 – 4000 souls in the area, with access to limited military support equipment assets, transport and heavy weapon systems.

Taliban armoured units at troop or company level (T80 / BMP 2) are stationed within Afghanistan some 10-20 km from border having defeated the loose, western facing, Northern Alliance in that region.

### **Iranian Extremists:**

The so-called Al Quds or “Gusgy Greens” (as the USMC have labelled – or was that Gassy Greens?), funded and manned by Iranian Revolutionary guards. This presence is supported by the Iranian Government in opposition to the Taliban presence which the Iranians believe should not be extended into the country. There is no evidence that the Al Quds would actively aid the Turkmeni government rather could be considered a destabilising force seeking to expand the Iranian influence and are predisposed to oppose the UN, particularly US, presence. Currently, their involvement has been limited to less than platoon sized incursions, with only personal weapons and civilian vehicles or trucks fielded. The continued presence of this faction openly in-country supports assessment of a very considerable breakdown in local law enforcement.

### **Iranian Revolutionary Guards**

Sited on the border this uniformed body with full access to Iranian military hardware at all levels of sophistication has threatened incursion into Mary Waylayaty. It is predicted to be actively opposed to all other military or militia forces including resident Russian troops. It is predicted that major threat or disruption to the oil and gas pipeline flow into Iran might trigger direct intervention.



## Annex B

Operation Restore Clarity the 1993 UN-sanctioned humanitarian relief and enforcement operation conducted in Turkmenistan.

### **RULES OF ENGAGEMENT FOR OPERATION RESTORE CLARITY [As described by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Order 7114/93]**

1. (U) Situation. Basic OPLAN/OPORD.
2. (U) Mission. Basic OPLAN/OPORD.
3. (U) Execution.
  1. (U) Concept of the Operation.
    1. (U) If you are operating as a unit, squad, or other formation, follow the orders of your leaders.
    2. (U) Nothing in these rules negates your inherent right to use reasonable force to defend yourself against dangerous personal attack.
    3. (U) These rules of self-protection and rules of engagement are not intended to infringe upon your right of self defense. These rules are intended to prevent indiscriminate use of force or other violations of law or regulation.
    4. (U) Commanders will instruct their personnel on their mission. This includes the importance of proper conduct and regard for the local population and the need to respect private property and public facilities. The *Posse Comitatus Act* does not apply in an overseas area. Expect that all missions will have the inherent task of force security and protection.
    5. (U) ROE cards will be distributed to each deploying soldier (see [Appendix 1](#) to this document).
  2. (U) Rules of Self-Protection for all Soldiers.
    1. (U) US forces will protect themselves from threats of death or serious bodily harm. Deadly force may be used to defend your life, the life of another US soldier, or the life of persons in areas under US control. You are authorized to use deadly force in self-defense when--
      1. (U) You are fired upon.
      2. (U) Armed elements, mobs, and/or rioters threaten human life.
      3. (U) There is a clear demonstration of hostile intent in your presence.
    2. (U) Hostile intent of opposing forces can be determined by unit leaders or individual soldiers if their leaders are not present. Hostile intent is the threat of imminent use of force against US forces or other persons in those areas under the control of US forces. Factors you may consider include--
      1. (U) Weapons: Are they present? What types?
      2. (U) Size of the opposing force.
      3. (U) If weapons are present, the manner in which they are displayed; that is, are they being aimed? Are the weapons part of a firing position?
      4. (U) the presence of crew served weapons and systems.
      5. (U) How did the opposing force respond to the US forces?
      6. (U) How does the force act toward unarmed civilians?
      7. (U) Other aggressive actions.
    3. (U) You may detain persons threatening or using force which would cause death, serious bodily harm, or interference with mission accomplishment. You may detain persons who commit criminal acts in areas under US control. Detainees should be given to military police as soon as possible for evacuation to central collection points (see [paragraph d](#) below).
  3. (U) Rules of Engagement. The relief property, foodstuffs, medical supplies, building materials, and other end items belong to the relief agencies distributing the supplies

until they are actually distributed to the populace. Your mission includes safe transit of these materials to the populace.

1. (U) Deadly force may be used only when -
  - (a) (U) Fired upon.
  - (b) (U) Clear evidence of hostile intent exists (see above for factors to consider to determine hostile intent).
  - (c) (U) Armed elements, mobs, and/or rioters threaten human life, sensitive equipment and aircraft, and open and free passage of relief supplies.
2. (U) In situations where deadly force is not appropriate, use the minimum force necessary to accomplish the mission.
3. (U) Patrols are authorized to provide relief supplies, US forces, and other persons in those areas under the control Of US forces. Patrols may use deadly force if fired upon or if they encounter opposing forces which evidence a hostile intent. Non-deadly force or a show of force should be used if the security of US forces is not compromised by doing so. A graduated show of force includes--
  - (a) (U) An order to disband or disperse.
  - (b) (U) Show of force/threat of force by US forces that is greater than the force threatened by the opposing force.
  - (c) (U) Warning shots aimed to prevent harm to either innocent civilians or the opposing force.
  - (d) (U) Other means of non-deadly force.

If this show of force does not cause the opposing force to abandon its hostile intent, consider if deadly force is appropriate.
4. (U) Use of barbed wire fences is authorized.
5. (U) Unattended means of force (for example, mines, booby traps, trip guns) are not authorized.
6. (U) If US forces are attacked or threatened by unarmed hostile elements, mobs, and /or rioters, US forces will use the minimum amount of force reasonably necessary to overcome the threat. A graduated response to unarmed hostile elements may be used. Such a response can include--
  - (a) (U) Verbal warnings to demonstrators in their native language.
  - (b) (U) Shows of force, including the use of riot control formations.
  - (c) (U) Warning shots fired over the heads of the hostile elements.
  - (d) (U) Other reasonable uses of force, to include deadly force when the element demonstrates a hostile intent, which are necessary and proportional to the threat.
7. (U) All weapons systems may be employed throughout the area of operations unless otherwise prohibited. The use of weapons systems must be appropriate and proportional, considering the threat.
8. (U) US forces will not endanger or exploit the property of the local population without their explicit approval. Use of civilian property usually be compensated by contract or other form of payment. Property that has been used for the purpose of hindering our mission will be confiscated. Weapons

may be confiscated and demilitarized if they are used to interfere with the mission of US forces (see [rule \(10\)](#) below).

9. (U) Operations will not be conducted outside of the landmass, airspace, and territorial seas of Turkmenistan. However, any USASIACOM force conducting a search and rescue mission shall use force as necessary and intrude into the landmass, airspace, or territorial sea of any county necessary to recover friendly forces.
10. (U) Crew-served weapons are considered a threat to US forces and the relief effort whether or not the crew demonstrates hostile intent. Commanders are authorized to use all necessary force to confiscate and demilitarize crew-served weapons in their area of operations.
  - (a) (U) If an armed individual or weapons crew demonstrates hostile intentions, they may be engaged with deadly force.
  - (b) (U) If an armed individual or weapons crew commits criminal acts but does not demonstrate hostile intentions, US forces will use the minimum amount of necessary force to detain them.
  - (c) (U) Crew-served weapons are any weapon system that requires more than one individual to operate. Crew-served weapons include, but are not limited to tanks, artillery pieces, anti-aircraft guns, mortars, and machine guns.
11. (U) Within those areas under the control of US forces, armed individuals may be considered a threat to US forces and the relief effort, whether or not the individuals demonstrate hostile intent. Commanders are authorized to use all necessary force to disarm and demilitarize groups or individuals in those areas under the control of US forces. Absent a hostile or criminal act, individuals and associated vehicles will be released after any weapons are removed/demilitarized.
4. (U) Use of riot control agents (RCAs). Use of RCAs requires the approval of JCS. When authorized, RCAs may be used for purposes including, but not limited to--
  - (1) (U) Riot control in the division area of operations, including the dispersal of civilians who obstruct roadways or otherwise impede distribution operations after lesser means have failed to result in dispersal.
  - (2) (U) Riot control in detainee holding areas or camps in and around material distribution or storage areas.
  - (3) (U) Protection of convoys from civil disturbances, terrorists, or paramilitary groups.
5. (U) Detention of Personnel. Personnel who interfere with the accomplishment of the mission or who use or threaten deadly force against US forces, US or relief material distribution sites, or convoys may be detained. Persons who commit criminal acts in areas under the control of US forces may likewise be detained.
  - (1) (U) Detained personnel will be treated with respect and dignity.
  - (2) (U) Detained personnel will be evacuated to a designated location for turnover to military police.
  - (3) (U) Troops should understand that any use of the feet in detaining, handling or searching Somali civilians is one of the most insulting forms of provocation.
4. (U) Service Support. Basic OPLAN/OPORD.

5. (U) Command and Signal. Basic OPLAN/OPORD.

## Appendix 1

### US ROE Card

#### Rules of Engagement Joint Task Force for Turkmenistan Relief Operations Ground Forces

Nothing in these rules of engagement limits your right to take appropriate action to defend yourself and your unit.

1. You have the right to use force to defend yourself against attacks or threats of attack.
2. Hostile fire may be returned effectively and promptly to stop a hostile act.
3. When US forces are attacked by *unarmed* hostile elements, mobs, and/or rioters, US forces should use the minimum force necessary under the circumstances and proportional to the threat.
4. You may not seize the property of others to accomplish your mission.
5. Detention of civilians is authorized for security reasons or in self-defense.

#### Remember

- The United States is **not** at war.
- Treat all persons with dignity and respect.
- Use minimum force to carry out the mission.
- Always be prepared to act in self-defense.