



NightWatch
26 January 2009

Special Report: November in Afghanistan

Summary: November was another surge month. Based on the *NightWatch* sample of news services and other open sources, November featured at least 441 clashes that produced casualties or property damage. In October 314 and in September 267 clashes occurred. November was the most violent month in the three year NightWatch data base.

Public media sources reported clashes resulting in death or damage taking place in 159 districts, which is the highest number since 2001. Even without December data -- still being compiled -- the cumulative total of clashes for 2008 distinguishes it as the worst year of the fighting, by a significant margin.

Multiple reports indicated the Taliban were trying to avoid combat except for convoy attacks. This was manifest in the number of Coalition casualties from improvised bombs and mines. Taliban did not engage in many direct attacks against Coalition forces, compared to last summer. The spike in incidents, thus, is the result of more aggressive Coalition operations and apparently an increase in open source reporting.

In November, the first murder of a voter registration official occurred. Nevertheless, Taliban harassment of election officials was limited, based on news service reports. The anti-government forces did not appear to have a unified position on whether to oppose voter registration.

The other feature of November is that the Afghan National Army continued to expand its operations, which are starting to have an impact. *NightWatch* has factored the Afghan army into the opposing force ratios consistently, but, like most of the foreign contingents in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) which are also factored, Afghan soldiers usually made no noticeable contribution to offensive combat power. In the past two months this has changed.

The addition of the Afghan units is a net plus that shows in the fighting and the casualty reports. Afghan soldiers are taking more casualties in operational settings, not just from roadside bombs. Afghan National Army forces sustained 59 killed and wounded, their highest monthly losses. NATO casualties were 36. November was the second month running in which Afghan army losses exceeded NATO losses.

Outlook: Most Taliban and other anti government fighters began to go to winter quarters, in Pakistan or in Afghanistan. The fighting will drop somewhat during the winter, but in the core provinces of the Pashtun south, weather is less a factor. There, fighting will be higher than last winter. December reports indicate winter weather had just begun to affect the fighters in the mountainous regions of the border with Pakistan.

Based on Taliban public statements, the focus will remain on the overland truck lifeline for Afghan and NATO forces and use of improvised bombs. Taliban will also plan for the spring offensive of 2009. Voter registration will progress with little interference.

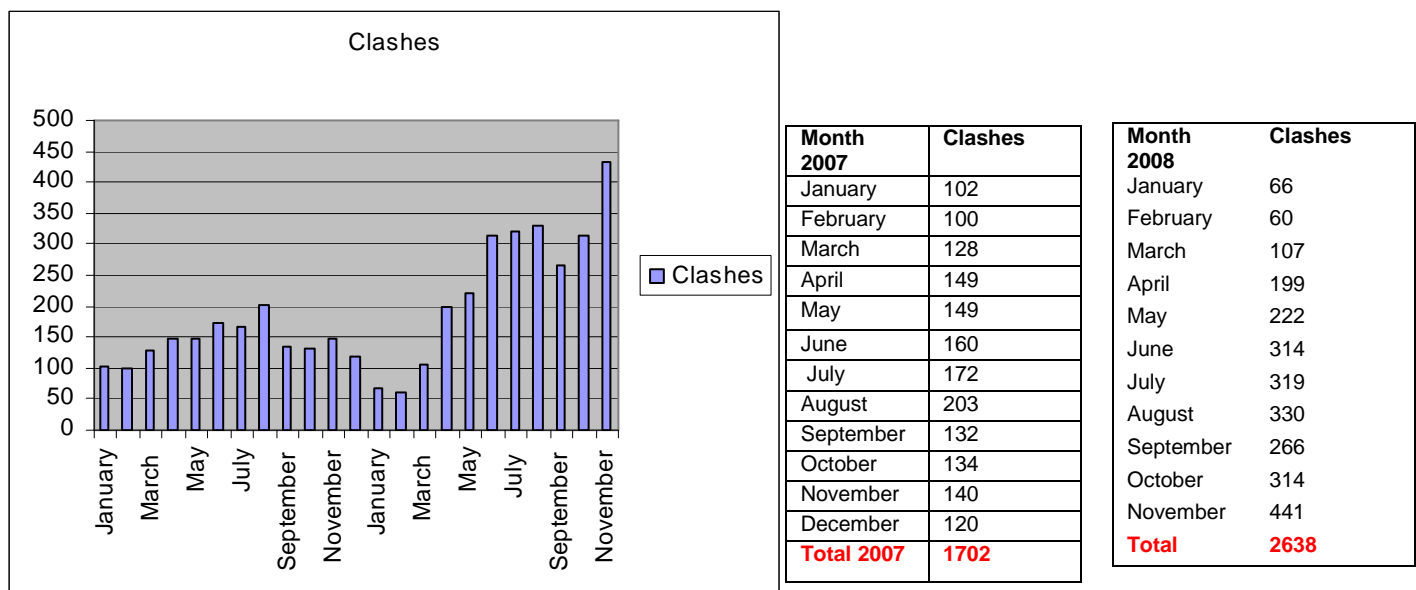
Monthly Fighting Data

The graph below shows the two year trend of clashes in the *NightWatch* data sample by month. The graph tracks the significant jump in violence this year. The timing of the jump corresponds to the investiture of an elected civilian government in Pakistan, which coincided with the start of Taliban's spring offensive.

Readers are reminded that the data in this report is a sample derived from public reporting sources. It is the sample that Afghans and foreigners read or hear about in their daily media. Over time it has proven to be a reliable gauge for evaluating and predicting the trend of the fighting.

A sample of fighting data is an imprecise, gross measurement of instability, but casualties and destruction plus territorial control are the facts of war. The fight in Afghanistan continues to worsen, but the emergence of the Afghan National Army in the security picture slowed the rate in November.

The two boxes enable a monthly comparison of the data used in the graph. The calendar year 2008 is the worst year for fighting since the overthrow of the Taliban.



Analysis of the Provinces

The 441 clashes or bombings or other violent incidents reported in the press were spread among 30 of the 34 provinces, compared to 29 in October and 27 in September and August both. The insurgency remains intractable in the core provinces which regularly account for more than three fourths of all clashes.

Whereas the Taliban emphasis in October was to break the stalemate by capturing a province capital, Lashkargah in Helmand Province, in November there was no sensational effort of that sort, just lots of low level clashes.

Fighting in the core provinces accounted for 70% of total clashes. Including Oruzgan Province, 72% of the violence reported in the press in November occurred in the 13 Pashtun provinces, as listed in the chart below. The fight remains primarily a Pashtun fight against the center for control of the center.

The percentage of fighting in the core provinces was lower than it was earlier in the year, which is one dependable indicator that the insurgency has spread. A high total number of attacks with a reduced number in the core provinces always signifies a worsening of security outside the core. October featured the greatest dispersion of fighting for a single month. What this means is that the security forces are failing to contain the fight in the Pashtun south.

The chart shows two other important points. Fighting in provinces adjacent to Pakistan rebounded after a decline in October. Nevertheless, the inland provinces along the Ring Road, the vital line of communication from Kabul to the south and west, contained about half of the violence once again.

Core Provinces of the Insurgency

| Province | Total 2007 | 2007 Average Clashes | June Clashes | July Clashes | August Clashes | September Clashes | October Clashes | November Clashes | Total 2008 |
|--------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Ghazni | 163 | Attack every three days | 34 | 38 | 53 | 29 | 43 | 31 | 302 |
| Helmand | 281 | Attack every 32 hours | 40 | 41 | 41 | 27 | 45 | 52 | 335 |
| Kabul | 57 | Attack once a week | 5 | 5 | 13 | 8 | 8 | 29 | 94 |
| Kandahar | 199 | Attack ever other day | 33 | 29 | 34 | 37 | 24 | 42 | 286 |
| Khost | 104 | Attack every four days | 24 | 16 | 19 | 22 | 13 | 33 | 183 |
| Konar | 85 | Attack every five days | 10 | 13 | 7 | 9 | 11 | 16 | 102 |
| Logar | 34 | Attack every 10 days | 13 | 21 | 11 | 16 | 21 | 18 | 123 |
| Nangarhar | 80 | Attack every five days | 5 | 12 | 11 | 8 | 2 | 13 | 76 |
| Paktika | 94 | Attack every four days | 21 | 20 | 18 | 8 | 9 | 20 | 105 |
| Paktia | 93 | Attack every four days | 32 | 18 | 16 | 10 | 14 | 26 | 181 |
| Zabol | 94 | Attack every four days | 14 | 19 | 8 | 13 | 11 | 17 | 126 |
| Farah | 86 | Attack every four days | 17 | 16 | 14 | 14 | 13 | 14 | 116 |
| Total | 1370 (80% of 2007 total) | 114 per month | 248 (79% of June total) | 248 (77% of July total) | 245 (74% of August total) | 201 (75% of Sept total) | 213 (68% of Oct total) | 311 (70% of Nov total) | 2029 (77% of 2008 total; 184 per month) |
| Oruzgan | 71 | Attack every six days | 9 | 7 | 10 | 14 | 14 | 7 | 68 |

Operational Notes

In November, press reported the death of the first voter registration official to be killed by anti-government forces since registration for the 2009 elections began earlier in the fall. The Taliban leadership in the past opposed elections as an un-Islamic practice, but have made few attacks against the registration process. Some voter registration officials had their houses burned, but anti-government forces displayed no united position on voter registration. Overall voter registration progressed steadily despite the security situation.

Anti-government fighters continued kidnappings, which were almost always for ransom, and assassinations of government officials, especially district governors. On 15 November in Farah Province in western Afghanistan, Taliban murdered Maulvi Shamsuddin, a well-known religious leader, because he condemned suicide bombings as un-Islamic.

Taliban continued to manifest their obsession with burning girls schools.

Follow-up to the Acid Throwing Incident in Kandahar

On 12 November two men on a motorcycle used water pistols to spray battery acid on five high school girls who were walking to the Mirwais Nika Girls High School in Kandahar City. Four girls were injured -- two blinded -- according to a statement from Afghanistan's National Military Command Center.

The residents were outraged. After an intense investigation, on 25 November Afghan authorities arrested ten Taliban who were involved in the assault. Under custodial interrogation they admitted each received \$2,000 for the attack. The men are Afghan Pashtuns, but were trained, paid and came from Pakistan to stage that assault.

The Badghis Disaster

The most sensational attack of the month was the ambush of a government supply convoy and firefight on 29 November in Bala Murghab District of Badghis Province. In the course of the fighting, 7 Army soldiers were killed and 7 wounded; 2 policemen were killed and 6 wounded; and up to 40 Taliban were killed. The most embarrassing development was Taliban kidnapped 6 soldiers and 19 policemen.

The attack is significant because of its size, sophistication and location. Badghis is not part of the Pashtun heartland. Rather it borders Turkmenistan in northwestern Afghanistan. Its ethnic composition is mixed, but 62% are Tajiks. There are pockets of Pashtuns as the result of past internal transmigration schemes. It is the least developed of all 34 provinces.

Through most of 2008, there were fewer than 6 attacks in Badghis per month and only 51 all year through the end of November. About half of those, however, have occurred in October and November. A Taliban commander apparently has identified this remote region as vulnerable to expansion and caught local forces unawares. Reports through January 2009 indicate significant clashes have continued there. Taliban fighting units are operating primarily in Bala Morghab and Ghormach Districts. Spain is responsible for the Provincial Reconstruction Team and security in Badghis.

Analysis of the Districts

Clashes occurred in 159 of the 398 districts in Afghanistan in November, compared to 119 in October and 105 in September. This is the highest number of districts to report clashes and might be partly attributable to more diligent local reporting. As the Afghan army has gotten more engaged the reporting has become more detailed in some reporting services.

In September 2008, NGO sources insisted that the Taliban have a permanent presence in up to 145 districts, or 36% of the districts. A report in early December by the International Council on Security and Development (ICOS, formerly known as the Senlis Council) published that the Taliban have a permanent presence in 72% of Afghanistan, which converts to 286 districts.

The fighting data in the public domain comes closer to supporting the NGO figure than the ICOS number. All three sources agree, however, that the insurgency is spreading. The government has lost ground in 2008.

In November, news services reported Taliban fighters attacked 14 separate district centers, compared to 12 in October. They did not attempt to overrun any districts but the frequency of rocket and mortar fire on district centers indicates anti-government fighting teams are nearby and harass the centers with impunity.

The chart below lists the province name, total districts in the province, the number of districts that experienced clashes in the month and total clashes for the province in the month. The data contains no surprises in that the core provinces contained the most districts under stress.

The yellow highlight showcases the worst provinces.

| Province | Total Districts | DISTRICTS | | | | | CLASHES | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|--------------|----------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| | | July | August | Sept | Oct | Nov | Clashes July | Clashes August | Clashes Sept | Clashes Oct | Clashes Nov |
| Badakhshan | 28 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Badghis | 7 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 9 | 1 | 7 | 16 |
| Baghlan | 15 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| Balkh | 15 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Bamiyan | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Daykundi | 9 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Farah | 11 | 7 | 6 | 3 | 6 | 8 | 16 | 14 | 14 | 13 | 14 |
| Faryab | 14 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 12 |
| Ghazni | 19 | 12 | 15 | 10 | 10 | 12 | 38 | 53 | 29 | 43 | 31 |
| Ghor | 10 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Helmand | 13 | 13 | 9 | 7 | 9 | 10 | 41 | 41 | 27 | 45 | 52 |
| Herat | 16 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 16 |
| Jowzjan | 11 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Kabul | 15 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 8 | 5 | 13 | 8 | 8 | 29 |
| Kandahar | 16 | 8 | 7 | 11 | 9 | 14 | 29 | 34 | 37 | 24 | 42 |
| Kapisa | 7 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 11 | 4 | 8 | 12 |
| Khost | 13 | 10 | 4 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 16 | 19 | 22 | 13 | 33 |
| Konar | 15 | 8 | 6 | 5 | 9 | 8 | 13 | 7 | 9 | 11 | 16 |
| Konduz | 7 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 9 | 7 |
| Laghman | 5 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 8 | 8 | 1 | 4 | 3 |
| Logar | 7 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 21 | 11 | 16 | 21 | 18 |
| Nangarhar | 22 | 8 | 5 | 5 | 1 | 7 | 12 | 11 | 8 | 2 | 13 |
| Nimruz | 5 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 9 | 5 | 9 |
| Nurestan | 8 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| Oruzgan | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 7 | 10 | 14 | 14 | 7 |
| Paktia | 11 | 6 | 3 | 8 | 6 | 8 | 18 | 16 | 10 | 14 | 26 |
| Paktika | 19 | 11 | 8 | 4 | 3 | 9 | 20 | 18 | 8 | 9 | 20 |
| Panjshir | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Parwan | 10 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| Samangan | 7 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Sar – e-Pol | 7 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Takhar | 17 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------|----|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|
| Wardak | 9 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 5 | 9 | 13 | 7 | 23 | 21 |
| Zabol | 11 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 19 | 8 | 13 | 11 | 17 |

Worst Districts

Occasionally, Afghan press outlets will publish the names of the districts under greatest stress in selective provinces. In October, one outlet identified the worst districts in Logar Province, which is just south of Kabul, as Kharwan, Charkh and Baraki Barak.

In November, the same news outlet identified the worst districts in Faryab Province in northwestern Afghanistan and Konar Province which borders Pakistan's Bajaur tribal area. Faryab is divided into 14 districts. The worst are Qeysar, Gurziwan and Shirin Tagab. The population is primarily Uzbek, Turkmen and Tajik. Through November, Faryab only experienced 25 clashes in the *NightWatch* sample, but 12 of them occurred in November and 6 in October. This previously stable province is a development area for the Taliban who derive support from pockets of Pashtuns transplanted in the province in the past.

Konar Province has 15 districts, almost all of which experienced anti-government violence during 2008. It is primarily an ethnic Pashtun province. The worst districts are Darra-y-Pech, Chapa Dara, Chowkay and Sirkany. It is one of the hotbeds of insurgency, experiencing over 100 clashes between May and November in the *NightWatch* sample.

Operational Issues

Bombs. Following an apparent rest in September and October, the bomb makers went back to work in November. The press services reported 106 roadside bombs, car bombs and mines and 23 suicide bomb attacks. These weapons inflicted more casualties than any others, which has been the case in every month of 2008.

Attacks on Convoys. *NightWatch* counted 26 attacks on convoys in November. They showed no concentration by province, meaning Taliban and criminal gangs attacked convoys all along the road system including in northern non-Pashtun provinces. The cumulative impact appears to be to discourage truck drivers from supporting NATO and government forces.

The best measure of this is the NATO search for alternative routes, such as using the Russian rail system, rather than overland transportation through Pakistan from Karachi on the Indian Ocean. Without Russian cooperation, military supplies cannot reach Afghanistan from the north, even if central Asian governments are accommodating.

Iran's railroads and roads represent an alternative to relying on Pakistani rails and roads. Iran is building a rail line east that will link the Afghan city Herat to the Iranian eastern network. It does not want to see the Taliban return to power probably more than it opposes a surge in US forces. None of the choices are good for Iran. The supply issue presents a potential opportunity for the Allies to engage Iran.

Attacks on Infrastructure. Few attacks on infrastructure were reported in the press. Only 12 road crews were harassed and two bridges were reported to have been destroyed. Improvised explosives blew up under many culverts in many separate areas without doing damage. These appear to have been the work of amateurs.

In November, press services reported no attacks on cell phone towers or other infrastructure projects.

NATO/ISAF Issues. In addition to the attacks against NATO convoys, Taliban commanders in several areas harassed the local Provincial Reconstruction Team staffed by national contingents not authorized to engage in offensive combat operations. That appears to have been a primary targeting consideration.

The Norwegians, Germans, Swedes, Spanish and French all were the targets of Taliban attacks. The attacks killed 2 Spanish soldiers and one French soldier, but wounded 5 Spanish, 4 Germans, 4 French and 2 Norwegians. Nearly all the wounded were caused by mines or roadside bombs deliberately and timed to detonate as a NATO vehicle or convoy passed. In all instances, the NATO forces drove off the Taliban. The Swedes were attacked at least four times, but took no casualties.

The French remained determined to punish the anti-government fighting unit -- believed to be members of Hizbe e Islami Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HIG) -- that ambushed their forces in Sorubi, east of Kabul on 19 August. Apparently the same anti-government element relished the challenge and persisted in harassing the French. This deadly team rivalry persisted through the fall. On 30 November, French forces killed 25 anti-government fighters, including Commander Gazi, the HIG leader who organized the 19 August ambush.

Casualty Ratios

Ratios for overall casualties and for fatalities provide insight into the lethality of the clashes and the impact of modern western military technology. *NightWatch* also tracks the changes in loss rates compared to the 2007 baseline data.

In November, Taliban once again spent manpower to sustain a surge in fighting. Taliban lost 1263 men killed, wounded or captured, just slightly fewer than the 1279 lost in October.

In November, the numbers of Taliban reported killed declined to 837, from 1038 in October. The numbers of Taliban reported killed in October is the highest in a single month since the fighting began.

The number of Taliban suspects reported captured in November was 332, making that the highest single month total. The number detained or captured is the clearest evidence that the Allied forces had the operational initiative that contributed to November's very high number of clashes.

Total killed, wounded and captured in 2008 through 30 November, in this sample, is 8396. That includes 7,133 killed. Total losses of all kinds in 2007 were 7306, including 6,218 killed. With the November casualties, Taliban and anti-government force losses in 2008 will be about 15% higher than in 2007.

At the cost of a 15% increase in losses, the Taliban and other anti-government forces sustained a 55% increase in fighting. The anti-government leaders will consider that an acceptable battlefield result.

Another measure of Taliban's expansion in 2008 is the number of districts in which fighting took place, compared to 2007, in the *NightWatch* database. In May 2007, 83 of the 398 districts experienced clashes as defined herein, making that the high point of the 2007 spring offensive. In 2007, 69 districts was the average.

In November 2008, the Taliban nearly doubled the highest monthly number of districts that experienced clashes to 159. The monthly average through November 2008 was 98 districts. As a

conservative base line, at least a quarter of the districts of Afghanistan host a permanent Taliban or other anti-government fighting group.

The total number of Allied (Afghan and western forces) killed and wounded reported in public media was 2626 through 30 November. In 2007, total losses for the year were 2307.

Total fatalities to Allied forces, including NATO, ISAF, the Afghan Army and the National Police, increased in November to 157. In October, they lost 97 men killed. Through 30 November 2008, 1238 Allied soldiers died in combat. In 2007, 1278 soldiers died. Afghan National Police deaths were 100 in the month, representing 63% of the Allied fatalities.

(Note: Accurate casualty data for non-NATO fighters is notoriously difficult to derive from the public media. 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. Trends in the levels of clashes and casualties should and do correspond in the data.)

The **Killed-Wounded-Captured Casualty Ratio** of Taliban to Allied forces moved in favor of the Taliban in November, rising to 2.7 to 1. In October, the ratio was 6:1 sharply favoring Allied forces. This means for every Allied soldier killed, wounded or kidnapped, the Allies killed, wounded or captured 3 Taliban. This ratio change seems to reflect the increased Taliban use of explosives, avoidance of direct combat and increased operations by the Afghan National Army.

The **Kill Ratio** in November was 5:1, compared to 11:1 during October. This means that Allied soldiers killed 5 anti-government fighters for every pro-government death. Again, the change in this ratio from October shows Taliban evened the fight somewhat.

The chart below enables a comparison of the data on killed and wounded for the past six months. Red highlight represents the highest civilian losses for the year

Casualties

| Force | 2007 KIA | 2007 Per month | June | July | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov KIA | 2008 Per month | 2007 WIA | June | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov WIA |
|---------------|----------|----------------|------|------|------|-----|------|---------|----------------|----------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------|
| Taliban | 6218 | 518 | 1024 | 765 | 1027 | 381 | 1038 | 837 | 527 | 452 | 120 | 94 | 141 | 59 | 92 | 94 |
| NATO | 249 | 21 | 45 | 31 | 46 | 33 | 19 | 12 | 25 | 210 | 42 | 48 | 65 | 59 | 55 | 57 |
| Afghan Army | 249 | 21 | 16 | 21 | 8 | 2 | 30 | 45 | 11 | 217 | 20 | 13 | 25 | 7 | 28 | 57 |
| Afghan Police | 780 | 65 | 80 | 137 | 76 | 111 | 48 | 100 | 71 | 602 | 67 | 97 | 62 | 111 | 8 | 145 |
| Civilians | 1201 | 100 | 133 | 418 | 367 | 173 | 233 | 271 | 196 | 894 | 160 | 321 | 277 | 123 | 139 | 472 |

July remains the high point for civilian deaths from clashes this year. November was the highest number of civilians reported wounded. Civilian deaths were moderate considering the surge in fighting. For the second month running, Afghan army deaths exceeded NATO forces killed. For the first time, the number of wounded was equal. The National Police continue to bear the brunt of all Taliban and anti-government attacks.

Forces

No news services reported significant changes in forces. The ISAF Placemat shows a decline of 350 soldiers in the ISAF command, as of 1 December. In November several countries promised to increase their national contingents or their financial support to the NATO/ISAF command. The augmentations generally will begin in 2009.

| Country | Forces of Order | Opposition | Forces of Order : Taliban ratio | Status |
|--------------------|--|--|---------------------------------|--|
| <i>Afghanistan</i> | 207,350 total - 17,000 Coalition (includes 8,000 US) -51,350 ISAF/NATO (includes 23,550 US) -58,000 Afghan Army -80,000 Afghan Police | 10,000 -15,000 Taliban fighters (unknown number of part time fighters) | 14-21:1 | Taliban can hold terrain against Afghan forces; Allies cannot prevent Taliban attacks and expansion into new areas. ISAF/NATO remains essential for government survival. |

Closing Observations

In November 2007, the Forces of Order totaled 150,500 soldiers. During 2008, they added 56,850 soldiers, producing a 37% increase in strength, mostly from the growing Afghan army and police, but including 10,000 NATO troops. This larger force experienced a 14% increase in losses and inflicted a 15% increase in Taliban losses through November.

Nevertheless, the Forces of Order did not hold their own. Between November 2007 and November 2008, a 37% larger Allied force was unable to prevent the Taliban from nearly doubling the size of the battlefield, as measured by the number of districts experiencing clashes. Without absolute control of the air and other modern military technological advantages, these results would have been much starker. More soldiers, police and militia are essential to contain the fight at the district level, but they are only part of the solution.

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