

Afghanistan Update: September 2008

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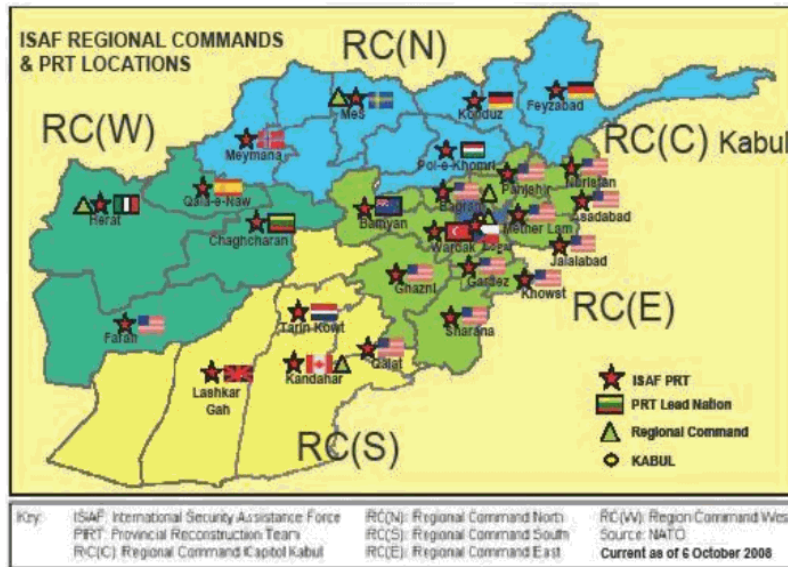


Image Source: NATO International Security Assistance Force

General Security Situation

Pending Saudi-sponsored peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government are an attempt to settle the conflict through diplomatic negotiations. While the agenda of the initial meeting is unclear, the agreement for future talks raises hope that both sides are looking to end the war. Despite this positive outlook, coalition troops continue to face an uphill battle against Taliban forces in Afghanistan. The organization has continued to gain strength, especially in Regional Commands South and East. Direct engagement with International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) troops has escalated. Attacks on Afghan National Police (ANP) units have also become more frequent. A string of several high-profile assassinations, such as the murders of Lowgar Gov. Abdullah Wardak and Kandahar Deputy Police Commander Malalai Kakar, and the kidnapping of Afghan Ambassador Abdul Khaliq Farahi, illustrate the improving tactical capabilities of the Taliban.

Three warlords, Mullah Omar, Jalaluddin Haqqani and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, are thought to be hiding in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. While residing safely in these largely unpatrolled regions, these leaders are able to oversee militant attacks within Afghanistan. The United States has conducted secret cross-border missions into Pakistan to try and root out these leaders, so far without

success. These covert intrusions have increased tensions between Pakistan and the United States.

The U.N. Security Council passed a resolution that extends NATO's mandate in Afghanistan until October 2009. In response to pressure from Russia, provisions were added to try to decrease civilian casualties and a compromise was reached on language that encourages ISAF forces to support the Afghan-led mission against drug trafficking.

A surge in military operations is expected by coalition troops in the upcoming months to take advantage of Taliban forces that have been historically less active in the winter. The United States estimated that it would be able to send 3,500 more soldiers next year, while France plans on sending 100 additional troops and several drone helicopters. Canada reiterated that it will remove all troops by 2011, and the United Kingdom announced that they have no plans of sending reinforcements.

Regional Command Capital

Sept. 13, 2008: Afghan Governor Assassinated by Taliban Bomb

In Kabul, the Taliban detonated a roadside bomb outside the home of Abdullah Wardak, governor of Lowgar province, killing him along with three bodyguards. Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid claimed that the Taliban was responsible. The incident marks the first attack against a provincial governor in Afghanistan since 2006.

Sept. 18, 2008: Two Militants Killed, Taliban Commander Captured

U.S. forces killed two Taliban members and arrested six others after a firefight in the Surobi district of Kabul. A Taliban commander was among those detained.

Sept. 23, 2008: Three Policemen Killed

Armed men entered a police post in Kabul, killing three police officers. The Taliban claimed responsibility.

Sept. 24, 2008: Top Afghan Police Officer Wounded in Kabul

Ali Shah Paktiawal, Head of the Criminal Investigative Department in Kabul, was wounded and two of his bodyguards were killed about six miles west of Kabul by an explosion. No one has claimed responsibility.

Regional Command North

Sept. 1, 2008: Car Bomb Hits NATO Convoy

A suicide mission killed one civilian in Konduz province. The bomber targeted a convoy of NATO-led German soldiers. The Taliban claimed responsibility, but embellished the truth by claiming that the explosion killed 11 German soldiers and destroyed two tanks.

Sept. 6, 2008: U.S. Soldier Killed

An American soldier was fatally shot while on patrol in Konduz province.

Sept. 21, 2008: Suicide Bombing Hits Afghan-German Convoy

A suicide bomber detonated a car filled with explosives near an Afghan-German convoy in Konduz province. Besides the bomber, there were no casualties.

Regional Command South

Sept. 6, 2008: Disguised Bomber Blows Up Prosecutor's Office

In Nimruz province, a suicide bomber disguised as a beggar entered a regional prosecutor's office and detonated his device, killing six, including a provincial attorney.

Sept. 6, 2008: Taliban Attack Police

Taliban militants attacked a police checkpoint in Nimruz, killing two police officers. Seven of the militants were killed by the police.

Sept. 7, 2008: Six Police Killed, Police Commander Wounded

Two suicide bombers attacked police headquarters in Kandahar province, killing six and wounding 13. One of the wounded was Gen. Abdul Raziq, a border police commander.

Sept. 7, 2008: Canadian Soldier Killed in Bombing

The 97th Canadian soldier to be killed in Afghanistan died when his armored car was hit by a roadside bomb in the Panjwaii district of Kandahar.

Sept. 7, 2008: Dutch Soldier Killed in Roadside Bombing

A Dutch soldier was killed and five others were wounded by a roadside bomb in Uruzgan province. This brings the Dutch death toll to 17.

Sept. 10, 2008: Bomb Kills British Soldier

A British senior NCO was killed by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) while trying to clear the road for other soldiers.

Sept. 12, 2008: Suicide Bomber Attacks Police Convoy

A suicide bomber killed two civilians and wounded a dozen more. The bomber drove a car into a police convoy in Kandahar province. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the bombing.

Sept. 12, 2008: Suicide Bomber Detonates in Town Center

A bombing occurred in Nimruz province in a small town center in Khash Rod, killing two civilians. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Sept. 13, 2008: British Soldier Killed

A British soldier was killed in southern Afghanistan when an IED exploded during a patrol in Helmand province.

Sept. 14, 2008: Suicide Bomber Hits U.N. Convoy

Two Afghan doctors were killed and 15 others were wounded by a suicide bomber who attacked their United Nations convoy in the market of the Spin Boldak district of Kandahar province. The Taliban claimed responsibility.

Sept. 18, 2008: NATO Mistakenly Kills Afghan District Governor

Rozi Khan, an Afghan district governor was accidentally shot and killed with two of his bodyguards in a misunderstanding by NATO forces. Khan had been called to his friend's house who thought he was being surrounded by Taliban. The forces were actually NATO troops. When Khan arrived, the NATO troops mistook him for a Taliban militant.

Sept. 18, 2008: Taliban Murder Afghan Elder

Mohammed Gul, an Afghan elder, and two policemen were killed in a mine explosion. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack.

Sept. 20, 2008: American Killed in Kandahar

An American officer was killed when an IED detonated near his vehicle. He was on patrol in Kandahar province.

Sept. 20, 2008: Two Americans Killed in IED Explosion

Two Americans were killed when their vehicle was hit by an IED. They were on patrol in the Korengal Valley of Konar province.

Sept. 22, 2008: ISAF Forces Capture Taliban Leader

Ahmad Shah, a Taliban leader responsible for numerous attacks on Afghan police and foreign forces, was captured in Uruzgan province. ISAF hope his capture will disrupt enemy operations in southern Afghanistan.

Sept. 25, 2008: Militants Attack Police

In the southern province of Kandahar, militants attacked police forces in two different incidents, leaving three people dead.

Sept. 28, 2008: Suicide Bombing Kills Six

A suicide bomber attacked a border police convoy in Kandahar province, killing three policemen and three civilians, as well as injuring 15 others.

Sept. 29, 2008: Top Female Police Commander Shot

In Kandahar province, two Taliban militants on a motorcycle opened fire on Malalai Kakar, killing her instantly. Kakar was the highest-ranking female police officer in Afghanistan. Her 18-year-old son was also shot in the attack; he remains in a coma at a local hospital. Kakar served as deputy commander of the Kandahar police department, heading a unit that specialized in defending women.

Sept. 29, 2008: ISAF Soldier Kills Afghan Civilian

A British soldier shot a civilian driving a motorbike after warning him to stop. The dead man ignored two verbal warnings and two warning shots. The incident occurred in Helmand province.

Sept. 30, 2008: Three Soldiers Killed

A roadside bomb detonated in southern Afghanistan killing three soldiers. Their nationalities were not disclosed.

Regional Command West

Sept. 5, 2008: Taliban Commander Mullah Fazel Killed

In Farah province, U.S. forces raided the compound of Taliban Commander Mullah Fazel. Fazel was killed in the attack, along with seven others, two of them civilians.

Sept. 11, 2008: American Troops Kill 10 Militants

U.S. troops raided the compound of an insurgent commander responsible for multiple roadside bombings in Kapisa province. Ten militants were killed.

Sept. 12, 2008: Afghan Police Kill 10 Militants

A clash between Afghan police and the Taliban broke out when militants attacked a supply convoy in Farah province. Ten insurgents and five police officers were killed.

Sept. 18, 2008: Three Afghan Policemen Die in Blast

Three policemen were killed by a roadside blast in Herat province.

Sept. 19, 2008: Coalition Member Killed

A roadside bomb killed one coalition member traveling through western Afghanistan in a U.S.-led convoy.

Sept. 21, 2008: Afghan Policemen Killed

About a dozen Afghan police officers were killed in an attack by militants in Western Afghanistan near Salama Dam in Herat province. The rebels were said to be loyal to Ghulam Mustafa, a former anti-Soviet commander.

Sept. 22, 2008: Taliban Kidnap 153

In Farah province, militant forces kidnapped 153 civilian laborers. According to the BBC, the laborers were taken near the Bara Boluk area as they were en route to Herat. The workers were employees of a U.S. construction company. The Taliban claimed responsibility.

Sept. 26, 2008: Taliban Release 118 Prisoners

In Farah province, Taliban forces freed 118 of the 153 laborers kidnapped on Sept. 22, 2008. The official reason for the release was because the Muslim holiday Eid al-Fitr was approaching.

Regional Command East

Sept. 1, 2008: Three Afghan Children Killed by NATO Artillery

After being attacked by militants in Paktika province, ISAF returned artillery fire. The ISAF rounds came too close to a nearby house, killing three children and wounding seven more. The incident is sure to deepen the rift between coalition forces and Afghan civilians.

Sept. 9, 2008: NATO Air Strike Off-Target, Kills Two Civilians

A NATO bombing in Khost province killed two Afghan civilians. A missile fired during the air strike misfired, impacting two miles from its target.

Sept. 9, 2008: Three Coalition Troops Killed

A roadside bomb killed three troops in eastern Afghanistan. No nationalities were given.

Sept. 14, 2008: Taliban Attack Police Convoy, Police Commander Killed

Taliban militants ambushed a police unit in the Zena Khan district of Ghazni province. Taliban spokesmen say the militants used a bomb to blow up the police car before firing on the officers. Seven officers were killed, including the police commander of the district.

Sept. 17, 2008: Four U.S. Soldiers Killed

Four U.S. soldiers and one Afghan civilian were killed by a bomb explosion in eastern Afghanistan.

Sept. 17, 2008: Five Afghan Policemen Wounded

Five policemen were wounded by a roadside bomb in Logar province.

Sept. 18, 2008: Taliban Attack Police Checkpoint

Taliban militants killed two policemen and wounded three others after attacking a checkpoint in Paktia province.

Sept. 19, 2008: Insurgent Missiles Miss NATO Base, Kill Four Civilians

Insurgents fired missiles at a NATO base in eastern Paktia province. The missiles were off-target and landed in a nearby field, killing four civilians, including a small girl.

Sept. 26, 2008: Suicide Bomber Kills Five

In Khost province, a suicide bomber killed five people and wounded seven more. The bomber is believed to have been targeting a U.S. military commander.

Sept. 28, 2008: American Killed During Ambush

A U.S. Army sergeant was killed when his unit was ambushed by militants using small-arms fire. He was on patrol in the Jaji district of Paktia province.

Sept. 28, 2008: Arrested Militants Kill ISAF soldier

Seven militants were arrested in connection to a roadside bomb in Paktia province. While the men were being transported, there was an altercation during which the militants managed to kill one ISAF soldier and one Afghan police officer.

Sept. 28, 2008: French Soldiers Clash with Militants

Nine French soldiers were reported injured in a clash with nearly 20 Afghan militants in Kapisa province. The men received reinforcements, but the fighting lasted several hours.

Sept. 28, 2008: Coalition Troops Engage al-Qaida militants

Coalition troops targeted an al-Qaida IED and suicide bomber base in Konar province. When searching the location, coalition troops met with heavy resistance and called in for air support. At least two militants were confirmed dead. Coalition forces suffered no casualties.

Sept. 29, 2008: Afghan Officer Kills U.S. Soldier

An Afghan police officer opened fire on U.S. troops inside a police station, killing one and wounding several others. The Americans returned fire, killing the Afghan officer. Initial reports suggest that the rogue Afghan officer might have been a Taliban militant who successfully infiltrated the Afghan police.

Pakistan**Sept. 3, 2008: U.S. Attack Inside Pakistan**

Heliborne U.S. Special Forces reportedly raided a small village in South Waziristan. The ensuing fight killed twenty civilians, including women and children. U.S. officials claim that the village was a known stronghold for al-Qaida and Taliban forces. Pakistan's foreign minister called the attack a "gross violation of Pakistani territory."

Sept. 4, 2008: Unmanned Coalition Plane Attacks Militants

An unmanned spy plane launched missiles at a house in the village of Mohammad Khel in North Waziristan. Five militants were killed.

Sept. 5, 2008: U.S. Forces Attack Village in North Waziristan

A U.S. spy plane fired missiles at a house in North Waziristan, killing three children and two women. This was the third attack in two days by coalition forces across the border in Pakistan.

Sept. 5-6, 2008: Pakistan Closes NATO Border Crossing

Pakistan closed down the Torkham border crossing into Afghanistan due to increased threats from Taliban forces. The road crossing is the main supply line for NATO forces in Afghanistan, with an estimated 70 percent of all NATO goods passing through it. Pakistani officials deny that the closure is related to the recent U.S. attacks inside Pakistan. The cross reopened the following day.

Sept. 6, 2008: Al-Qaida Chief in Pakistan Killed in U.S. Strike

Abu Haris, al-Qaida chief in Pakistan, was killed in a U.S. missile attack in northwest Pakistan. At least 25 others were killed and 20 more wounded. Three other al-Qaida members were killed in the attack: two Saudis, Abdullah and Abu Hamza, and the Egyptian Zain ul-Abu Qasim. The strike targeted the residence of Jalaluddin Haqqani, a Taliban commander. Two of Haqqani's wives and one of his sisters were killed in the attack; however, Haqqani was in Afghanistan at the time.

Sept. 9, 2008: Zardari Takes Office

Asif Ali Zardari assumed the office of the president of Pakistan. He was the husband of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto who was assassinated by believed al-Qaida operatives. Hours after being sworn in as president, Zardari appeared on television with Afghan President Hamid Karzai to declare their united effort in stopping the Taliban. Zardari told Karzai, "Pakistan intends to work with you, along with you." Zardari claimed he already had a comprehensive military strategy to finally defeat the Taliban.

Sept. 17, 2008: Mullen Meets Gilani

U.S. Commander Michael Mullen met Pakistani Prime Minister Gilani to discuss operations across Pakistani borders in order to decrease tension over secret cross-border attacks by the United States. According to the BBC, Mullen guaranteed Pakistani sovereignty and addressed the need for more U.S.-Pakistani cooperation in fighting terrorist forces.

Sept. 20, 2008: Marriott Hotel Attacked, Fifty-Three Dead

The Marriott Hotel in Islamabad was attacked by a suicide truck bombing. Nearly 53 people were killed, with hundreds more injured in the explosion that engulfed the entire hotel in flames and destroyed much of the surrounding city block. Pakistani officials claim that al-Qaida is responsible.

Sept. 22, 2008: New Afghan Ambassador to Pakistan Kidnapped

Militants captured a convoy in northern Pakistan carrying Afghani ambassador-designate Abdul Khaliq Farahi. The militants killed the driver and kidnapped Farahi. Suspicions have fallen on al-Qaida and Taliban forces, although there has been no confirmation.

Sept. 22, 2008: U.S. to Redouble Efforts Following Marriott Attack

In response to the Marriott Hotel bombing, the United States stated it will "redouble efforts to counter extremism" and work closely with the Pakistani and Afghani governments.

Sept. 25, 2008: Zardari Will Not Tolerate Secret Raids

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari warned that his country would not tolerate cross-border attacks. He believes that such attacks strengthen the extremists.

Sept. 25, 2008: Pakistani and U.S. Forces Exchange Fire

Pakistani troops and a U.S.-Afghan ground patrol exchanged fire. Pakistani troops fired at two U.S. helicopters, and in response, U.S. forces fired into the hillside where Pakistani troops were entrenched. The U.S. maintains that its helicopters did not cross the Pakistani border, which Pakistan disputes. The Pakistan government says that it did not give troops permission to fire over the border.

Sept. 26, 2008: Pakistan Vows to Take Tribal Areas from Militants

Pakistan vowed to take back northwestern tribal areas from al-Qaida and Taliban forces within two months. Since early August, Pakistan claims that its troops have killed 1,000 militants and wounded 2,000 more.

Sept. 29, 2008: Kidnapped Afghan Ambassador Released

Afghan ambassador-designate Abdul Khaliq Farahi was reportedly released by his unknown captors. Farahi was kidnapped nearly a week ago after militants assaulted his motorcade.

Sept. 30, 2008: Pakistani Taliban Leader Reported Dead

Conflicting reports surfaced that Baitullah Mehsud, the Taliban leader in Pakistan, had died of kidney failure due to diabetes. Television news stations have reported that he died around midnight, while other sources, such as friends and his doctor, deny the reports. Mehsud has been accused of masterminding the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, as well as many other attacks by Taliban forces.

Sept. 30, 2008: Afghanistan Accuses Pakistan of Being Soft on Terror

Amrullah Saleh, the head of Afghanistan's spy agency, accused Pakistan of refusing to arrest the mastermind behind the bombing of the Indian Embassy in Kabul. He claimed that Afghanistan gave Pakistani officials information about the terrorist and where he was hiding, but Pakistan chose not to act.

Sept. 30, 2008: Pakistan Intelligence Service Gets New Chief

Pakistan announced that Lt. Gen. Ahmed Shujaa Pasha will take over as head of its main intelligence service, the Inter-Services Intelligence. The ISI has long been a concern to coalition forces, as it is believed to be aiding Taliban militants in Afghanistan.

Sept. 30, 2008: 20,000 Pakistani Refugees Cross into Afghanistan

United Nations officials state that increased pressure from Pakistani troops in the tribal regions has pushed 20,000 Pakistani refugees into the Konar province of Afghanistan. Officials say that the U.N. and other aid agencies have been quick to send emergency supplies, such as food, plastic sheets, blankets, lanterns and medical assistance to Konar. It is predicted that nearly 500,000 people have been displaced due to fighting in the tribal areas.

Sept. 30, 2008: Pakistan Backs Tribal Militias

The Pakistani army has begun to back tribal militias in hopes that they will assist them in fighting the Taliban in northwestern Pakistan. Commanders believe that control of the tribal areas is crucial in stopping the spread of Islamist militancy.

Other News**Sept. 10, 2008: Canadian Troops Out by 2011**

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper renewed his pledge to withdraw all troops from Afghanistan by 2011. Canada has nearly 2,500 troops stationed in Kandahar province and has suffered around 100 deaths.

Sept. 15, 2008: Son of al-Qaida Suspect Released

Kabul authorities released the son of Aafia Siddiqui, who is suspected to have links to al-Qaida. Siddiqui is currently being held in Guantanamo Bay.

Sept. 15, 2008: Iran Supplying Arms to Taliban

Taliban officials announced that they have received arms from the Iranian government and from smugglers that cross the Iran-Afghanistan border. The Iranian version of the Kalashnikov rifle is particularly dangerous and is capable of firing grenades. The Taliban also stated that they have received the deadly Iranian-made Explosively Formed Penetrator mines, which have been responsible for nearly 10 percent of all American casualties in Iraq. Coalition commanders report that Iranian arms are making the Taliban more effective.

Sept. 19, 2008: No Plans for U.K. Troop Reinforcements

The United Kingdom's Defense Minister Des Browne stated that there are no more plans to reinforce British forces in Afghanistan after the June decision to raise troop levels by 230 to more than 8,000. U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates had suggested that British troops might increase by another 4,000.

Sept. 22, 2008: U.N. Security Council Approves NATO Extension

The U.N. Security Council unanimously approved an extension for NATO-led forces in Afghanistan. The mandate lasts until Oct. 13, 2009. Pressure from Russia forced the Security Council to compromise on language that emphasized greater efforts to try to minimize civilian casualties and urged NATO forces to help the Afghan National Police (ANP) fight drug-trafficking. After the meeting, a Libyan official blasted NATO for the civilian death toll and asserted that the struggle to defeat terrorism should not come at the cost of civilian lives. He hoped those who had been responsible for past civilian deaths would be brought to justice.

Sept. 22, 2008: France Will Send More Troops

French Prime Minister Francois Fillon announced that France would reinforce its military presence in Afghanistan within several weeks. 100 troops and several drone helicopters will bolster the 2,600 French troops already in the country.

Sept. 23, 2008: Interpol to Help Afghanistan Police

Interpol announced that they will aid Afghanistan by helping to train police officers and by providing modern equipment. In addition, Interpol will help set up a communications network that allows police around the country to remain in contact with headquarters in Kabul. Interpol training and equipment will also allow Afghan police to better catalogue the militants they capture through the creation of a thumbprint database.

Sept. 24, 2008: Taliban Funder Convicted

Bashir Noorazi is convicted of trying to smuggle \$50 million in heroin into the United States. Noorazi had provided the Taliban with money and drugs in return for protecting his farm in Afghanistan.

Sept. 25, 2008: More U.S. Troops in Afghanistan Possible in 2009

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates told the Senate Armed Services Committee that more troops were not currently available to go to Afghanistan, but that up to three more brigades, about 3,500 soldiers, could be deployed next year.

Sept. 24-27, 2008: Afghan Government and Taliban Leaders Discuss Peace

Over a period of four days, 11 Taliban officials, two representatives of the Afghan government, a follower of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and a few others secretly met in Mecca to discuss peace. The talks were moderated by Saudi Arabian King Abdullah and were the first major move by the Saudis to broker a deal between the Taliban and Afghanistan. A representative of Taliban leader Mullah Omar said that the Taliban have broken away from al-Qaida, however this is unconfirmed. During the discussion, the Afghan officials announced that they cannot beat the Taliban militarily, while the Taliban stated that they cannot beat a U.S.-led coalition. More talks are scheduled to take place in December.

Sept. 27, 2008: U.S. Predicts Weakened Taliban During Winter

U.S. Maj. Gen. Jeffrey J. Schloesser said that Taliban forces will not be able to mount a massive campaign during the upcoming winter months. Schloesser expects that operations by allied forces will intensify to combat the weak Taliban.

Sept. 29, 2008: U.N. Reports Taliban Violence Interrupts Immunization Drive

United Nations officials stated that recent increases in Taliban violence have interrupted a polio vaccine drive in Afghanistan. It is suggested that nearly 200,000 children remain without the polio vaccine. Most of the children that could not be vaccinated were in the Helmand and Kandahar provinces.

Sept. 29, 2008: Hekmatyar Claims French Ambush

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar claimed responsibility for an ambush in August against French troops east of Kabul. The ambush killed 10 French soldiers. Hekmatyar, leader of the Hezb-i-Islami militant organization, announced this message in a video that was delivered to the Pajhwok News Agency in Kabul.

Sept. 29, 2008: Afghan Police Training Proving Challenging

Questions about the success of training programs for Afghan police forces have begun to arise. Norwegian officials point out that defection to the Taliban among new trainees is rampant. Additionally, it was found that 95 percent of trainees tested positive for cannabis and amphetamines. Norway has issued calls for more funds for the training programs so that these challenges can be overcome.