

# Regrouping of Taliban in Afghanistan

by Paul Wolf, 4 September 2003



**Taxis, steel walls, cement barricades and barbed wire mark the entrance to the UN complex in Kabul, Afghanistan.**

Photo by Paul Wolf, June 2003

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From: Paul Wolf <paulwolf@icdc.com>  
Subject: Regrouping of Taliban in Afghanistan

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## Introduction

The forces occupying Iraq and Afghanistan now appear to be confronting the growth of armed resistance movements. In Iraq, popular resistance first took the form of public demonstrations in front of the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad, where the international media were staying. This was followed several weeks later by less peaceful protests in Mosul, resulting in the death of dozens of people. Recently the UN headquarters in Iraq was destroyed with a cement truck bomb, and a US-supported cleric was assassinated in Najaf (not the first). Neither of these crimes were solved, but both were sophisticated and made clear political statements, tending to show the existence of an Iraqi resistance.

In Afghanistan the situation is even worse. In the last few months, there's been a growing trend in attacks against US and ISAF forces, with last week's battles involving a force of about 1000 Taliban militia. Next month Afghanistan will adopt a new constitution -- which has been drafted and debated in secret -- and then a new government will be elected by an assembly which is supposed to be ethnically representative of the country. Right now the government is run by minority Tajik commanders of the Northern Alliance who won their positions through cooperation with the US. Further, there is international pressure to make the new constitution conform to international standards, regarding women's rights and other matters, in conflict with the traditional Afghan social order. Combined with the occupation by foreign forces and a growing armed resistance, the political process risks a national liberation movement, based on traditional Islamic values, such as the Afghan people rallied around in their successful struggle of liberation against Soviet occupation a decade ago. History could easily repeat itself there, especially if the policy experts in Washington have their way.

On a personal note, I have moved back to Washington DC after traveling all summer, and just began my second year of law school. My new telephone number is (202) 364-6188. Now that I have normal internet access in my home I expect to resume my email newsletters, which I've been writing for the last five years. It's been difficult keeping up with the news without being plugged into the internet for information, but the experience of visiting Afghanistan gave me a new outlook on that part of the world, at least.

- Paul

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### **Afghan Taliban Says Sends 300 Reinforcements**

by Saeed Ali Achakzai, *Reuters*, 2 September 2003

SPIN BOLDAK, Afghanistan (Reuters) -- Afghanistan's Taliban has sent 300 more fighters to the southern province of Zabul to help battle Afghan government and U.S.-led troops, a commander from the ousted militia said on Tuesday.

Maulvi Faizullah, a senior Taliban commander involved in fighting in Zabul, said a fresh wave of militants had been deployed in Dai Chopan district to join up to 1,000 others who have been fighting in the area for the last eight days.

The reinforcements were being led by former Taliban Education Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, Faizullah told Reuters. They had been sent from Khost province in the east bordering Pakistan, he said.

Zabul provincial intelligence chief Khalil Hotak said Afghan government forces backed by U.S.-led troops were searching in the Koh Larzab area of Dai Chopan, where he said Taliban militants were believed to be hiding in caves.

There were no air attacks from U.S. and allied jet fighters and helicopter gunships early on Tuesday and no direct contact with the Taliban fighters, he added.

According to a U.S. military spokesman, soldiers from the 20-nation force hunting remnants of the Taliban and al Qaeda network of Osama bin Laden clashed with small enemy units of five to 10 men on Tuesday and trapped one group in a cave.

Suspected Taliban guerrillas and their supporters, who the U.S. military says have been scattered, are using small arms fire and rocket propelled grenades against U.S.-led troops and their Afghan allies.

## **Holy War**

The Taliban has declared a "jihad," or holy war against foreign forces, aid organizations and allies in Afghanistan.

Afghan policemen, soldiers and aid workers have borne the brunt of the attacks, with Taliban officials calling them spies for foreign organizations or supporters of the United States and the U.S.-backed government in Kabul.

The battle in Zabul helped make August the bloodiest month since the Taliban was toppled from power by U.S. air power and Afghan ground forces in late 2001.

Afghan officials and commanders say more than 90 Taliban fighters have been killed, most of them in air raids, while the Taliban say its losses are far lower. The U.S. military has reported at least 37 Taliban losses in the Zabul fighting.

There were no fresh casualties reported by either side on Tuesday.

A U.S. embassy spokesman in Kabul said resurfacing work on a highway from Kabul to the southern city of Kandahar was continuing despite a string of recent killings along the road.

Early on Monday four policemen were killed, four were wounded and four went missing after a raid on their checkpoint 180 km (115 miles) northeast of Kandahar in Zabul province.

Indian contractors working for U.S. company Louis Berger Group Inc came under small-arms fire in a guest house nearby.

In a separate attack, two of the company's security guards were shot dead when assailants opened fire on their vehicle.

Two more attacks were carried out late on Sunday or early on Monday in Zabul and the neighboring Uruzgan province, taking to 11 the number of people killed in the area.

The highway is the largest reconstruction project in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, and its progress is seen as a barometer of the success or otherwise of the central government in stabilizing the country.

## **U.S. Troops In Afghan Push**

*AP, QALAT, Afghanistan, 2 September 2003*

(AP) Afghan and U.S. troops overran three suspected Taliban positions in the mountains of southern Afghanistan Tuesday, while American bombing echoed through the rugged region, where hundreds of Taliban holdouts have been offering a week of fierce resistance.

Gen. Haji Saifullah Khan, the main Afghan commander in the battle area in Zabul province's Dai Chupan district, said U.S. warplanes and helicopter gunships kept up their barrage until shortly before dawn Tuesday.

Khan said the Taliban had been pushed back from three hideouts Tuesday but were continuing to hunker down, using the rough terrain as their shield.

"It's a huge mountain with many gorges in it. It provides very excellent shelter against bombing," said Khan, who spoke to The Associated Press by satellite phone from the front lines.

The commander said his men would offer the Taliban in other hideouts a chance to surrender -- then move in.

"We have tightened our siege. We are very close to the Taliban positions," he said. "We will try to make them surrender. If they do not surrender then fighting will start."

Khan said U.S. warplanes targeted the Sairo Gar mountain area. His ground troops found bedding and turbans but no weapons at the three locations -- Kafir Shaila, Kabai and Ragh -- that were overrun. There was no ground fighting as the Taliban simply retreated from their positions.

The U.S. military has been involved in the fighting since it began about eight days ago. Since Saturday, they have dubbed their role in the skirmishes as "Operation Mountain Viper."

The military said U.S. special operations forces and soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division, as well as close air support, have been involved. The military would not say how many U.S. soldiers were involved in the fighting, though Afghan officials have put the number at several hundred.

U.S. military spokesman Col. Rodney Davis said Tuesday that coalition forces clashed with groups of five to 10 fighters firing small arms and rocket-propelled grenades in Dai Chupan. They had cornered a group of insurgents in a cave and were attacking it Tuesday afternoon with small arms fire, artillery and air support, he said.

"As a result of the offensive several anti-coalition elements have fled the area making them more vulnerable to attack," Davis said in a statement from Bagram Air Base, the coalition headquarters in Afghanistan.

There were no reported coalition casualties in the latest fighting, Davis said. He had no details on Taliban casualties.

One American soldier died Friday when he fell during a night combat mission. Two other U.S. soldiers died in a 90-minute gunbattle Sunday in eastern Afghanistan, near the border with Pakistan. Four suspected Taliban were killed in that fighting.

Those deaths bring to 35 the number of U.S. troops killed in action in Afghanistan, in addition to 162 that have been wounded, according to the U.S. military.

Afghan presidential spokesman Jawid Luddin said that more than 500 troops of the fledgling Afghan national army had been deployed in Zabul. So far, most of the fighting on the government side has been done by provincial militia forces.

Dozens of suspected Taliban have been killed in the ongoing battle in Zabul province. U.S. military said at least 37 insurgents had been killed in direct combat or air strikes. Afghan officials have put the toll much higher.

The U.S. military said it had also called in warplanes and fired artillery on Monday after five rockets landed near a coalition base at Shkin, in eastern Paktika province, near where the two U.S. soldiers were killed in fighting on Sunday.

Meanwhile, in Kabul a spokeswoman for the International Assistance Force said Tuesday that the recent arrests of several suspected terrorists and criminals in Kabul were "preventive."

Early Monday, Afghan authorities supported by peacekeepers from a NATO-led force that patrols the capital raided an apartment and arrested an unspecified number of people suspected of "terrorist and criminal activities."

ISAF spokeswoman Maj. Sarah Wood described it as a "big operation" and a "preventive measure." "The arrests were to protect Kabul, by preventing any further attacks on its institutions or people," she told The Associated Press.

She would not say what evidence was uncovered to implicate the arrested men in terrorist activities. She said they were being held for questioning, but she wouldn't give any details.

Khalil Aminzada, deputy chief of police of Kabul, said Tuesday that two suspects were arrested in the capital on Monday by Afghan authorities acting with some foreigners. Aminzada was not sure if the foreigners were from ISAF or the United States.

He identified one suspect as Qalam, allegedly a former commander of rebel leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, but did not name the other and or elaborate on what they were suspected of plotting.

He said three guns were taken from the home. It wasn't clear whether Aminzada was referring to the same raid.

The U.S. Embassy had no comment.

Hekmatyar is a former prime minister who opposed the Taliban during their rule. However,

after their collapse in late 2001, he allied himself with the Islamic hard-liners to oppose the U.S.-led coalition and President Hamid Karzai's government.

The 5,000-strong ISAF force, established in December 2001 in the wake of the U.S.-led war that toppled the Taliban, is charged with making the Afghan capital secure.

Security in Kabul is good compared with the rest of the country largely because of the peacekeeping force, yet some residents say the city is overrun by thieves and criminals, many of them affiliated with warlords who are part of the government.

In June, ISAF suffered its worst-ever casualties when a suicide bomber driving an explosives-laden taxi killed four German peacekeepers and wounded 29 others. The chief of ISAF last month warned that Kabul was still be vulnerable to further terror attacks.

Two government ministers have been shot and killed in broad daylight in Kabul since ISAF was deployed. No arrests have been made.

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### **Afghan Govt Says Ousts Taliban from Dai Chopan**

by Sayed Salahuddin, *Reuters*, 3 September 2003

KABUL (Reuters) -- After more than a week of intense bombardment and ground fighting, Afghan and U.S.-led forces have driven out Taliban fighters from Dai Chopan district in the southern province of Zabul, a senior official said on Wednesday.

Zabul's intelligence chief, Khalil Hotak, also said that authorities from neighboring provinces had rushed fighters to the borders of the district to arrest Taliban forces trying to flee.

He told Reuters he had received reports of skirmishes between fugitive guerrillas from the hardline Islamic militia and Afghan troops in some parts of Uruzgan province to the north of Dai Chopan.

"We have overrun all Taliban strongholds in Dai Chopan," Hotak said. "The operation for Dai Chopan finished last night. American planes are flying, mostly on reconnaissance missions, and people there have announced support for the government."

Hotak said up to 124 corpses of Taliban fighters, including two Arabs, have been found in caves and mountainous areas of Dai Chopan during the operation which started on August 25.

The Taliban claims its losses are much lower, while the U.S. military told Reuters on Wednesday that between 43 and 67 "anti-coalition personnel" had been killed.

Hotak put the death toll among Afghan troops at seven for the battle involving hundreds of soldiers and a small group of U.S. troops backed by air support. There were up to 1,000 Taliban fighters involved.

One soldier from U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan died of wounds sustained in an accident during the operation and two received gunshot wounds.

### **Reinforcements?**

News of the Taliban setback came a day after Maulvi Faizullah, a senior Taliban commander involved in fighting in Zabul, said around 300 fresh fighters had been deployed in Dai Chopan to join their fellow fighters in battle.

He said the reinforcements were being led by former Taliban Education Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi. They had been sent from Khost province in the southeast bordering Pakistan.

The Taliban force in Zabul was the largest concentration of militants from the ousted regime since it was toppled from power late in 2001. The movement has declared a "jihad," or holy war against foreign forces, aid organizations and their allies in Afghanistan.

August was the bloodiest month since the Taliban's demise, and an estimated 220 people have been killed and scores wounded in violence since August 7.

The toll includes civilians, local aid workers, several dozen police including seven killed late on Sunday in separate attacks near Zabul along the highway linking the capital with the south, which is being rebuilt with foreign funds.

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