



NightWatch

13 December 2008

Special Report: October in Afghanistan

Summary: October was another surge month. Based on the *NightWatch* sample of news service reports, fighting increased to 314 clashes that produced casualties or property damage and were reported in the press. In September 267 clashes occurred. October tied with June as the third worst month in the history of the insurgency.

Clashes were reported in 119 districts, which also is the third highest number since 2001. The cumulative total of clashes reported in press is projected to set a new record by a significant margin over all past years. Once again, the nature of attacks showed greater organization and tactical skill and characteristics of insurrection instead of insurgency.

In October, Taliban and other anti-government forces sustained more casualties than in any single month. The 1038 Taliban killed, in the *NightWatch* sample, is the highest number of Taliban deaths reported in news media in a single month. Taliban and anti-government militia leaders seem to judge those losses acceptable relative to the successes in maintaining presence.

Afghan National Army forces were more engaged in fighting than in any prior month. They sustained 59 killed and wounded, their highest monthly losses. NATO casualties were 36. October was the first month that Afghan army losses exceeded NATO losses.

Outlook: Most Taliban and other anti government fighters probably began to go to winter quarters, in Pakistan or in Afghanistan. The fighting will drop during the winter, but in core provinces of the Pashtun south, it should remain high relative to last winter, unless the weather turns as harsh as in the winter of 2007.

Based on Taliban public statements, the focus will be on the overland truck lifeline for Afghan and NATO forces.

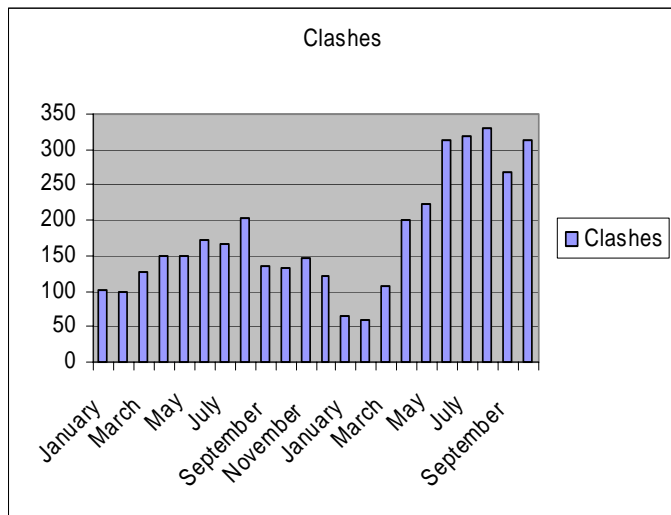
Monthly Fighting Data

The graph below shows the two year trend of clashes in the *NightWatch* data sample by month. The graph illustrates the significant jump in violence this year. The timing of the jump almost precisely matches the investiture of an elected civilian government in Pakistan. It implies that Pakistan security official have waged a passive aggressive campaign against the elected government that abetted the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Readers are reminded that the data in this report is a sample derived from public reporting sources. It is the sample that Afghans 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.

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.



Month	Clashes
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

Month	Clashes
January	66
February	60
March	107
April	199
May	222
June	314
July	319
August	330
September	267
October	314
Total	2194

Effect of Pakistan Operations

In October, numerous Afghan-US operations in the east and northeast continued to target the fighters loyal to Haqqani, whose base is in Waziristan, Pakistan, but whose tribe straddles the border. The elder Haqqani, Jalaluddin, fought on the side of the US against the Soviets and was a fully supported US proxy, according to the author Steve Coll; on the side of the Taliban against the corrupt secular government in the 1990s; was the Minister of Tribes and Border Areas in the Taliban government; was offered a position in the Karzai for a time and is once again fighting on the side of the Taliban. He and his people are not Taliban because they do not take orders from the Taliban leaders based in Quetta, Baluchistan Province, Pakistan, which include Mohammed Omar. They loosely coordinate operations.

Haqqani's fighters are often more skilled and better trained than other Taliban. Haqqani's men pose a significant threat in the Khost-Paktia area, north to Jalalabad in Nangarhar Province and west to Kabul.

Attacks by US missile-armed drones aim to decapitate the Haqqani leadership based in Waziristan. The impact of these attacks on the overall security picture is difficult to measure. One reason is that there are no consistent sources of fighting data for western Pakistan that may be used to build a baseline to evaluate change over time.

In Afghanistan fighting declined in the border provinces, except Paktia where it increased. It is not possible to attribute the cause of the decline to operations in Pakistan because the Taliban surged their clashes in the provinces immediately west of the border zone, along the Ring Road. A more likely explanation for the general decline along the border was a westward redeployment of forces by the Taliban.

The larger significance of this note is to remind Readers that the fight in Afghanistan is a Taliban fight in which nearly 100% of the men are Afghans or from Pashtun tribes that straddle the Pakistan border. Arabs and other Muslim outsiders, except some Pakistanis, do not figure significantly in the fighting in Afghanistan. Even the suicide bombers are increasingly local Afghans.

The number of identifications of foreign fighters in Afghanistan increased in the summer, but there were only one incidents on 4 October in which foreign fighters -- an Iranian and a Pakistani -- were identified among the dead.

Analysis of the Provinces

The 314 clashes or bombings or other violent incidents reported in the press were spread among 29 of the 34 provinces, compared to 27 in September and August both. The insurgency remains intractable in the 12 core provinces which account for over three fourths of all clashes. The Taliban emphasis in October was to break the stalemate by capturing a province capital, Lashkargah in Helmand Province. That failed, primarily because of Allied air power.

Fighting in the core provinces accounted for 68% of total clashes. Adding in Oruzgan Province, 72% of the violence reported in the press is in the 13 Pashtun provinces, listed in the chart below.

That is the smallest percent of combat in the core regions since before the spring offensive began. A high total number of attacks with a reduced number in the core provinces always signifies a worsening of security outside the core. In other words, the Taliban dispersed the fight more in October.

The chart shows two other important points. The Taliban reduced fighting in provinces along the Pakistan border, including Nangarhar, Khost, Paktia and Paktika. The increased drone attacks into adjacent areas of Pakistan might have contributed to this condition.

Alternatively, the Taliban leaders clearly concentrated a surge in effort against six provinces on the ring road, north to south: **Logar**, on the ring road south of Kabul; Maydan **Wardak**, next; **Ghazni**, on the ring road south of Wardak; **Zabol**, east of Kandahar, **Helmand**, on the ring road west of Kandahar; and **Farah**, west of Helmand. These six accounted for half of all clashes. The data show Taliban tried to shut down the ring road. This is the only high way and supply line that runs from Turkmenistan south to Heart; then swings southeast to Kandahar, before it heads north to Kabul.

Core Provinces of the Insurgency

Province	Total 2007	2007 Average Clashes	May Clashes	June Clashes	July Clashes	August Clashes	September Clashes	October Clashes	Total 2008
Ghazni	163	Attack every three days	31	34	38	53	29	43	271
Helmand	281	Attack every 32 hours	30	40	41	41	27	45	283
Kabul	57	Attack once a week	11	5	5	13	8	8	65
Kandahar	199	Attack ever other day	21	33	29	34	37	24	244
Khost	104	Attack every four days	14	24	16	19	22	13	150
Konar	85	Attack every five days	23	10	13	7	9	11	86
Logar	34	Attack every 10 days	10	13	21	11	16	21	105
Nangarhar	80	Attack every five days	9	5	12	11	8	2	53
Paktika	94	Attack every four days	6	21	20	18	8	9	85
Paktia	93	Attack every four days	20	32	18	16	10	14	155
Zabol	94	Attack every four days	6	14	19	8	13	11	109
Farah	86	Attack every four days	10	17	16	14	14	13	102
Total	1370	114 per month	191	248	248	245	201	213	1462

	(80% of 2007 total)		(86% of May total)	(79% of June total)	(77% of July total)	(74% of August total)	(75% of Sept total)	(68% of Oct total)	(78% of 2008 total)
Oruzgan	71	Attack every six days	0	9	7	10	14	14	61

The Battle for Lashkargah, capital of Helmand Province

The Taliban attempted to seize the provincial capital of Helmand Province in multiple attacks, using the largest fighting groups reported in press accounts in years. The first attack was a rocket barrage that occurred on 8 October amid a surge in fighting in two other districts of Helmand: Greshk and Nad-e-Ali. This appears to have been the preliminary phase. No attacks were reported in Helmand for two days after the surge on the 8th.

The second phase occurred between 10 and 13 October, featuring multiple coordinated attacks from multiple directions. This was a major effort that apparently drew fighters from surrounding districts, which were overrun temporarily. The Allied forces with air support held the capital inflicting more than 180 Taliban killed during the four days, according to Afghan official and NATO reports. That represented 18 percent of all Taliban killed in October.

The final push for Lashkargah occurred on 16 October, when local authorities reported more than 1,000 Taliban fighters were committed in a coordinated three-sided pincer attack. Taliban lost 18 more men killed. This is the only day the government admitted losing 6 Afghan National Army soldiers killed and 8 wounded.

After that effort the Taliban reverted to their most successful tactics of roadside and suicide bombings. The suicide bomber attack on 21 October in Lashkargah killed 25 Afghan National Army soldiers, making it the most deadly attack against the Army since its formation. At the end of the month, no territory changed hands, but the Taliban continued attacks in surrounding districts.

Logar Province Under Taliban Control

A report posted by Pajhwok news service described Logar Province as insecure. Three of the most populous districts were said to be under Taliban control. Kharwan District was the worst. All girls schools were closed and all construction projects had been halted by the Taliban. Charkh District was next, followed by Baraki Barak District. Taliban attacked the district headquarters buildings in all three.

In Charkh District, Taliban used loudspeakers openly to warn shopkeepers to stop selling audio cassettes and cosmetics for women. They set up checkpoints to check passenger vehicles for contraband, as they define it, and warned residents to stay away from the presidential elections in 2009. Voter registration began on 29 September.

Analysis of the Districts

Taliban engaged in clashes in 119 of the 398 districts in Afghanistan in October compared to 105 in September. This is the third highest number of districts to experience clashes. In September, 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 ICOS, formerly known as the Senlis Group, 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.

In the *NightWatch* data base, the largest number of districts that experienced clashes is 130 districts in July 2008, not far below the NGO figure. The *NightWatch* number is auditable and replicable from press reporting and represents a conservative floor. When the Taliban organize a

district, they usually have a protecting force of fighters, which tends to be revealed in reports of clashes in the media. This is not universally true, but it is a general rule of analysis. For example, in several provinces in the northwest, Taliban are reported to have a presence, but clashes are infrequently reported.

In October, news services reported Taliban fighters attempted to overrun district headquarters on 12 occasions. Their most successful effort was the attack on Qalander District, Khost Province, on 10 October which they held for a day before Allied forces drove them off. Taliban also attempted to seize the district headquarters building in Zana Khan District, Ghazni Province. Local Taliban leaders apparently assessed them to be easy targets. However, Taliban groups could not hold ground against NATO air power supporting the ground counter attacks.

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 measured by districts under stress.

Province	DISTRICTS						CLASHES				
	Total Districts	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Clashes June	Clashes July	Clashes August	Clashes Sept	Clashes Oct
Badakhshan	28	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	2	0	0
Badghis	7	4	2	3	1	4	6	3	9	1	7
Baghlan	15	2	4	4	1	2	3	5	4	1	3
Balkh	15	2	1	2	3	2	2	0	2	3	2
Bamiyan	7	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1
Daykundi	9	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	2	0	1
Farah	11	9	7	6	3	6	17	16	14	14	13
Faryab	14	1	0	1	1	4	1	0	2	1	6
Ghazni	19	12	12	15	10	10	34	38	53	29	43
Ghor	10	1	1	0	3	1	1	1	0	4	2
Helmand	13	11	13	9	7	9	40	41	41	27	45
Herat	16	5	4	5	3	4	9	8	10	11	12
Jowzjan	11	3	1	0	0	0	4	1	0	0	0
Kabul	15	2	2	3	4	3	5	5	13	8	8
Kandahar	16	8	8	7	11	9	33	29	34	37	24
Kapisa	7	2	1	2	2	3	8	4	11	4	8
Khost	13	11	10	4	8	9	24	16	19	22	13
Konar	15	7	8	6	5	9	10	13	7	9	11
Konduz	7	2	2	4	3	3	2	6	5	3	9
Laghman	5	1	2	3	1	3	1	8	8	1	4
Logar	7	4	4	5	5	6	13	21	11	16	21
Nangarhar	22	2	8	5	5	1	5	12	11	8	2
Nimruz	5	3	2	1	2	3	3	3	2	9	5

Nurestan	8	1	3	3	2	1	2	6	4	3	2
Oruzgan	5	2	4	4	3	5	9	7	10	14	14
Paktia	11	8	6	3	8	6	32	18	16	10	14
Paktika	19	11	11	8	4	3	21	20	18	8	9
Panjshir	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Parwan	10	2	2	0	2	0	1	4	0	2	0
Samangan	7	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Sar – e-Pol	7	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
Takhar	17	0	2	1	0	1	0	3	1	0	1
Wardak	9	4	4	4	3	6	11	9	13	7	23
Zabol	11	5	4	3	6	6	14	19	8	13	11

Operational Issues

Bombs. The bomb makers took a bit of a rest in September and continued in October. The press services reported 61 roadside bombs and 12 suicides, about 29 percent of the total attacks in the sample for October. In September roadside bombs, car bombs, mines and suicide bombs accounted for 29 percent of the attacks and 30% of them in August.

Attacks on Convoys. *NightWatch* counted 22 attacks on convoys. 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 a chilling effect on truck transportation in support of NATO and government forces. The best measure of this is the NATO search for alternative routes, such as using the Russian rail system and ship south from Termez, rather than overland transportation through Pakistan from Karachi on the Indian Ocean.

Attacks on Infrastructure. Few attacks on infrastructure were reported in the press. Only two bridges were reported to have been destroyed. However the Taliban attacked road work crews on seven occasions. In Herat Province, Taliban attacked the Selma Dam project repeatedly. This is an \$80 million hydroelectric power and irrigation project that has been under construction since 2006.

NATO Issues. Attacks against NATO and other western forces appear to be an increasing subset of the attacks against convoys. Most of the convoys attacked were providing support for NATO or other western forces. One of the worst attacks was a suicide attack in Chardara District, Konduz Province, on 20 October in which 2 German soldiers died and a third was injured. This was the fourth suicide attack against the German Provincial Reconstruction Team. Authorities succeeded in identifying the suicide bomber as local Pashtun resident of Konduz. Various kinds of bomb attacks were responsible for 13 of the 19 NATO casualties in October.

In Ghazni Province, on 18 October a Danish force withdrew from its area because the Afghan National Army provided no supporting troops. The same day a French unit withdrew from Kapisa Province a fight but left behind a Milan anti-tank weapon. This caused a brief sensation. Taliban concentrated on harassing the French in Kapisa during October.

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 October, Taliban once again spent manpower to sustain a surge in fighting. Taliban lost 1,279 men killed, wounded or captured; nearly double the 578 lost in September. That made October the second highest month for total losses. However, the 1038 men reported killed was the highest death count on record.

Total killed, wounded and captured through 31 October, in this sample, is 7,133, including 5,277 killed. Total losses in 2007 were 7306, including 6,218 killed. With the October casualties, Taliban losses in 2008 will be about 17% higher than in 2007 and will have achieved a sustained 29% increase in clashes. The leadership will likely consider that an acceptable battlefield result.

The Allied forces, including NATO and the Afghan Army and Police, decreased in October. They lost 97 men killed, compared to 146 in September, and 130 in August and have lost 1081 killed, as reported in the public media through 31 October. Afghan National Police deaths account for 71, or 66% of the total. The total number of Allied (Afghan and western forces) killed and wounded reported in public media is 2223 through 31 October.

(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 sharply in favor of the Allies in October, rising to 6:1, compared to 2:1 in September and 5:1 in August. This means for every Allied soldier killed, wounded or kidnapped, the Allies killed, wounded or captured 6Taliban. This ratio change is a significant improvement in combat discipline in favor of the Allied forces.

The ***Kill Ratio*** in October was the good news for the month. In October, the ratio was 11:1, meaning Allied soldiers killed 11 Taliban for every Allied soldier killed. This is the highest kill ratio on record and reversed the negative trend in September.

The change in the kill ratio indicates the Taliban spent manpower to try to seize and hold ground against NATO superior weapons. Once again Taliban's lack of anti-aircraft defenses prevented success.

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	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct KIA	2008 Per month	2007 WIA	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct WIA
Taliban	6218	518	370	1024	765	1027	381	1038	527	452	51	120	94	141	59	92
NATO	249	21	23	45	31	46	33	19	25	210	22	42	48	65	59	55
Afghan Army	249	21	15	16	21	8	2	30	11	217	20	20	13	25	7	28

Afghan Police	780	65	51	80	137	76	111	48	71	602	91	67	97	62	111	8
Civilians	1201	100	156	133	418	367	173	233	196	894	154	160	321	277	123	139

July remains the high point for civilian casualties this year, which declined again in September. NATO force killed and wounded continues to trend at more than triple Afghan Army losses.

Forces

No news services reported significant changes in forces. The ISAF Placement shows a decline of 350 soldiers in the ISAF command, as of 1 December. In October several countries promised to increase their national contingents in 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.