**UN Department of Safety and Security, Afghanistan**
# Topic Assessment 02/07
**13 August 2007**

# Half-Year Review of the Security Situation in Afghanistan

## 1.    Introduction

1.1.    The security situation in Afghanistan is assessed by most analysts as having deteriorated at a constant rate through 2007.   Statistics show that although the numbers of incidents are higher than comparable periods in 2006, they show the same seasonal pattern.   The nature of the incidents has however changed considerably since last year, with high numbers of armed clashes in the field giving way to a combination of armed clashes and asymmetric attacks countrywide.   The Afghan National Police (ANP) has become a primary target of insurgents and intimidation of all kinds has increased against the civilian population, especially those perceived to be in support of the government, international military forces as well as the humanitarian and development community.

1.2.    This Topic Assessment (TA) records graphics and dialogue used in a briefing to the Afghanistan Security Management Team (SMT) on 13 August 2007.

## 2.    Aim

2.1.    The aim of this TA is to review overarching security trends in Afghanistan at the half-year mark and to use these to revise the General Conclusion on threats facing UN staff and programme into the second half of 2007.

2.2.    Note that the TA does not delve onto techniques and tactics in any depth, nor does it attempt to define the insurgency.   It is primarily spatial and basically depicts the security situation in a graphic manner.

## 3.    Scope

3.1.    The following elements are addressed:

- Overall snapshot including security statistics.
- Programme accessibility and status of regions.
- Division of the country into zones of similar security characteristics.
- Review of the General Conclusion.

## 4.    Overall Snapshot

4.1.    Figure 1 demonstrates how although figures for 2007 are higher than 2006, the rising pattern has remained constant and parallel.  The difference in monthly incident numbers averages 100[1].  2006 experienced an average of 425 security incidents per month while the equivalent figure for 2007 is 525.   It is not the aim of the TA to analyze the regional statistics in detail but it can be said that the majority of these incidents took place in the SR, SER, ER and CR with the greatest growth in 2007 being found in the ER.  The southern districts of the CR are also responsible for significant increases in 2007.
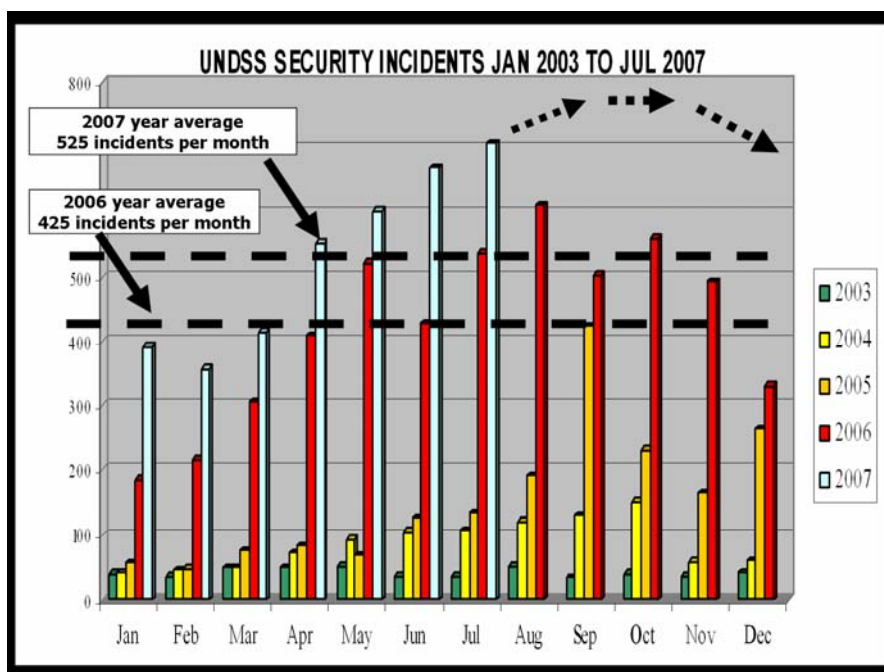


**Figure 1 : Overall Statistics January 2003 - July 2007**

4.2.    As stated in the introduction, the more significant change in 2007 is the shift from large-scale armed clashes in the field to asymmetric or terror-style attacks.  The former do still take place and as air support is often used, casualty figures are still high.   On average however these clashes are fewer and smaller than in 2006.  Possible reasons include the high numbers of Taliban fighters killed during summer 2007 including many mid-level and senior commanders.   Another reason must be the realization that these types of attacks are futile against a modern conventionally equipped military force supported by a wide range of air assets.  The Afghan National Army (ANA) has also been improving throughout 2007.

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[1] The actual difference is possibly higher as UNDSS-Afghanistan developed methodologies in 2007 to more accurately separate out real security incidents from basic domestic crime, non-security related incidents and reports of movement etc.  The 2006 figures still contain some of these non-security related figures and as such the delta between 2006 and 2007 is probably greater than an average of 100 incidents per month.

4.3. On the other hand asymmetric or terror-style attacks are much cheaper, less visible during preparation, and require considerably fewer fighters for equal or higher media value.  A suicide attack against the ANP costs one fighter and probably only requires four or five others for planning, preparation, reconnaissance, command and control but achieves immediate and widespread media coverage.  A ground attack against an ANP checkpoint along a deserted rural road may lose the same number or even no fighters but achieves little or no media attention, places the group in jeopardy as they will be hunted by ground and air assets as they are a more visible entity than the suicide attack support group, and does not demonstrate their power to the local population.

4.4. The asymmetric nature of the current Anti-Government Element (AGE) campaign includes suicide attacks, stand-off attacks, Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), attacks on district centers, attacks on aid and development convoys, attacks on contractors transporting goods for the government and the international military, and intimidation.  Intimidation includes night letters, assassinations, illegal checkpoints where persons without beards or with music in their cars are beaten or even killed, and so-called "Taliban courts".

4.5. **Projection**.  It is likely that the current steadily rising graph (Figure 1) will continue to do so through August and September, flattening out in October and then falling slightly into November and December.  The frequency of incidents will be lower during the winter but will probably maintain the delta between the 2006 and 2007 figures.

## 5. Programme Accessibility and Status of the Regions

5.1. Figure 2 shows the UNDSS Programme Accessibility Map[2] and indicates how it changed between May 2006 and May 2007.  It is clear that the map shows far more of the Extreme Risk/Hostile Environment classification (pink) which now makes up about one third of the surface area of the country.  Main areas to be affected, i.e. areas where the deteriorating security situation has been assessed as an Extreme Risk/Hostile Environment thereby causing less accessibility to programmes, are:

- The southern and extreme northern parts of Helmand Province, most of Kandahar Province, a portion of northern Nimroz Province and most of Zabul and Uruzgan Provinces.
- The rest of Paktika Province not previously coloured pink.
- The "Tora Bora" area of southern Nangahar Province.
- The extreme northern area of Nuristan Province.

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[2] Note that the Programme Accessibility Map is in itself the result of a security risk assessment which will not be repeated in this TA.  Only the result of the assessment process, i.e. the map, is discussed here.

5.2. Medium Risk/Unstable Environments added include parts of Farah, Badghis and Faryab Provinces.

5.3. Areas previously assessed as Medium Risk/Unstable Environments which reverted back to being Low Risk/Permissive Environments (i.e. improved) include parts of Maydan Wardak, Badakshan (northern tip), Takhar and Baghlan Provinces. These improved areas are insignificant when seen against the large areas which deteriorated. It is also possible that some of these "improved" areas may soon revert back to previous assessments.
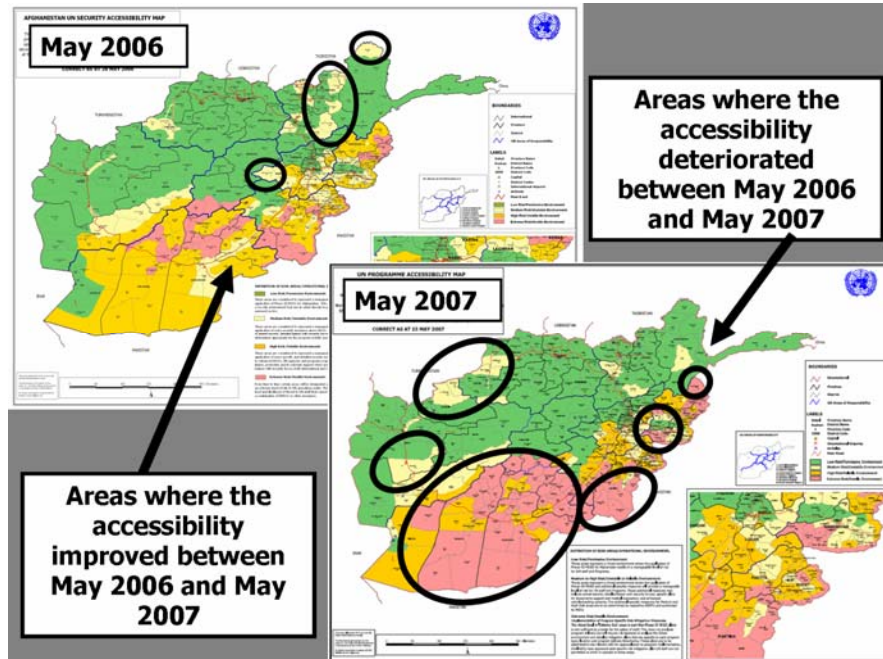


**Figure 2: Changes in Accessibility from May 2006 to May 2007**

5.4. **Regional Status**[3]. At the end of May 2007 SR, SER and ER were assessed as *Volatile* from a security incident point of view. WR and CR were seen overall as *Unstable*. NER, NR and CHR were assessed as *Calm*. These were the overall assessments and some Provinces or Districts within the respective regions may have been assessed higher or lower. Interestingly the only change between May 2006 and May 2007 was a **downgrading** of the WR from *Unstable* to *Calm*

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[3] **UN Regions** (Regional office in the province indicated in **bold** text):

  **NER**: North East Region comprising Badakshan, Takhar, Baghlan and **Kunduz** Provinces.

  **NR**: Northern Region comprising **Balkh**, Samangan, Sari Pul, Faryab and Jawzjan Provinces.

  **WR**: Western Region comprising Ghor, Farah, **Hirat** and Badghis Provinces.

  **SR**: Southern Region comprising Uruzgan, Zabul, **Kandahar**, Helmand and Nimroz Provinces.

  **SER**: South Eastern Region comprising **Paktya**, Khost, Paktika and Ghazni Provinces.

  **ER**: Eastern Region comprising Nuristan, Kunar, **Nangahar** and Laghman Provinces.

  **CR**: Central Region comprising Panjsher, Kapisa, **Kabul**, Logar, Maydan Wardak and Parwan Provinces.

  **CHR**: Central Highlands Region comprising **Bamyan** and Dai Kundi Provinces.

(overall).  This will probably change soon as a result of serious instability in Farah and Badghis.

5.5.  **HARA**.   Mirroring closely the programme accessibility map, a High Abduction Risk Area (HARA) was defined in August 2007 as a response to the growing threat of abductions to UN staff in particular and internationals in general.  The HARA was developed based on inputs from the Regional FSCOs[4] and information gathered in the SIOC.  The area depicted in Figure 3 is temporary and supersedes the mitigation measures indicated on the Programme Accessibility Map.  This implies that although a particular area may not require escorted movement, until rescinded the same area on the HARA map may override this and require not only two escort vehicles but also two armoured vehicles for staff movement[5].  This decision was prompted by the rising numbers of abductions of both international and national humanitarian, aid workers and journalists as well as recent statements made by the two Taliban Dadullah brothers.  These abductions include[6]:

- 4 March – Italian journalist, Helmand Province.
- 27 March – 4 Health workers, Helmand Province.
- 3 April – 2 French and 3 Afghan aid workers, Farah Province.
- 20 June – 6 NGO staff, Nuristan Province.
- 26 June – 17 Deminers, Ghazni Province.
- 28 June – German national, Farah Province.
- 15 July – 2 German engineers, 4 nationals, Maydan Wardak Province.
- 19 July – 23 South Koreans, Ghazni Province.
- 21 July – Danish/Afghan journalist, Kunar Province.

5.6.  The statements by the Dadullah brothers which reflect a growing threat to the UN and which are also partly responsible for the decision to define the HARA are:

- 29 April – Mullah Dadullah: "*We certainly target all those who work for the UN, the US, and Karzai. We are attempting to target everyone that works for the UN and are determined to target all UN organizations and branches, considering them similar to US organizations*".   Mullah Dadullah was reportedly the senior Taliban Commander in the south until his death in an air strike on 12 May 2007.
- 27 July – Mansur Dadullah: "*Of course, kidnapping is a very successful policy and I order all my mujahideen to kidnap foreigners of any nationality wherever they find them and then we should do the same kind of deal*".   Mansur Dadullah is the elder brother of Mullah Dadullah killed in May 2007. The

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[4] FSCO: Field Security Coordination Officer.

[5] Note that this TA is not a Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS) or threat mitigation document and has no authority.  It must therefore not be read as an official document laying down security measures applicable to UN staff and programmes.

[6] There are many more cases, sometimes of short duration, of abductions involving national staff of these organisations which are either not reported to UNDSS or which are not considered prominent or significant.

former was released from captivity in a controversial deal to secure the release in March of the Italian journalist, Daniele Mastrogiacomo, and is now reported to have taken his brother's place as a senior Taliban operational commander.

5.7.    Finally the growing number of incidents of all kinds which affect the humanitarian and development community, and which therefore pose a potential threat to the UN, were also taken into account.   The HARA and associated mitigation measures also helps to protect staff against criminality, suicide attacks, IEDs and random shootings.   By 6 August the statistics[7] for these incidents in 2007 showed an alarming picture:

- Humanitarian Convoys Attacked/Ambushed/Looted:  41.
- Humanitarian Facilities Attacked/Looted: 29.
- Humanitarian Workers abducted[8]:  69 (44 national, 25 international).
- Later killed by captors:  7 (5 national, 2 international).
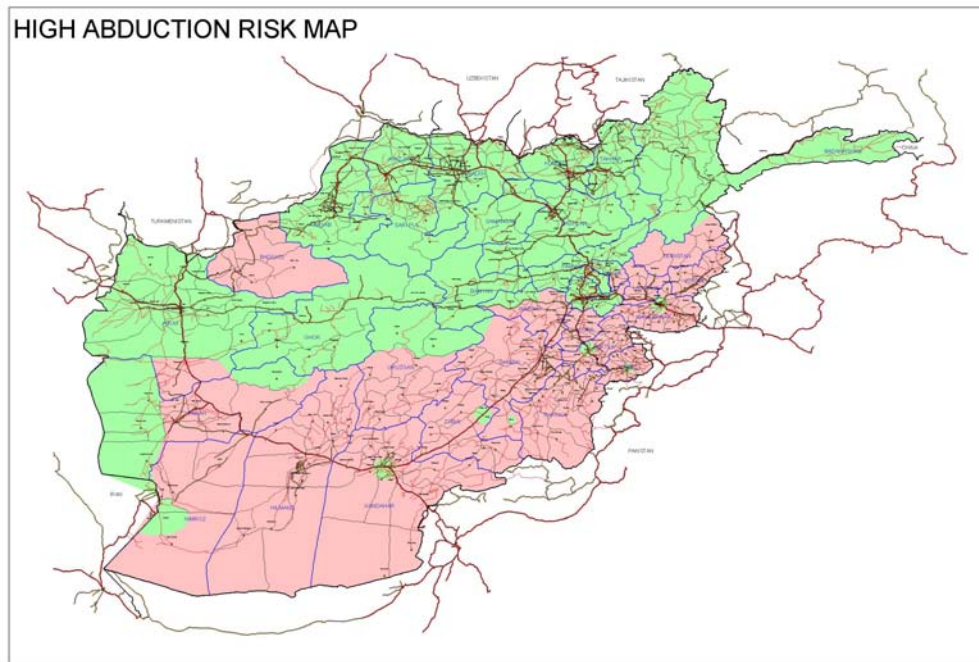- Total Humanitarian Workers killed[9]:  41 (34 national, 7 international).



**Figure 3 : HARA Map**[10] **- August 2007**

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[7] Figures based on a preliminary evaluation of unconfirmed information.  Many security incident reports come from external agencies and the accuracy of reports cannot always be verified.

[8] Numbers include the five health department workers abducted in Kandahar in March of which one was killed. They do NOT include journalists.

[9] Includes the Kandahar IED killing of one national driver and four Nepalese gurkhas.

[10] This first draft map is in the process of being refined as specific roads or routes may not require the degree of additional security initially envisaged.

## 6.    Zones of Similar Security Characteristics

6.1.    Figures 4 to 7 indicate zones of Afghanistan where the security characteristics are deemed to be similar and should not be confused with the formal UN Regions.   Zones are geographic areas which are characterized by similar manifestations of the insurgency and security situation and can change as the situation develops while the Regions remain static.   They cross UN Regional boundaries and include some districts of a particular province while excluding others.   The extent of the zones indicated is not precise and rather reflects a general assessment of the area.   The specific characteristics of each are indicated in the bulleted box at bottom right of the figures.

6.2.    Note that Figures 4 and 5 also indicate that cross-border activity is characteristic of the particular zone.   The influence of Pakistan on Afghanistan and vice versa is well documented and will not be addressed here.   In the case of Iran, the map symbol is indicated with question marks as reports are mostly from open sources and it is not yet possible to confirm if that country is really contributing to insecurity in the south and west or not.   US government analysts have been quite clear in their opinion that the involvement is real and state orchestrated.   There is currently talk of declaring the Iranian Revolutionary Guard a terrorist organisation based on their alleged involvement in both the Iraq and Afghanistan insurgencies.   Although there is no doubt that Iranian weapons are finding their way into Afghanistan, it is not yet possible to confirm whether these are state supplied or the result of rogue elements within the Iranian armed forces.   For the purposes of this TA therefore, the influence of Iran on the security situation in Afghanistan is left as unconfirmed.

6.3.    The Figures are self-explanatory.   Four zones have currently been identified but these can be reduced, added to or altered as the situation develops:

- Southern Zone.   Most of SR and SER including a small part of the CHR and WR.
- Eastern Zone.   The ER plus a small part of the CR.
- Central Zone.   Most of the CR plus a small part of the NER.
- Northern Zone.   The rest of the country including half of Nimroz Province in the SR, most of the WR, all of the NR, most of the NER and most of the CHR.

6.4.    Note that the assessment to arrive at these zones is not provided in this TA but only the results of that process. Collectively these four maps help to arrive at the General Conclusion mentioned in the aim of the TA.   The term "Dynamic Occupation" (Southern Zone) was coined by an external source earlier in 2007 to explain the temporary seizure of District Centers by the Taliban.   It became commonplace during the year to have a District Center overrun by insurgents and then a day or two later have it retaken by international military or government forces. This see-saw effect became know as "Dynamic Occupation".   The taking of District Centers is particularly prevalent in the SR and SER and negatively

affects the ability of UN programmes to access those areas. The District of Musa Qala in Helmand Province, occupied since 26 January 2007 is still denied to the government by the Taliban and is one of the examples where "Dynamic Occupation" became semi-permanent.
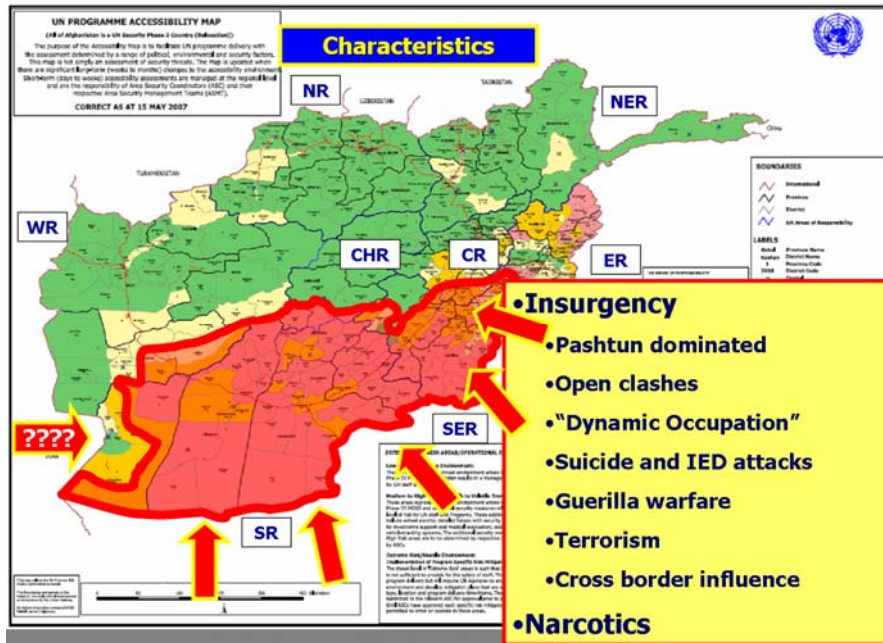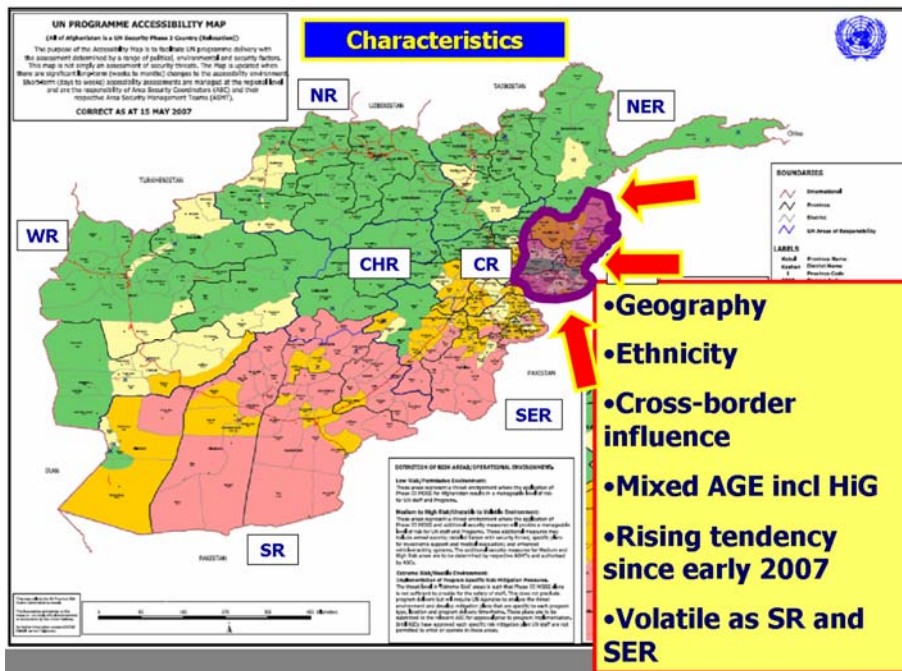


**Figure 4 : Southern Zone**
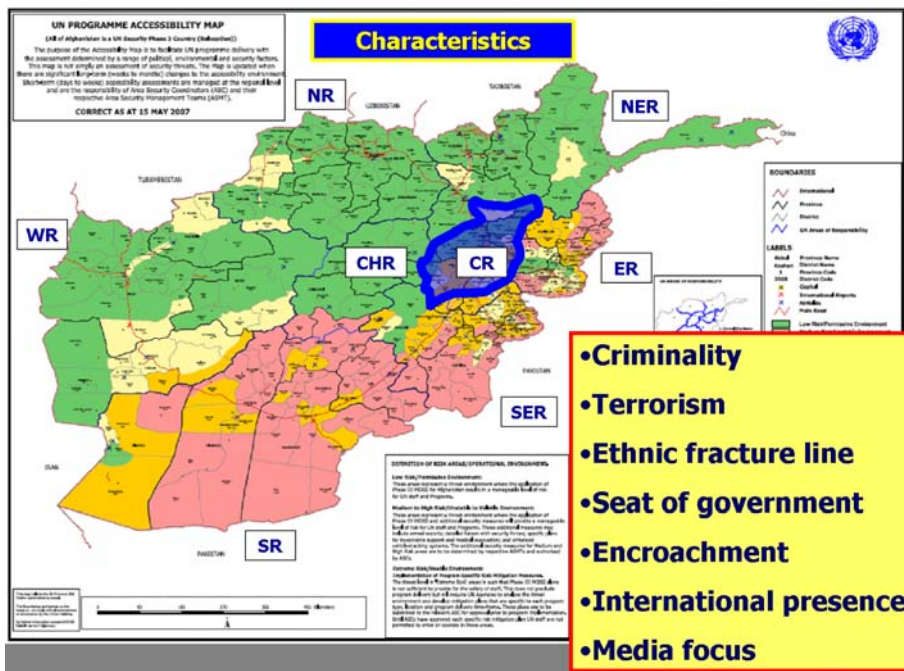


**Figure 5 : Eastern Zone**
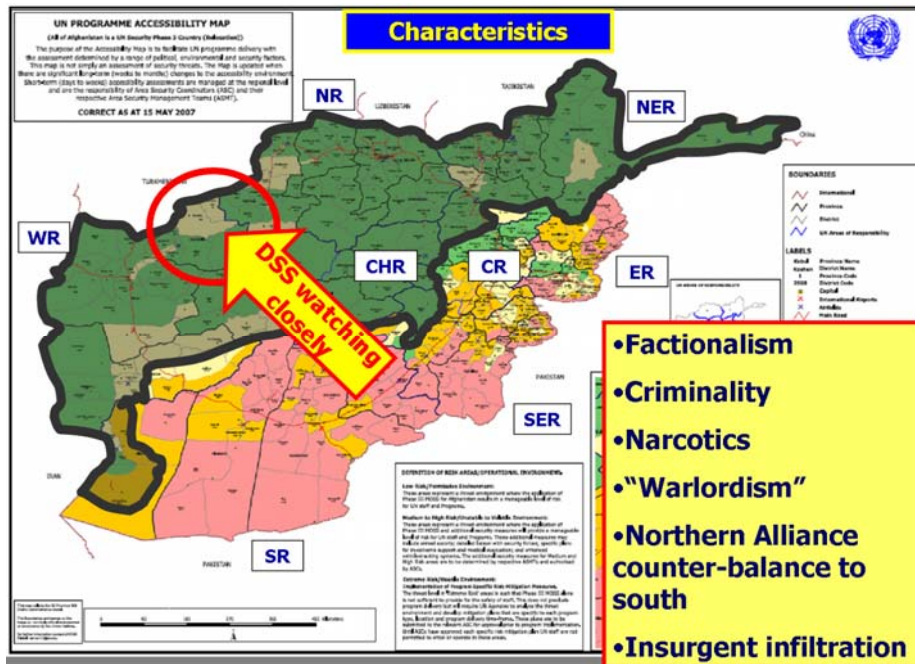
**Figure 6 : Central Zone**



**Figure 7 : Northern Zone**

6.5.    Figures 4 and 5 together indicate the rough line of insurgent extent although pockets of activity do flare up periodically in the Northern Zone and acts of terror occur increasingly in the Central Zone.  An example in the west of the Northern

Zone is recent insurgent activity in Badghis Province, and in the Central Zone incursions into Logar and Maydan Wardak are becoming increasingly more frequent. The zones identified do not imply intensity but rather differing characteristics. The Eastern Zone for example shows higher incident numbers than the individual UN Regions of the Southern Zone (SR and SER) but these are primarily asymmetric acts while open clashes in the field are more characteristic of the Southern Zone. The full spectrum of insurgent and terrorist tactics such as armed clashes, stand-off engagements, ambushes, intimidation, IEDs and suicide attacks are however found in all zones but to varying degrees.

6.6. The zones also differ broadly in terms of the insurgent groups involved[11]. While the SR portion of the Southern Zone is predominantly main stream Taliban, the SER portion is a mixture of main stream Taliban and the Haqqani Tribal Organisation (HTO) of Jalaluddin Haqqani[12] and his sons. The Eastern Zone is predominantly the territory of Hizb-i Islami with two primary factions: The Hizb-i Islami faction of Gulbuddin Hikmatyar (HIG) very visible in Nuristan and Kunar and the Hizb-i Islami faction of Yunus Khalis (HIYK) in Nangahar. Recently an offshoot of HIYK, the 'Tora Bora Front', has been established in southern Nangahar by a son of Yunus Khalis. The Central Zone is the target of all the groups involved while the Northern Zone appears to be periodically targeted by main stream Taliban. The Northern Zone, in all three of its constituent UN Regions (NER, NR and WR), is also plagued by a variety of political factions and their associate "warlords" and other illegal armed groups (IAGs).

## 7.    General Conclusion

7.1. The text and graphics above are brief pointers to a changed security environment leading to the General Conclusion[13] indicated below.

7.2. While **evidence of a deliberate AGE strategy against the UN is still not visible**, recent incidents of an AGE, factional and criminal nature clearly aimed at UN staff (or contractors), programmes and facilities necessitates re-evaluation of the general conclusion regarding the safety of UN staff and programmes. These incidents, all from 2007, include:

- Statements made by the two Dadullah brothers referring to the UN being synonymous with the US (and by implication a legitimate target) and that the abduction of foreigners is a viable tactic.
- The IED attack on a UNAMA vehicle in Logar.

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[11] Content partially extracted and paraphrased from, and with acknowledgement to, a recent paper by the UNAMA JMAC (author E. Schiewek) entitled "A Review of the Taliban and Fellow Travelers as a Movement - Concept Paper updating PAG Joint Assessment of June 2006" dated 13 August 2007.

[12] Jalaluddin Haqqani has been reported dead (by natural causes) but while numerous observers believe this to be true, it is as yet unconfirmed. Irrespective of the veracity of the reports, it is generally believed that his sons have been steering the organisation for some time and that his passing will not affect the operations and strategy of the Haqqani Tribal Organisation (often termed Haqqani Network).

[13] This General Conclusion presented to the Country SMT on Monday 13 August 2007.

- IEDs attacks on UNOPS contractors in the SR.
- Stand-off attacks in Hirat.
- Execution of the deminers in the SR.
- Numerous attacks on WFP contractor convoys.
- Threat warnings received by UN staff countrywide.

7.3. It must now be assumed that where the UN is engaged in programmes considered to be against their interests, AGE and factional groups may take action against the UN, and where opportunity arises, criminal elements will not hesitate to attack UN programmes.

7.4. **Abduction for political or criminal motives remains the highest threat followed by attacks against UN programmes and facilities for localised factional reasons and thirdly, collateral damage due to IED and suicide attacks**.

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