

SITUATION OVERVIEW

AFGHANISTAN

JUNE 2008

NATO HAS THE WATCH THE TALIBAN HAS THE TIME

SUMMARY

Security conditions in Afghanistan worsened in June. The 314 clashes in the sample represent an increase of 50 per cent over May, the previous high. The fighting set new records for intensity, scope and frequency of attacks. Taliban also set new records in the numbers of districts under stress; the number of district centers attacked; and the numbers of roadside, car bombs and suicide bombs used.

Taliban also attacked convoys more consistently than before. In several attacks they stood and fought NATO forces in conventional firefights until air power arrived. The last time they did that was in 2001. They fought as if they had received better, more disciplined tactical training. This was reflected in a relatively low number of civilian deaths compared to the high numbers of clashes.

In the last week of June, roughly since 22 June, multiple reports from captured Taliban and battlefield after action reports attested to a measurable increase in fighters arriving from Pakistan. More non-South Asian foreign fighters – Saudis, Turks, Uzbeks and Chechens -- also were identified after firefights than at any time since 2001. The numbers are not yet large, but they have returned and they are coming from Pakistan.

The 45 NATO fatalities represented the highest number of men killed in a single month in the nearly seven years of fighting. Twenty-seven were Americans; thirteen were British, the rest were Canadians, a Hungarian, a Pole and a Romanian.

On the other hand, the Taliban hemorrhaged manpower. They suffered over 1,000 men killed based on the sample of public sources. However they never ran out of bodies, ammunition or supplies. Increased manpower from Pakistan is the best and simplest explanation for Taliban's ability to sustain the fighting in June.

NATO ground forces did not win every battle in June. That is a change. They won every battle in which they had air support, however. The role of NATO air power changed from expanding victories to preventing defeats for the first time in this conflict.

OUTLOOK

Afghanistan appears to have become a magnet for foreign fighters again. Uninhibited access to Pakistan as a safe haven and base area will have a transforming effect on the insurgency and makes it impossible to contain the escalation. The Taliban will tire of fighting before they run out of manpower. NATO forces cannot win a war of attrition.

The amount of supplies needed to sustain the level of effort in June is such that the logistics effort must be open and extensive in Pakistan. Parts of Pakistan must be considered at war with NATO in Afghanistan.

There are no signs that this level of effort is tapering off, as occurred in last year's offensive at this time. With the surge from Pakistani tribal fighters and more non-South Asians showing up, July attacks should surpass those in June.

The ring around Kabul is tightening monthly. Security will continue to deteriorate in the adjacent provinces. Attacks in Kandahar, such as the Sarposa Prison break, suggest much of that city is not under government control. Both cities could come under Taliban influence this summer even with NATO forces present. Nevertheless, only NATO forces are preventing the collapse of the entire western-backed enterprise in Afghanistan.

Attacks in June and July to date show that Taliban are willing to sacrifice manpower to take the fight directly to NATO forces more than at any time since 2001. ***Their web postings indicate their intent is to overrun a NATO outpost, in the style of the French loss in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam***, so as to cause embarrassment and collapse of support for the Afghan effort on the NATO home fronts as well as within Afghanistan. If they succeed, as they nearly did on 13 July in Konar Province, the erosion of confidence will be far reaching and difficult to restore, even though the tactical significance might be small. It could be a culminating strategic event in favor of the Taliban.

OPERATION EBRAT UPDATE

There were no observed additional web postings about the offensive plan, but detected repeated attempts to apply new tactics or to focus on different targets, especially in provinces bordering Pakistan. These changes were mentioned in the web postings. So also was some discussion of attempting to overrun isolated NATO outposts.

In heartland provinces, Taliban fighters attacked in districts that have not previously registered attacks. In the sample, press sources reported 17 attacks on convoys or at least one attack every other day. June was the first month in which that category distinguished itself.

The number of attacks in the sample is clearly an understatement. News sources from two widely separated provinces reported the Taliban set up road blocks to warn all drivers to not work with NATO or the national government. The same message in widely separated provinces indicates this is a country-wide initiative to disrupt logistic support.

In terms of tactics not reported previously, in one major attack, Taliban used three roadside bombs in a sequence to attack a vehicle, attack the first responders and attack again, coordinated with gunfire support. On 6 June in Tagab District, Kapisa Province a fighting force from Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's HIG organization attempted to overrun a US-Afghan outpost. A different group tried to do the same thing on 21 June in Khost Province. Helicopter gunships helped beat back the attacks.

Some Taliban groups showed better tactics than is customary in executing coordinated attacks from more than one direction. An attack in Uruzgan Province on 2 June was an example. In Zurmat District, Paktia Province, on 13 June the Taliban fighters stood and fought against a Coalition force, instead of running, until the helicopter gunships arrived. The fighting groups have lacked the discipline to engage in a conventional firefight with NATO ground forces.

In Qarabagh and Andar Districts, Ghazni Province, they forced the closure of all schools in mid-June. IN other provinces they warned locals to stop providing assistance to NATO and the government. On 22 June, a group attacked the Ainak copper mine facility for the first time. This is the location of one of the world's largest copper ore deposits and is being developed by China. The apparent intent is to frighten off the Chinese developers.

The above highlights indicate many Taliban groups were trying to follow the guidance of the Operation Ebrat plan. The target mix was more diverse and the tactics somewhat improved, compared to past months.

THE PAKISTAN FACTOR

June was the first month in which the numbers of reports of Pakistani nationals killed or arrested in transit emerged as a distinguishable trend. National news services reported a dozen security incidents involving Pakistani nationals between 22 and 30 June. Afghanistan analysts presume a certain amount of infiltration and smuggling is routine, but the activity in June far exceeded that baseline.

During custodial interrogations, would-be suicide bombers identified their homes, schools and teachers and trainers in Pakistan and contacts in Afghanistan. For example, three young would-be bombers captured on the road in Kandahar Province near the Pakistan border said they had been sent to Helmand Province, Afghanistan by Baitullah Mehsud, a leader in South Waziristan tribal agency in northwest Pakistan. They identified the imam they were to contact in Helmand.

A would be suicide bomber arrested in Balkh Province, in northern Afghanistan provided the name and location of the madrassa in Pakistan that sent him. In Sarkano District, Konar Province, on 23 June, NATO and Afghan forces killed 22 fighters who proved to be members of the Lashkar e Taiba, an Kashmiri militant group with bases inside Pakistani-controlled Kashmir and responsible for attacks in Indian Kashmir and India. It is reputed to be trained and supported by Pakistani intelligence.

In Paktika Province, NATO and Afghan forces killed 51 armed men as they were entering Afghanistan from Pakistan. Similar incidents occurred in Konar and Khost Provinces. The significance of the provincial distribution is that it indicates Pakistani nationals were joining the fight all along the border in the last week of June.

One would-be suicide bomber who was arrested in Kabul identified the Taquera Islam Madrassa in Faisalabad, Pakistan, as the location where he was trained. This youth also mentioned that he was given a drug to take just before he attacked. This is the first press report that Afghan suicide bombers are drugged before they detonate themselves.

MONTHLY FIGHTING DATA

The graphics below depict the trend of fighting by month and enable a comparison with last year. The total number of clashes in the first five months of 2007 and 2008 were not significantly different, but June 2008 represents a point of departure from all prior years of fighting. The 314 clashes are the new monthly record in the sample. It is not yet clear that this level of fighting will be sustained, though the fighting through mid-July suggests it will. If this surge lasts through July, that would indicate a significant increase in Taliban capabilities.

MONTH 2008	CLASHES WITH CASUALTIES
January	66
February	60
March	107
April	199
May	222
June	314
Total	968

MONTH 2007	CLASHES WITH CASUALTIES
January	102
February	100
March	128
April	149
May	149
June	160
July	172
August	203
September	132
October	134
November	140
December	120
Total 2007	1702

ANALYSIS OF THE PROVINCES

Clashes or bombings occurred in 29 of the 34 provinces, the highest number to date since 2001. The charts below show that the core of the fighting remains the Pashtun heartland province. Clashes in those provinces accounted for 79 per cent of the total clashes in June. Whatever gains Allied forces achieved, for example in Paktika earlier this year, were erased. Moreover, the Taliban are steadily increasing their presence in the provinces surrounding Kabul, except Parwan and Laghman. Taliban seems unable to establish a self-sustaining fighting cell in these two provinces or considers them less important than the provinces between Kabul and Kandahar.

Nangarhar looks like a bright spot, except that on the Pakistan side of the border, the Taliban stopped almost all truck traffic in June, as they threatened. Moreover, adjacent to it is Konar Province, one of the main infiltration routes in the northern sector of the border for fighters coming from Pakistan.

One significant change in June is that the core provinces accounted for fewer of the total attacks compared to May. In May the core accounted for 86% of the attacks but in June 79% of the clashes were in core provinces. This means the Taliban succeeded in broadening the area of the fighting to districts not previously involved.

PROVINCE	TOTAL 2007	2007 AVERAGE CLASHES	JANUARY CLASHES	FEBRUARY CLASHES	MARCH CLASHES	APRIL CLASHES	MAY CLASHES	JUNE CLASHES	TOTAL 2008
Ghazni	163	Attack every three days	1	1	7	34	31	34	108
Helmand	281	Attack every 32 hours	11	14	17	17	30	40	139
Kabul	57	Attack once a week	5	1	2	7	11	5	31
Kandahar	199	Attack ever other day	10	9	13	34	21	33	117
Khost	104	Attack every four days	8	7	9	18	14	24	80

PROVINCE	TOTAL 2007	2007 AVERAGE CLASHES	JANUARY CLASHES	FEBRUARY CLASHES	MARCH CLASHES	APRIL CLASHES	MAY CLASHES	JUNE CLASHES	TOTAL 2008
Konar	85	Attack every five days	1	5	3	4	23	10	46
Lowgar	34	Attack every 10 days	2	1	1	9	10	13	36
Nangarhar	80	Attack every five days	3	0	1	2	9	5	20
Paktika	94	Attack every four days	0	1	0	2	6	2 1	30
Paktia	93	Attack every four days	1	0	1	13	20	32	67
Zabol	94	Attack every four days	3	2	8	13	6	14	46
Farah	86	Attack every four days	7	4	5	3	10	17	46
Total	1370 (80% of 2007 total)	114 per month	52 (78% of Jan total)	45 (75% of Feb total)	67 (62% of Mar total)	156 (78% of Apr total)	191 (86% of May total)	248 (79% of June total)	766 127/month 79% of 2008 total)
Oruzgan	71	Attack every six days	3	7	5	5	0	9	29

The regularity of attacks is a key indicator of the Taliban's capabilities in any province. Helmand is the first province to show clearly the capability to stage multiple attacks per day in a province. This is the first time this has occurred. *Kandahar, Ghazni and Paktia are very close to that threshold.* Afghan forces in a single province lack the mobility to respond to multiple attacks per day. NATO resources also can become over extended in responding to multiple simultaneous attacks.

The capability to execute multiple attacks in a province on a single day can signify a major increase in manpower or more frequent attacks by existing groups. The data on casualties and on infiltrations from Pakistan suggests Taliban manpower has increased.

ANALYSIS OF THE DISTRICT ATTACKS

Bombings, ambushes, arson and fighting engagements resulting in casualties occurred in 127 of Afghanistan's 398 districts. This is a record number of districts under stress. And the second time more than one-quarter of the districts registered Taliban attacks, exceeding the previous high in May 2008. (Note: this summary does not include tribal feuding and criminal activity.)

In June, Taliban fighters attacked 20 district centers, scaled-down versions of the administrative center in a county seat in a US state. A few were overrun and all apparently were recaptured, indicating this is not a large threat of

violence so much as a drain on resources. More importantly it erodes confidence in the government at the level of official presence that affects the greatest number of people.

Taliban already tried and stopped this kind of targeting late last year because of the losses from Allied counter attacks. In June, however, they revived this targeting program, which tries to discredit the government for being unable to protect its own agents. At least ten of the district centers attacked in June were seldom attacked at all in the past. None are government or NATO strong points.

The Taliban attempted to takeover several districts in the border provinces of Khost, Ghazni, Paktia and Paktika which form a cluster in the central part of the Pakistan border. Several districts experienced repeated attempts to seize the district center in those provinces. The Taliban are not yet capable of seizing and holding ground, but came closer to that capability in June than in prior months.

The chart below shows the number of districts in each province; the number of districts that experienced attacks in each province; and the total number of attacks for each province.

DISTRICTS CLASHES

PROVINCE	TOTAL DISTRICTS	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	CLASHES FEB	CLASHES MAR	CLASHES APR	CLASHES MAY	CLASHES JUN
Badakhshan	28	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Badghis	7	0	2	1	0	4	0	4	2	3	6
Baghlan	15	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	2	2	3
Balkh	15	0	4	1	1	2	0	4	1	1	2
Bamiyan	7	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Daykundi	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Farah	11	3	3	2	4	9	7	5	3	10	17
Faryab	14	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1
Ghazni	19	1	2	10	10	12	1	7	34	31	34
Ghor	10	0	1	0	2	1	0	1	0	3	1
Helmand	13	6	6	9	9	11	14	17	17	30	40
Herat	16	2	4	3	1	5	4	7	8	1	9
Jowzjan	11	0	1	0	1	3	0	2	0	1	4

PROVINCE	TOTAL DISTRICTS	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	CLASHES FEB	CLASHES MAR	CLASHES APR	CLASHES MAY	CLASHES JUN
Kabul	15	1	1	3	5	2	1	2	7	11	5
Kandahar	16	6	4	9	12	8	9	13	34	21	33
Kapisa	7	1	2	2	1	2	1	3	4	1	8
Khost	13	4	8	8	7	11	7	9	18	14	24
Konar	15	4	2	3	9	7	5	3	4	23	10
Konduz	7	0	1	4	3	2	0	2	5	5	2
Laghman	5	1	1	2	4	1	1	1	3	4	1
Lowgar	7	1	1	5	3	4	1	1	9	10	13
Nangarhar	22	0	1	2	7	2	0	1	2	9	5
Nimruz	5	1	1	3	0	3	1	4	9	0	3
Nurestan	8	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	2	0	2
Oruzgan	5	2	3	2	0	2	4	5	5	0	9
Paktia	11	0	1	4	6	8	0	1	13	20	32
Paktika	19	1	0	2	5	11	1	0	2	6	21
Panjshir	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0
Parwan	10	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	2	1
Samangan	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sar – e-Pol	7	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	1
Takhar	17	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0
Wardak	9	0	2	1	5	4	0	3	0	6	11
Zabol	11	1	4	7	5	5	2	8	13	6	14

CASUALTIES

The chart below shows the box score and cumulative data for 2007 as a baseline reference.

Accurate casualty figures for non-NATO fighters are notoriously difficult to derive. The Taliban and Afghans exaggerate their achievements, and understate their own losses. The result is that when either side admits to losses those figures form a reliable minimum that has served as a rough gauge of the lethality of the clashes for the past two years. Levels of clashes and casualties should and do correspond in the data.

NATO losses are almost at the 2007 monthly average but Afghan force losses remain below the 2007 monthly averages. The increase in NATO killed in wounded reflects a more aggressive targeting strategy and increased operations by NATO.

The Taliban sustained a 300% increase in casualties but did not falter during the month. NATO losses more than doubled. The Afghan police losses rose almost precisely at the same rate as the overall clashes. The Afghan Army remains conspicuous for not making a difference for two years running. Most of its losses were from roadside bombs and Taliban ambushes.

The one positive note is that civilian losses rose less than the rate of the increase in fighting. This indicates the combatants were much more cautious about civilian casualties than has been common. Today the sample of media sources have reported 777 civilians killed and 801 injured through 30 June.

CASUALTY RATIOS

Ratios for overall casualties and for fatalities provide insight into the lethality of the clashes and the impact of modern western military equipment. Also tracked are the changes in loss rates compared to the 2007 baseline data.

Taliban lost 1024 killed in June, which almost equals their total losses through May. Total Taliban reported killed this year is 2066 in this sample. Total killed wounded and captured is now 3024 between January and 30 June. The Allied forces, including NATO and the Afghan Army and Police, have lost 384, as reported in the public media through 30 June. NATO forces have suffered 19 fatalities in July through the date of this report.

FORCE	2007 KIA	2007 PER MONTH	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	2008 PER MONTH	2007 WIA	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE
Taliban	6218	518	63	112	196	301	370	1024	344	452	13	3	23	70	51	120
NATO	249	21	14	7	19	14	23	45	20	210	13	2	12	19	22	42
Afghan Army	249	21	3	7	8	4	15	16	7	217	2	16	1	10	20	20
Afghan Police	780	65	32	22	34	124	51	80	53	602	56	12	36	103	91	67
Civilians	1201	100	38	145	128	177	156	133	129	894	30	146	163	188	154	160

The Killed-Wounded-Captured Casualty Ratio of Taliban to Allied forces moved in favor of the allies from 1.5: 1 in May to 4:1 in June. This means for every Allied soldier killed, wounded or kidnapped, the Allies killed, wounded or captured 4 Taliban. The last month in which the overall loss ratio was this favorable to the Allies was prior to the spring offensive in 2007.

The Kill Ratio jumped in favor of the Allies as the Taliban sacrificed manpower to sustain the high level of fighting in June. The kill ratio was the highest recorded at 7: 1. In other words for every Afghan and NATO fatality, the Taliban lost 7 in this data sample.

The news reports of battles consistently indicate that without air power, NATO ground forces were in danger of losing to Taliban because of its manpower advantage. If the Taliban acquire the capability to reduce NATO air support, the NATO position will become untenable.

BOMBS

One fourth of all attacks in June included roadside bombs, car bombs and suicide bombs. Taliban used 64 improvised bombs and sacrificed 22 suicide bombers. By far the most sensational and tactically effective use was the prison break in Kandahar which featured coordinated suicide bombings and small arms supporting fires.

Bombings of all kinds were concentrated primarily in six Taliban heartland provinces: Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar, Paktia, Paktika and Khost. In other provinces, the roadside bomb attack showed the Taliban were in the area.

Ghazni Province Governor Osmani accurately described the Taliban’s eastern strategy in explaining the surge in attacks in Ghazni. On 24 June he said Ghazni is part of the seven province cluster that forms the path from Kandahar to Kabul: Kandahar, Zabol, Ghazni, Paktia, Paktika, Logar, Kandahar and Mayden Wardak. ***Control of those seven provinces provides control of all land routes linking Afghanistan’s largest cities.***

Farah in western Afghanistan and Helmand are the pathway from Kandahar to Herat. That helps explain the concentration of attacks in Farah. The Taliban are controlling overland access to their heartland, while putting pressure on Kabul. The Pakistani Taliban already control the road from Peshawar, Pakistan, westward to Kabul.

FORCES

The level of fighting in mid July despite losses in June indicates Taliban strength has grown, but no sources in the public domain provide an estimate. Based on the fighting in June, Taliban probably added 2,000 to 3,000 fighters, and lost about half of them.

COUNTRY	FORCES OF ORDER	OPPOSITION	FORCES OF ORDER : TALIBAN RATIO	STATUS
Afghanistan	<p>207,900 total</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 17,000 Coalition (includes 8,000 US) - 52,900 ISAF/NATO (includes 23,550 US) - 58,000 Afghan Army - 80,000 Afghan Police 	<p>6,000 -8,000 Taliban fighters (unknown number of part time fighters)</p>	<p>30-35:1</p>	<p>Taliban can hold terrain against Afghan forces; Allies cannot prevent Taliban attacks and expansion into new areas. ISAF/NATO remains essential for government survival.</p>