

1800 K Street, NW  
Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20006

Phone: 1.202.775.3270  
Fax: 1.202.775.3199

Web:  
[www.csis.org/burke/reports](http://www.csis.org/burke/reports)



# The Afghan-Pakistan War: The Rising Intensity of Conflict 2007-2008

**Anthony H. Cordesman**  
Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy  
With assistance by Nicholas B. Greenough

**CSIS**

CENTER FOR STRATEGIC &  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Burke Chair  
in Strategy

*August 12, 2009*

# **The Rising Intensity of Conflict: 2008 - I**

**The lack of any systematic reporting on the intensity of the war is particularly striking for 2008. It is clear from US background briefings that the level of conflict continues to intensify, but the data provided are national and do not show where the fighting is becoming most serious.**

**The Secretary General of the UN and the US Director of National Intelligence have provided some useful summary judgments. (pp. 32-33)**

**The UN, NATO/ISAF governments, and the Afghan government do not, however, provide reliable breakouts of Afghan casualties, no reliable central chronology, no detailed description of NATO/ISAF or Afghan Army and police activity and outcomes. No meaningful maps are provided of either the pattern of conflict, or the shifts in Taliban influence. Once again, activity in Afghanistan is decoupled from activity in Pakistan.**

**The closest thing to useful summary reporting on the location of the fighting, and trends by area and region, is provided by Senlis (pp. 35-41). It is important to note that NATO sources and the Afghan government dispute much of the detail in these maps, but that background briefings tend to support them. One key difference is that background briefings by intelligence experts tend to describe much of the Taliban presence in terms of support areas for the fighting, while Senlis describes them as areas of Taliban influence.**

# **The Rising Intensity of Conflict: 2008 - II**

**NATO and member government reporting focuses almost exclusively on the fighting and kinetic developments. The Taliban, however, is not fighting the same war as NATO/ISAF. It is seeking to expand its political and economic influence, not to defeat NATO/ISAF and Afghan forces in open battle.**

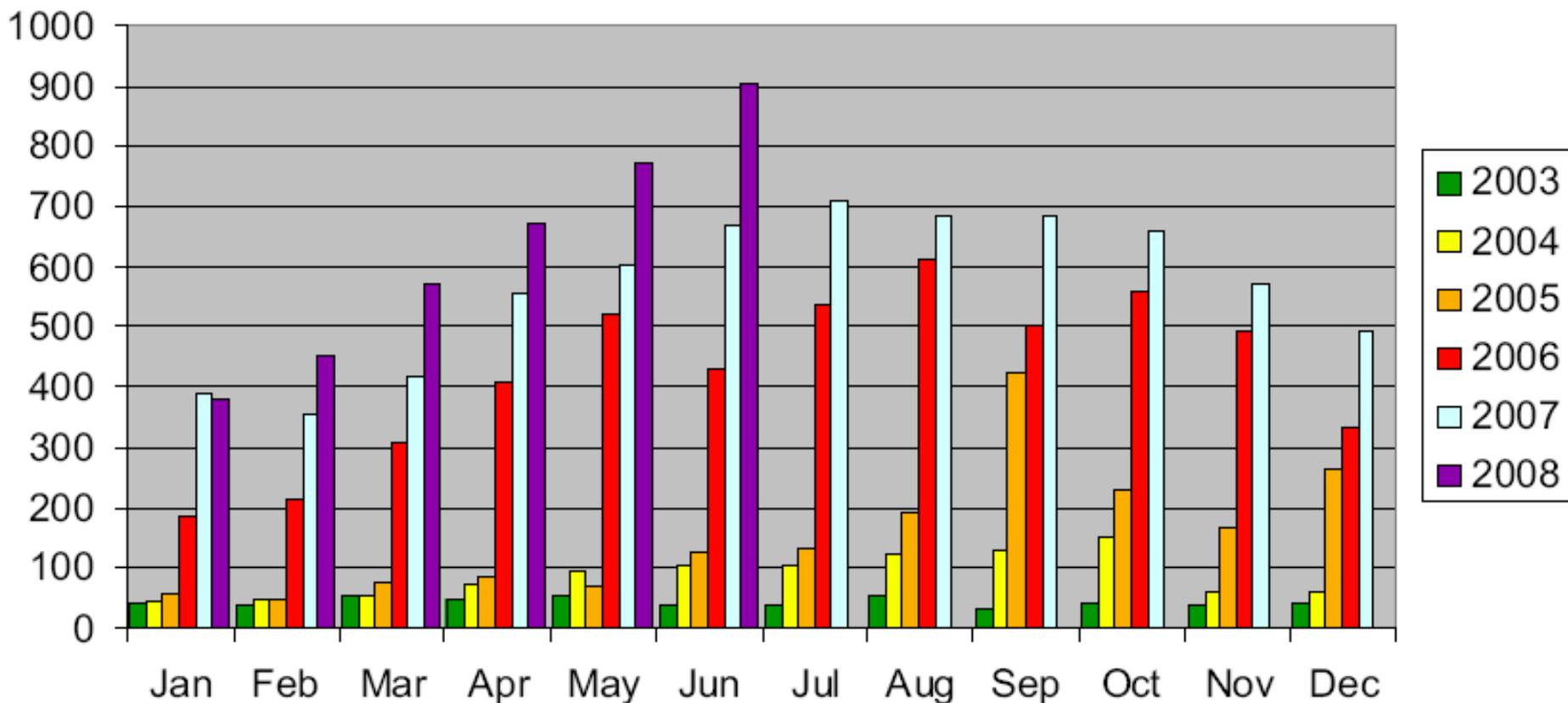
**The Taliban and other Islamist fighters are also fighting a war of political attrition in an effort to outlast NATO/ISAF presence, force out given countries and NGOs, and push the Afghan people into a belief they must deal with the Taliban. Polls by ABC and TFT indicate that the Taliban and other Islamist fighters are having growing success in achieving these objectives.**

**This does not mean that the Taliban or other factions control most areas. It does often mean that they are present more often than NATO/ISAF or Afghan government forces, can pressure or threaten local leaders, can control part of the drug trade, and recruit and pay young fighters – in a country with 40-60% youth unemployment or underemployment. The Senlis maps on pages 38-43 of the briefing may not be fully accurate, but they illustrate the point quite well.**

# Global Patterns in Terrorism versus Terrorism in Middle East, Afghanistan, and Pakistan in 2008

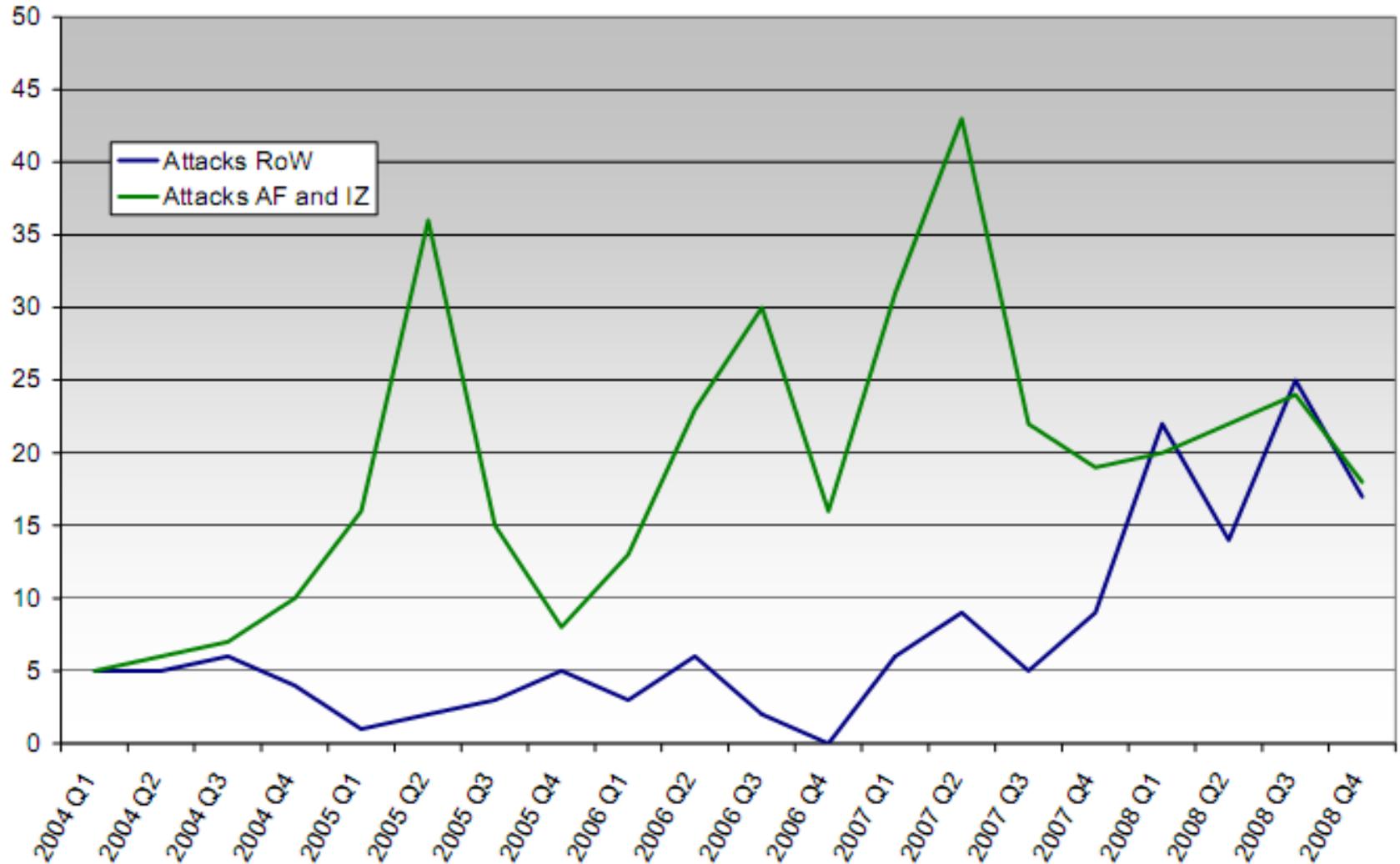
- **Approximately 11,800 terrorist attacks against noncombatants occurred in various countries during 2008, resulting in over 54,000 deaths, injuries and kidnappings.**
- **Compared to 2007, attacks decreased by 2,700, or 18 percent, in 2008 while deaths due to terrorism decreased by 6,700, or 30 percent.**
- **As was the case last year, the largest number of reported terrorist attacks occurred in the Near East, but unlike previous years, South Asia had the greater number of fatalities. These two regions were the locations for 75 percent of the 235 high-casualty attacks (those that killed 10 or more people) in 2008.**
- **Attacks in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan accounted for about 55 percent of all attacks**
- **Of the 11,770 reported attacks, about 4,600, or nearly 40 percent, occurred in the Near East where approximately 5,500 fatalities, or 35 percent of the worldwide total, were reported for 2008.**
- **Attacks in Iraq have continued to decline since 2007.**
- **Another 35 percent of the attacks occurred in South Asia with Afghanistan and Pakistan registering increased attacks.**
- **Attacks in Pakistan more than doubled in 2008.**

# Number of Security Incidents By Month, January 2003 to June 2008

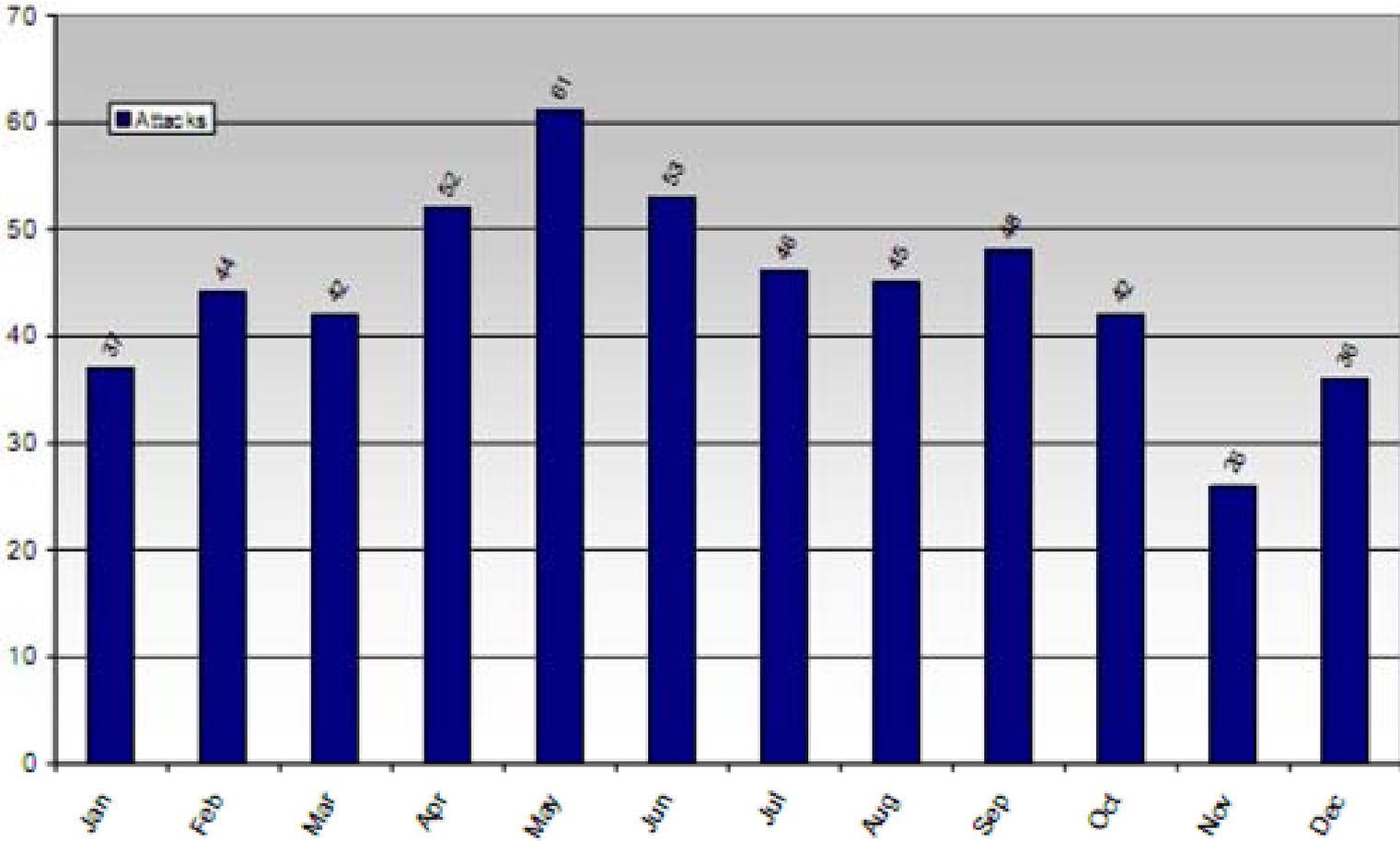


United Nations, Office on Drugs and Crime, "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2008,"  
Executive Summary, August 2008, p. 19, and UNDSS, Kabul

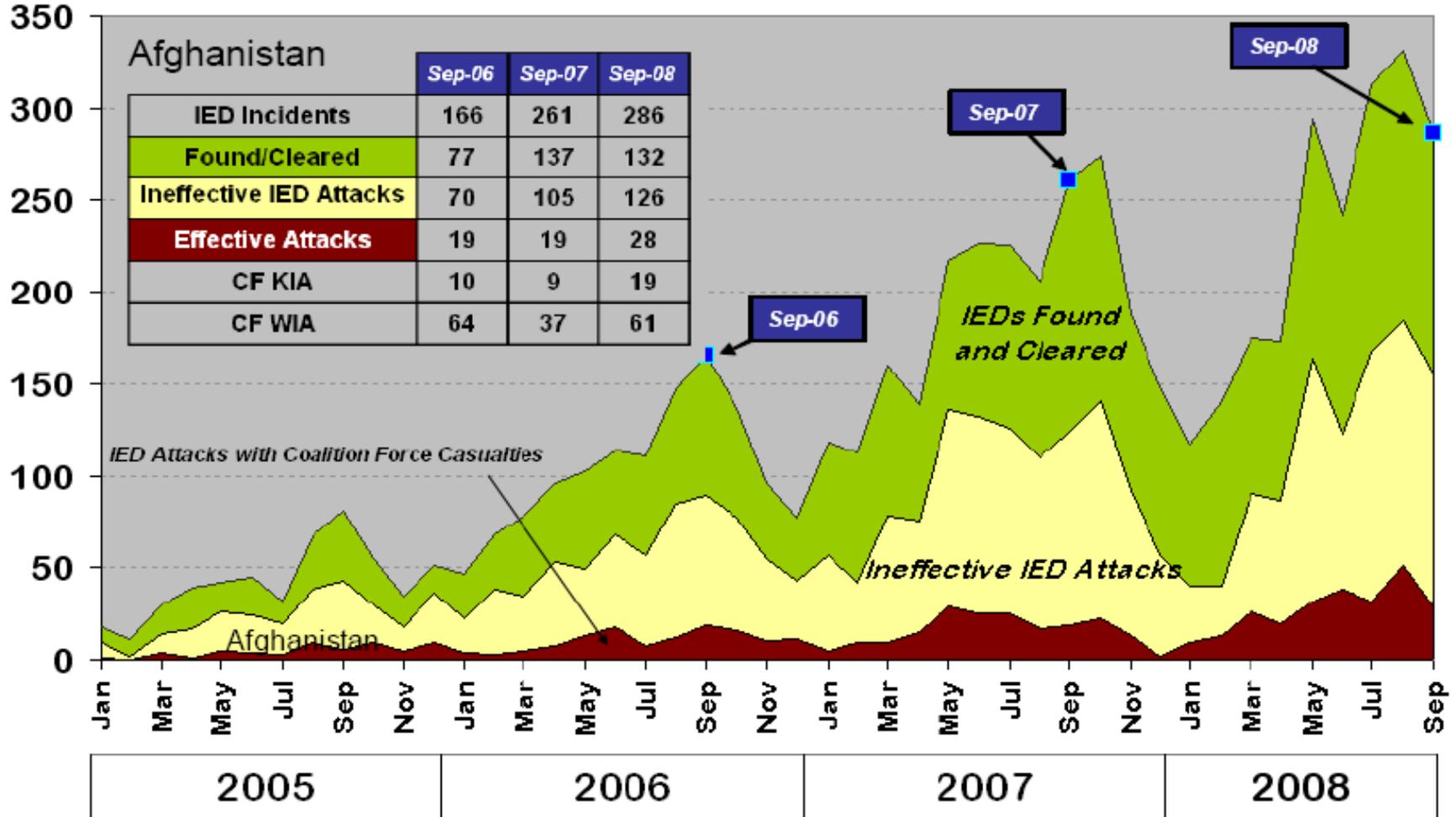
# Comparison of High-Fatality Sunni Attacks in Iraq and Afghanistan Versus Rest of World from 2004 to 2008



# Sunni High-Fatality Attacks Grouped by Month of Attack 2004 to 2008

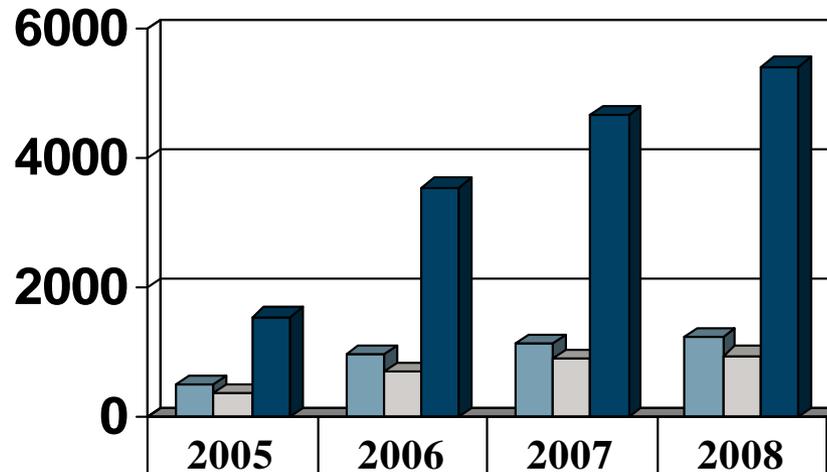


# IED Attacks in Afghanistan: 2005-2008



“The Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization: DOD’s Fight Against IEDs Today and Tomorrow,” US House of Representatives, Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations, November 2008 Committee Print 110-11 45-137, p.40

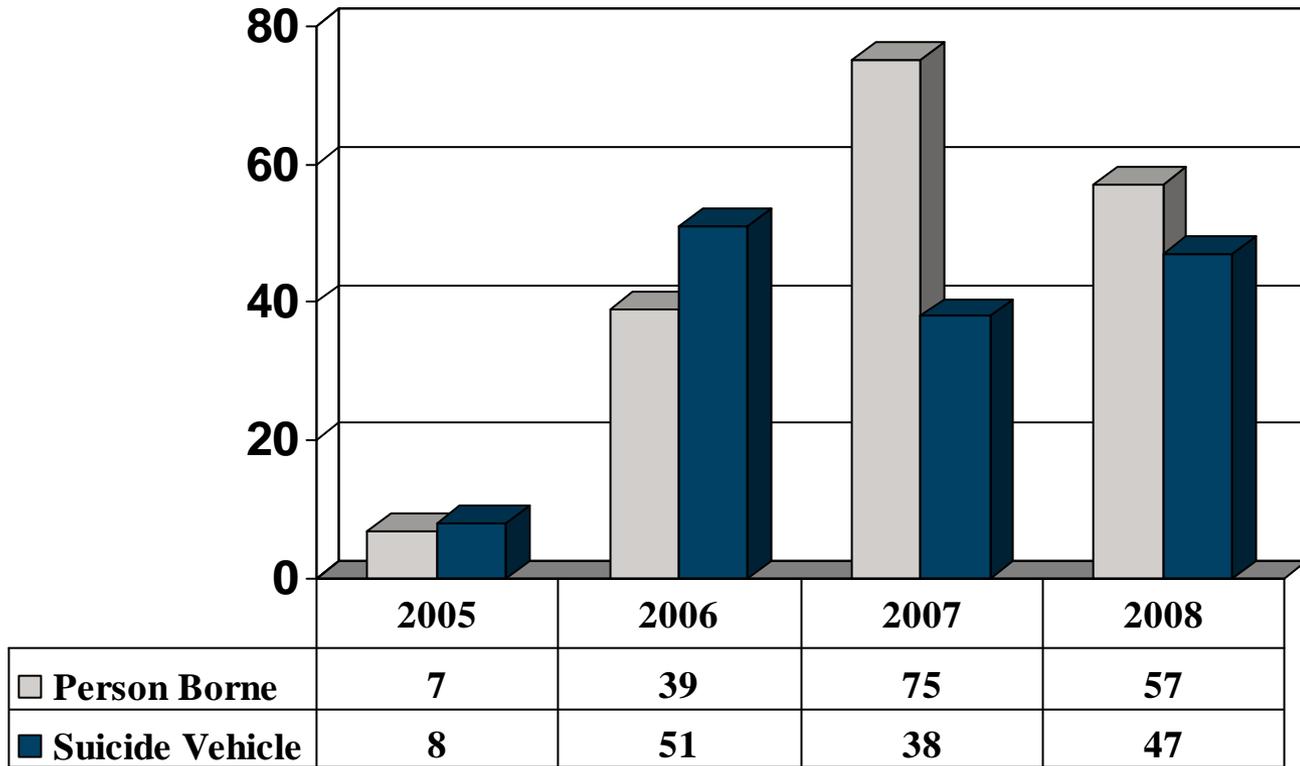
# Terrorist Incidents and Casualties in Afghanistan: 2005-2008



<b>■ Total Attacks</b>	<b>494</b>	<b>968</b>	<b>1125</b>	<b>1220</b>
<b>■ Attacks resulting in at least one death, injury or kidnapping</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>890</b>	<b>948</b>
<b>■ People killed, injured, or kidnapped</b>	<b>1551</b>	<b>3556</b>	<b>4662</b>	<b>5423</b>

National Counterterrorism Center, *2008 Report on Terrorism*, 30 April 2009, <http://www.nctc.gov/>, p. 14.

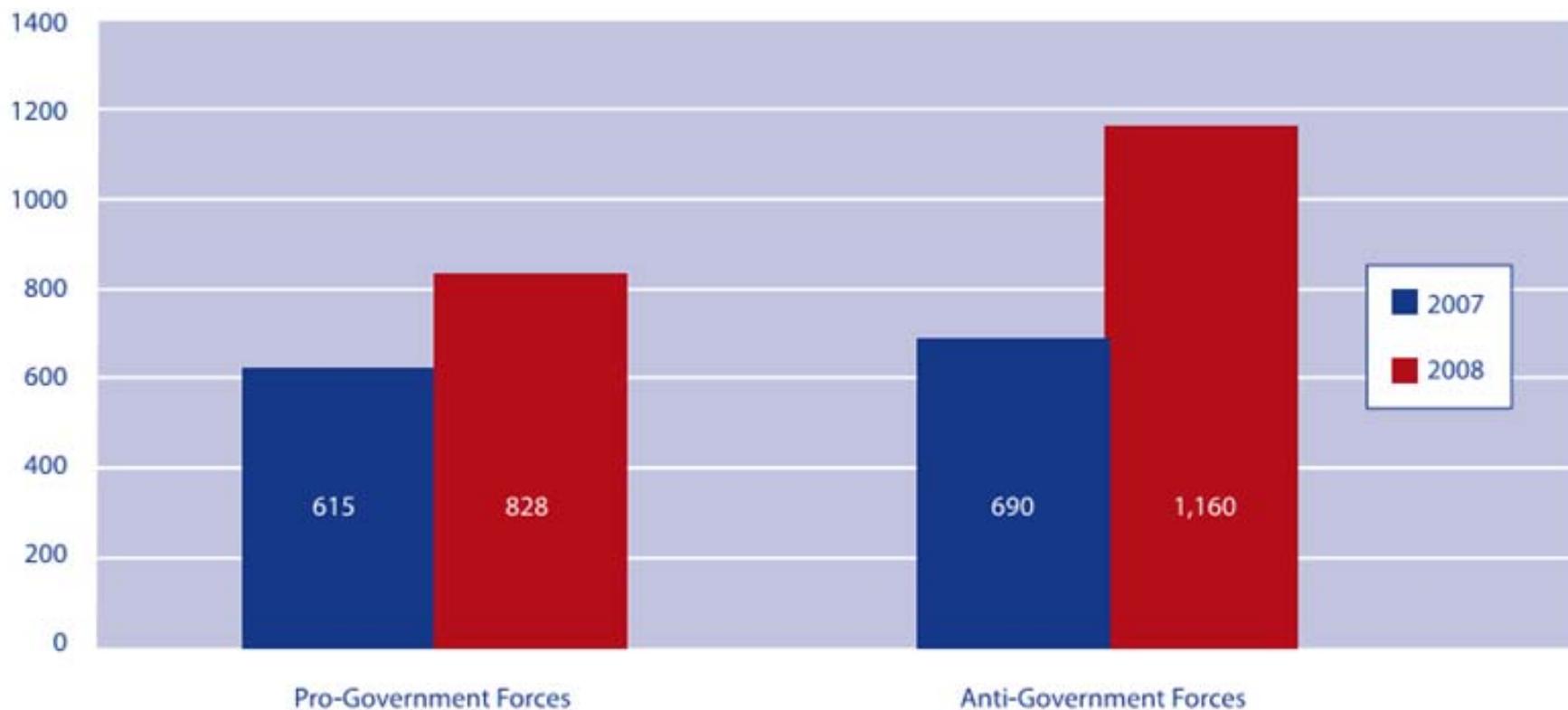
# Trends in Person-borne Improvised Explosive Device (PBIED) vs. Suicide Vehicle-borne Improvised Explosive Device (SVBIED) Attacks in Afghanistan: 2005-2008



National Counterterrorism Center, *2008 Report on Terrorism*, 30 April 2009, <http://www.nctc.gov/>, p. 14.



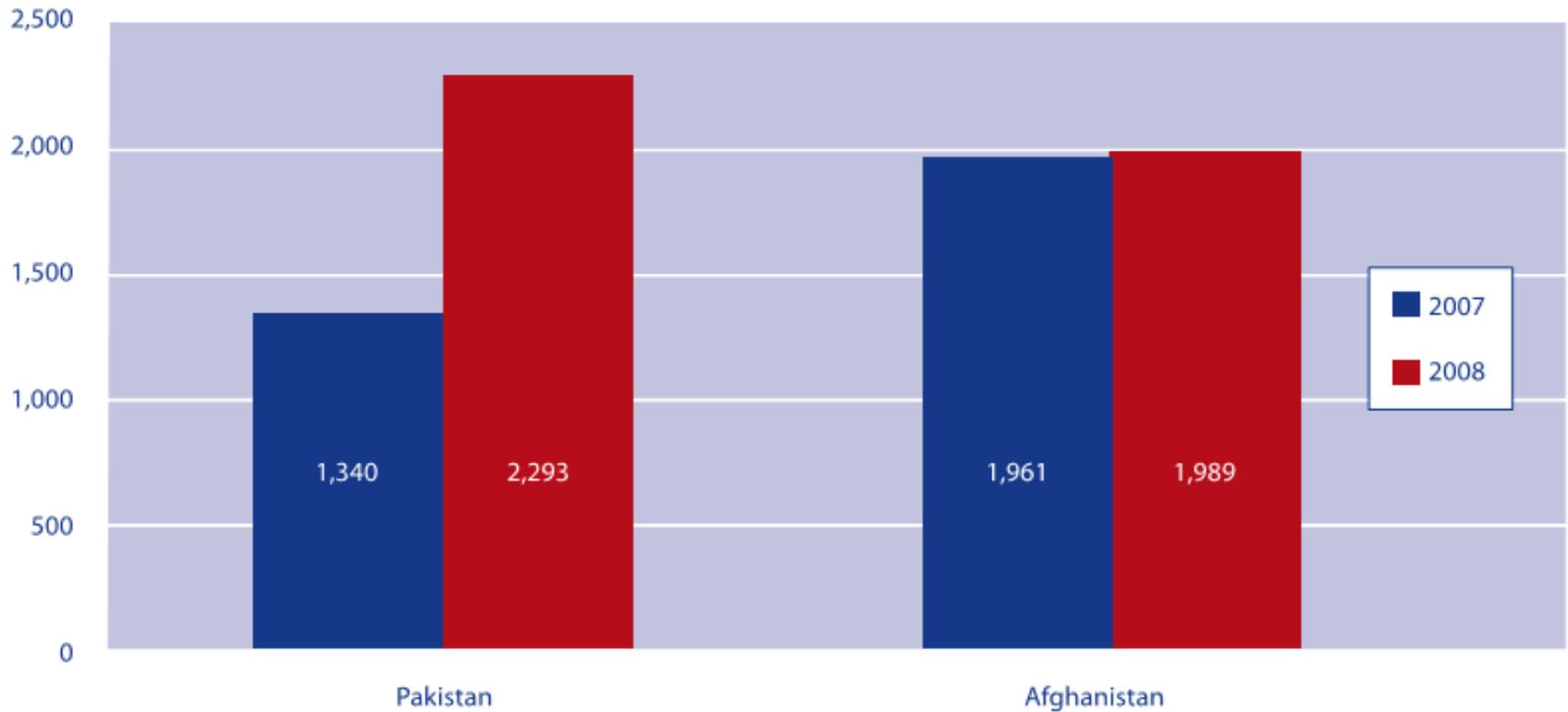
# Cause of Civilian Deaths in Afghanistan: 2007 vs. 2008



Data from United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan. Pro-government forces include international military forces and Afghan national security forces.

"Triage: The Next Twelve Months in Afghanistan and Pakistan", Andrew M. Exum, Nathaniel C. Fick, Ahmed A. Humayun, David J. Kilcullen", June 2009, Page 8

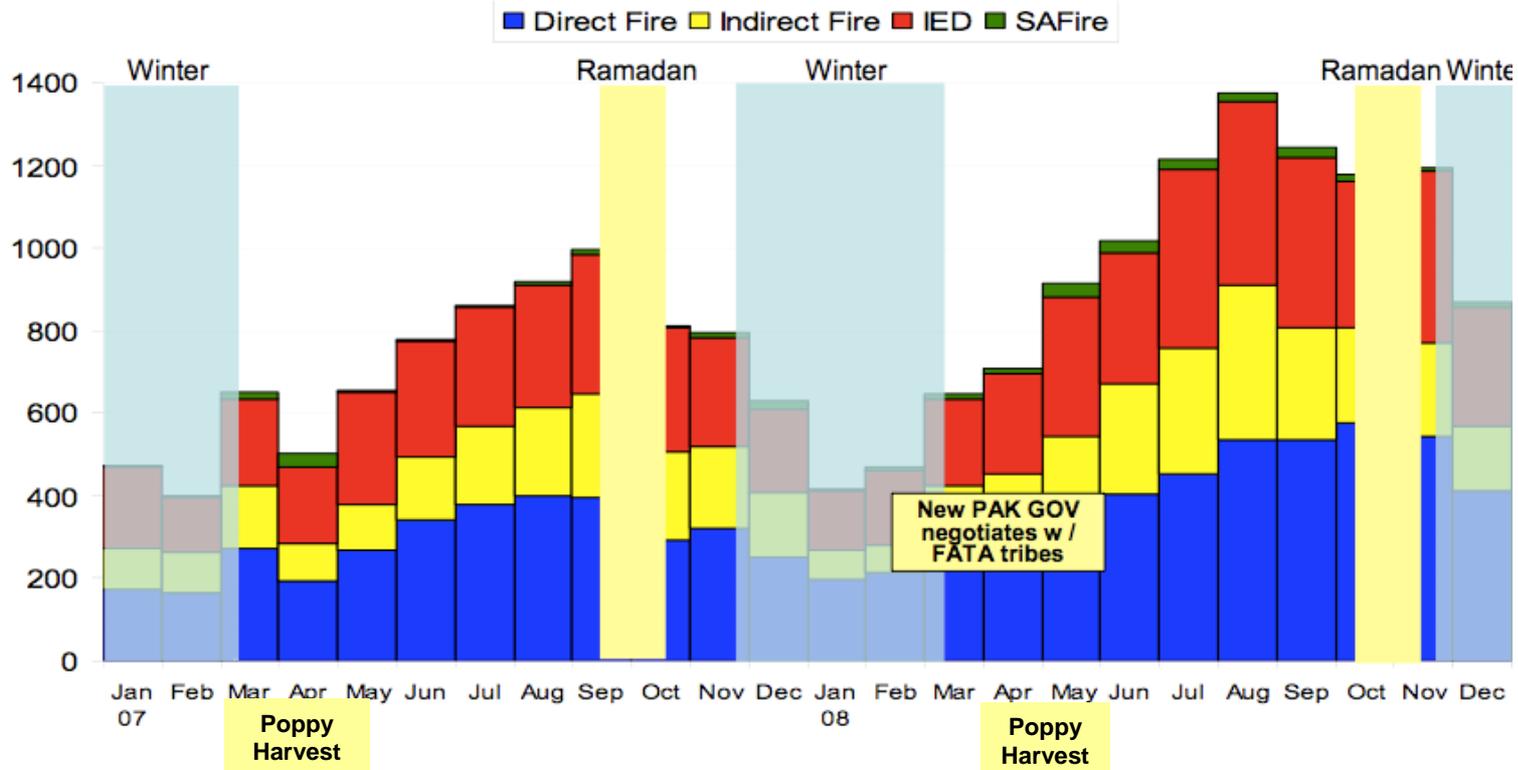
# Deaths from Terrorism: 2007 vs. 2008



Data from the National Counterterrorism Center.

“Triage: The Next Twelve Months in Afghanistan and Pakistan”, Andrew M. Exum, Nathaniel C. Fick, Ahmed A. Humayun, David J. Kilcullen”, June 2009, Page 11

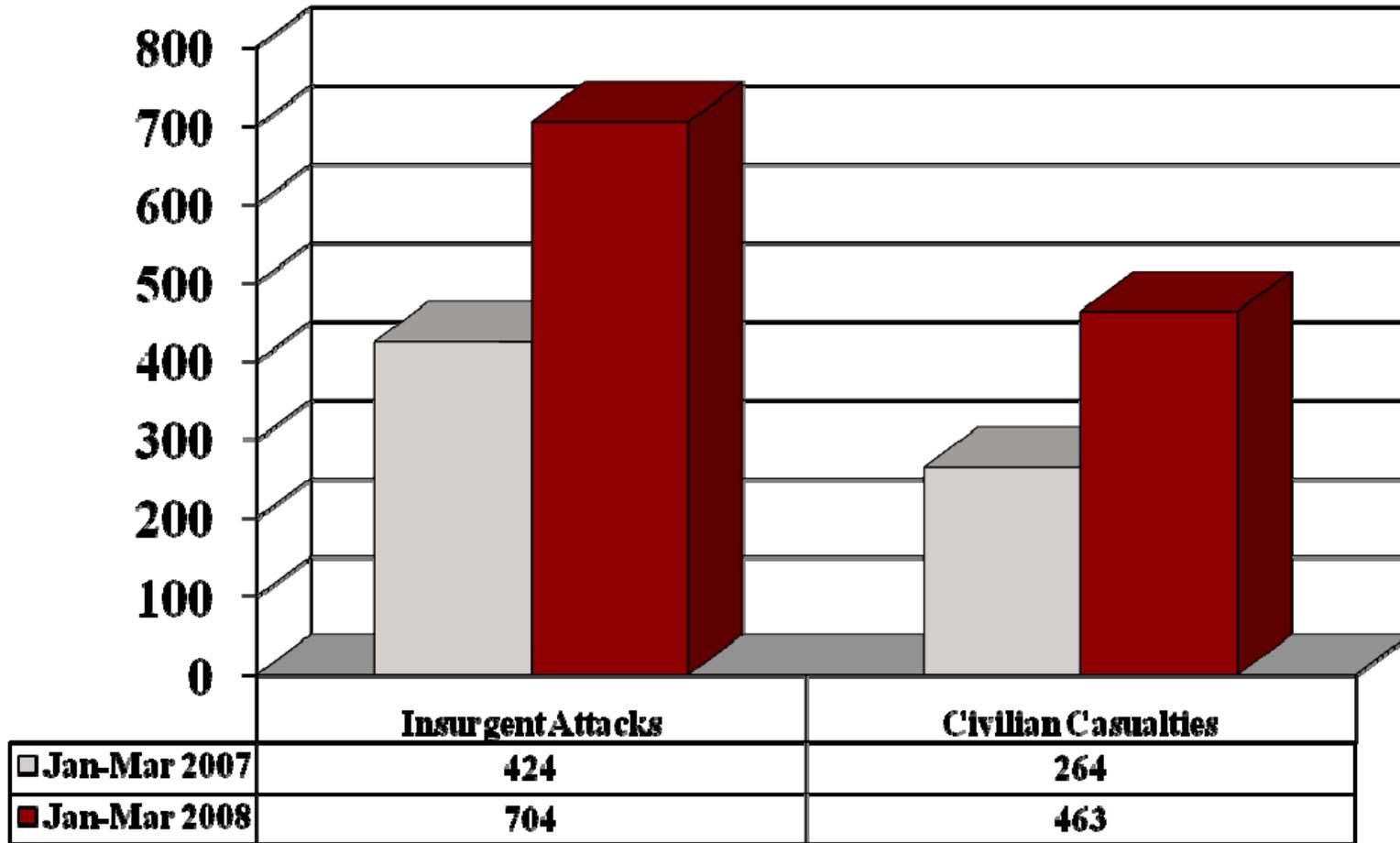
# Insurgent Initiated Attacks: 2007-2008



- Two distinct insurgencies operate in Afghanistan: a Kandahari-based Taliban in the South and a more complex, adaptive insurgency in the East.
- There has been a 37 percent increase in attacks along Afghanistan major highway -the Ring Road -- from 2007 to 2008.
- Direct fire incidents increased 40 percent
- Indirect fire incidents increased 27 percent.
- IED incidents, including discovered IEDs and suicide bombings, increased 26 percent.
- Surface-to-air fire (SAFIRE) increased 67 percent.

# Rise in Afghan Violence: 2007 vs. 2008

Insurgent attacks and civilian casualties in the first quarter of 2008 versus the first quarter of 2007



# Key Trends: 2008-2009 - I

- Various testimony and briefings show that the average monthly number of major incidents rose from only 50 in 2002 to 80 in 2003, 150 in 2005, 425 in 2006, and 566 in 2007. Suicide bombings rose from 1 in 2001 and 0 in 2002 to 2 in 2003, 6 in 2004, 21 in 2005, 123 in 2006, and 160 in 2007, and reached just over 1200 by the end of the first six months of 2008. The number of IEDs and roadside bombs rose from 22 in 2002 to 83 in 2003, 325 in 2004, 782 in 2005, 1,931 in 2006, and 2,615 in 2007, although the number of effective IED attacks remained low.
- The number of attacks in the peak month in each year rose from 400 in 2005 to 800 in 2006 and 1,000 in 2007, and reach 1,000 in September 2008. Attacks causing at least one death rose from 366 in 2005 to 695 in 2006 and 892 in 2007, and the number killed, injured, or kidnapped rose from 1540 in 2005 to 3,557 in 2006 and 4,672 in 2007. Peak monthly US casualties (killed and wounded) rose from less than 20 from 2002-2003 to the mid-30s in 2004, 70 in 2005 and 2006, and 130 in 2007.
- These figures rose by roughly third between 2007 and 2008. As the NATO/ISAF figures attached to this analysis show. During 2008, there was a 33% increase in kinetic events or military clashes, a 27% increase in indirect fire attacks, and a 67% increase in surface to air fire. The number of IED attacks – the most serious source of casualties, rose by 26% to 27%. There was a 119% increase in the number of attacks on Government of Afghanistan personnel, and 50% rise in kidnappings and assassinations. The number of suicide attacks dropped by 5%, but their lethality and skill increased and so did estimates of the number of suicide bombers in training. The number of NATO/ISAF deaths rose by 35% and civilian deaths rose by 40-46%.
- The situation deteriorated further in late 2008 and early 2009, in part because the weather permitted more Jihadist movement. Clashes and attacks in the first two months of 2009 were twice the numbers as during the same period in 2008. They surged by 131% in the Eastern province of Kunar relative to the same month in 2008, highlighting the growth of the threat in the east as well as in the south.<sup>i</sup> This situation continued to deteriorate in March. US forces reported that "kinetic activity" in eastern Afghanistan increased by 68 percent this year compared to the same 80-or-so-day span last year. In the two provinces bordering Pakistan's Waziristan provinces, violence involving Western troops is up 90 percent, and attacks rose by 130% in the area across from the Mohmand and Bajaur tribal areas -- where the Pakistani military claimed the Taliban had "lost".
- US and UN intelligence maps that were issued or leaked during 2005 to 2007, and more recent NATO/ISAF maps issued in January 2009, do show the size of the high risk-areas inside Afghanistan have increased by 30% to 50% every year since 2005. Kabul is scarcely under siege, but it has turned from a city where NATO/ISAF and aid personnel could wander as tourists to one so filled with violence that the US and foreign compounds have become the equivalent of a Green Zone. There has been a particularly serious increase in violence in the Afghan-Pakistan border area. There were 431 insurgent attacks in the Khyber border area during January-November 2007, and 625 during the same period in 2008 – an increase of 45%.<sup>ii</sup>

---

<sup>i</sup> Fisnik Abbashi, "Roadside Bomb Kills 4 Troops in Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, March 16, 2009, p. A8.

<sup>ii</sup> Candace Rondeaux, "US-Funded Intelligence Center Struggles in the Khyber Region," *Washington Post*, January 12, 2008, p. A6.

# Key Trends: 2008-2009 - II

These data understate the scale of the problem since they do not count all the Afghan on Afghan violence that does not attack government officials and forces, and kidnappings, night letters, and Taliban attacks on Afghan civilians have spread to cover nearly half of the country. The UN rates nearly half the country as unsafe for movement by aid workers not supported by troops, and security has deteriorated sharply in Kabul, particularly in the last year. The level of violence, incidents, and casualties continues to rise, as does the frequency and intensity of combat. A new threat has also developed to US and NATO/ISAF lines of supply, as well as imports from Pakistan, during 2008. This is critical because at least 60% of all supplies come from ports in Pakistan across the border in the Khyber and FATA areas.

While detailed NATO/ISAF and US maps that show the growth of Taliban, Hekmatyar, and Haqqani areas of influence are classified, it is clear from unclassified briefings that these insurgent groups continue to expand their influence at the local level. Although they are controversial, estimates by the International Council on Security and Development (formerly the Senlis Council) indicate that the,

Taliban now holds a permanent presence in 72% of Afghanistan, up from 54% a year ago. Taliban forces have advanced from their southern heartlands, where they are now the de facto governing power in a number of towns and villages, to Afghanistan's western and north-western provinces, as well as provinces north of Kabul. Within a year, the Taliban's permanent presence in the country has increased by a startling 18%. Three out of the four main highways into Kabul are now compromised by Taliban activity. The capital city has plummeted to minimum levels of control, with the Taliban and other criminal elements infiltrating the city at will.

The increase in their geographic spread illustrates that the Taliban's political, military and economic strategies are now more successful than the West's in Afghanistan. Confident in their expansion beyond the rural south, the Taliban is at the gates of the capital and infiltrating the city at will. Of the four doors leading out of Kabul, three are now compromised by Taliban activity. The roads to the west, towards the Afghan National Ring Road through Wardak to Kandahar have become unsafe for Afghan or international travel by the time travelers reach the entrance to Wardak province, which is about thirty minutes from the city limits.

The road south to Logar is no longer safe for Afghan or international travel. The road east to Jalalabad is not safe for Afghan or international travel once travelers reach the Sarobi Junction which is about an hour outside of the city. Of the two roads leaving the city to the north only one – the road towards the Panjshir valley, Salang tunnel and Mazar – is considered safe for Afghan and international travel. The second road towards the north that leads to the Bagram Air Base is frequently used by foreign and military convoys and subject to insurgent attacks.

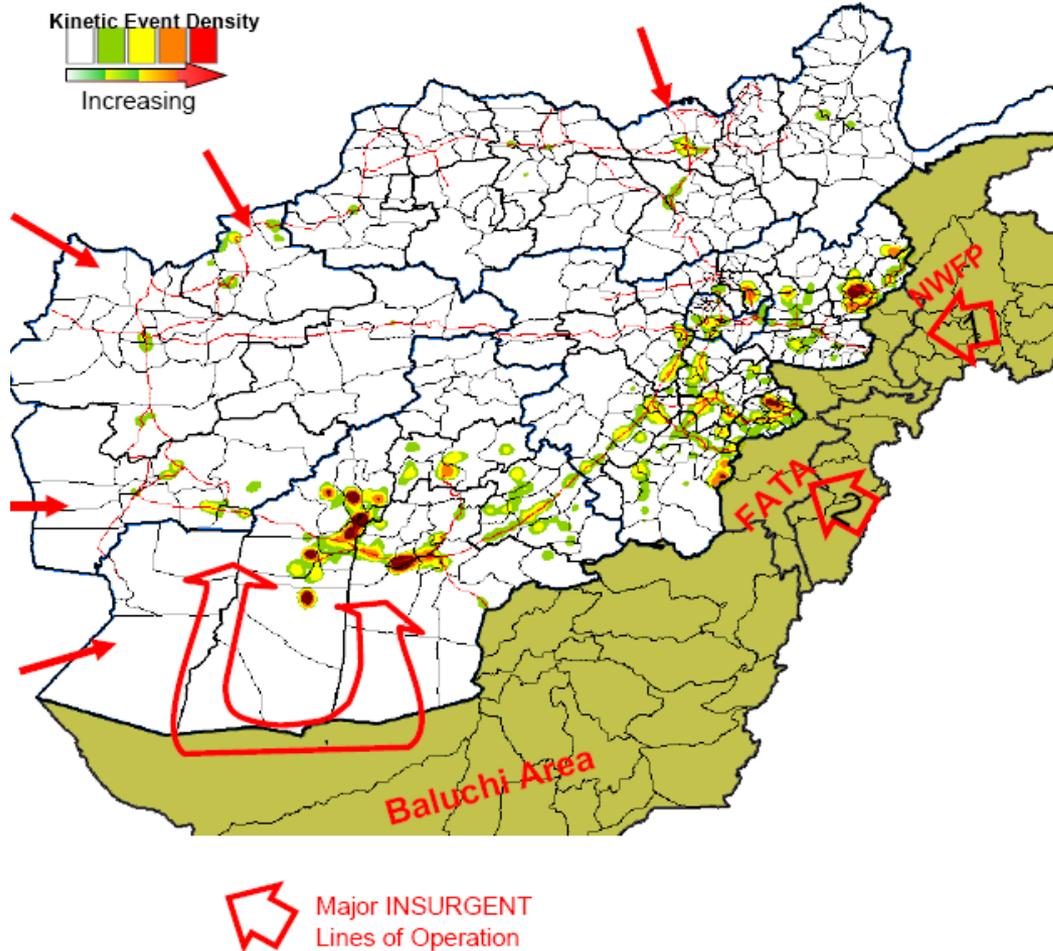
By blocking the doors to the city in this way, the Taliban insurgents are closing a noose around the city and establishing bases close to the city from which to launch attacks inside it. Using these bases, the Taliban and insurgent attacks in Kabul have increased dramatically – including kidnapping of Afghans and foreigners, various bomb attacks and assassinations. This dynamic has created a fertile environment for criminal activity. The links between the Taliban and criminals are increasing and the lines between the various violent actors becoming blurred. All of these Taliban successes are forcing the Afghan government and the West to the negotiating table.

# Key Trends: 2008-2009 - III

The Taliban are now dictating terms in Afghanistan, both politically and militarily. At the national level, talk of reconciliation and power sharing between undefined moderate elements of the Taliban movement and elected government officials is commonplace. At a local level, the Taliban is maneuvering skillfully to fill the governance void, frequently offering a mellower version of localized leadership than characterized their last stint in

-

# NATO/ISAF Security Summary 2008



DATA DERIVED FROM NATO/JOIIS DATABASE

**2008**

24% Afghans perceive improvement,  
19% perceive worsening (Sep 08 poll)

70% of kinetic events continue to occur  
in 10% of the districts

33% increase in Kinetic Events

IED events up 27%....single largest  
cause of casualties

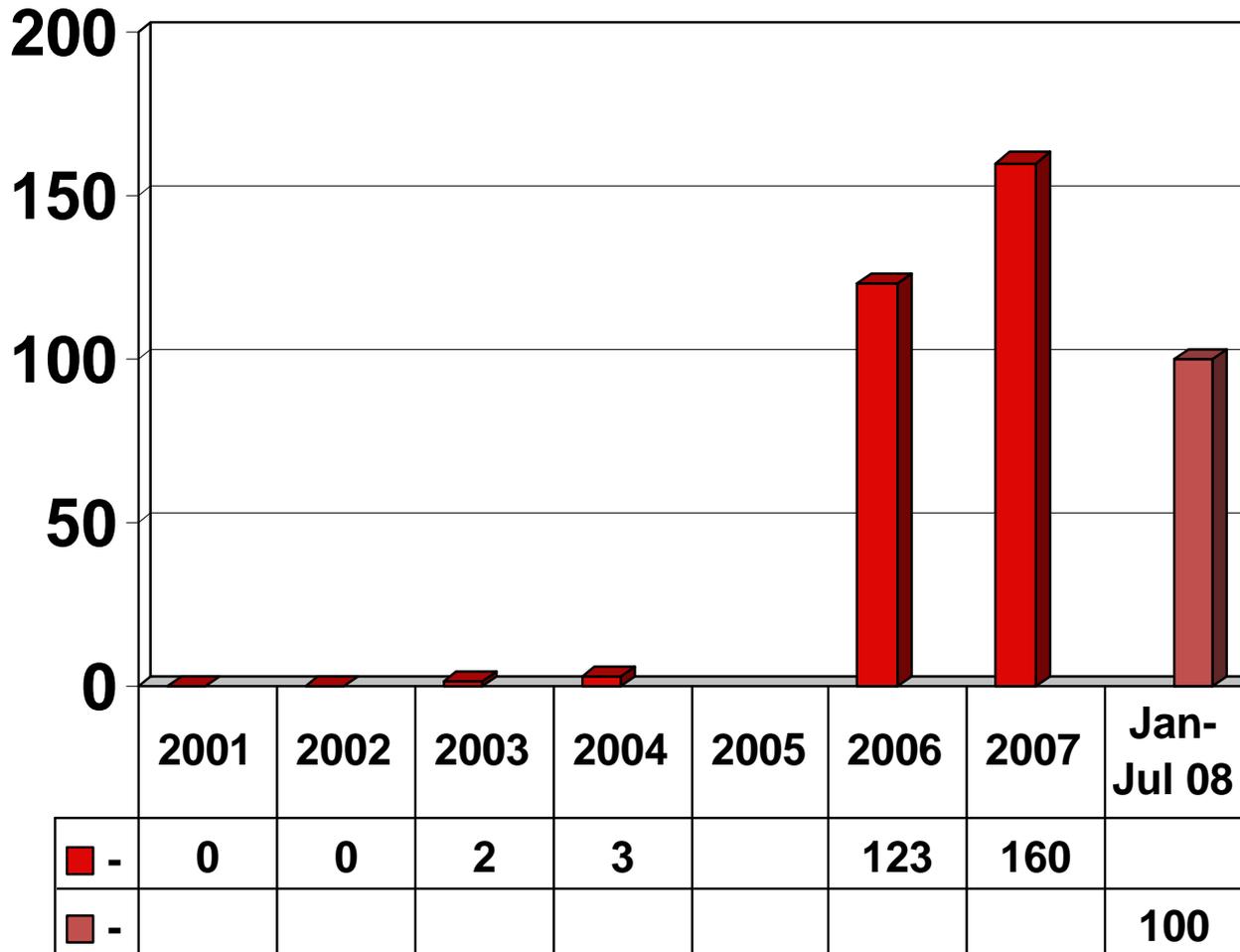
119% more attacks on GIROA  
5% less Suicide Attacks  
50% more Kidnappings/Assassinations

ISAF/OEF Deaths: up 35%  
Civilian Deaths: up 40% - 46%\*

**Building Host Nation Capacity:**  
ANA: 13 more Kandak BNs formed  
46 Kandaks capable of BN Ops

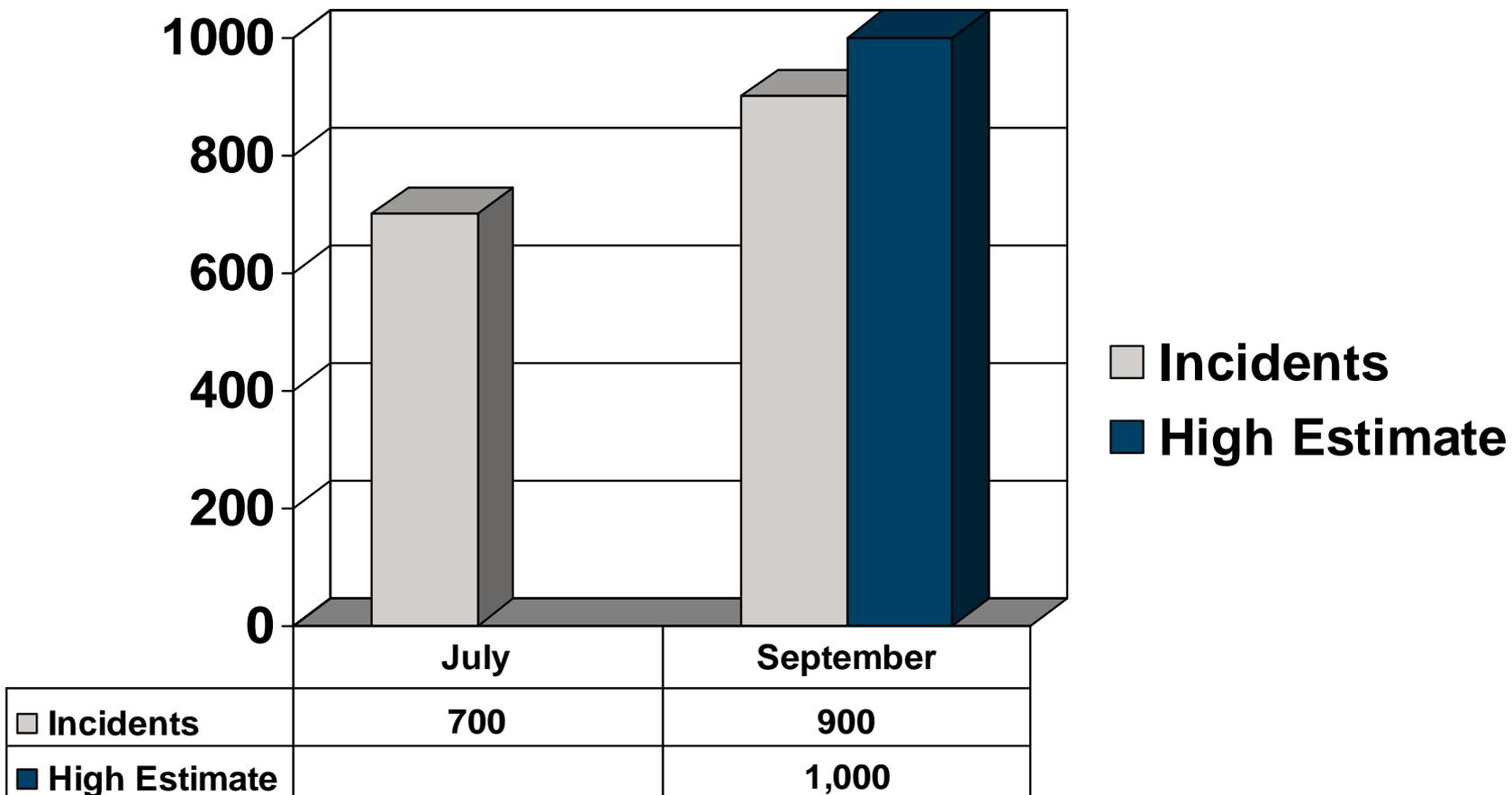
ANP: 52 districts undergoing FDD  
13 of 20 Civil Order Police BNs  
fielded

# Suicide Bombs: 2001 - First Six Months of 2008

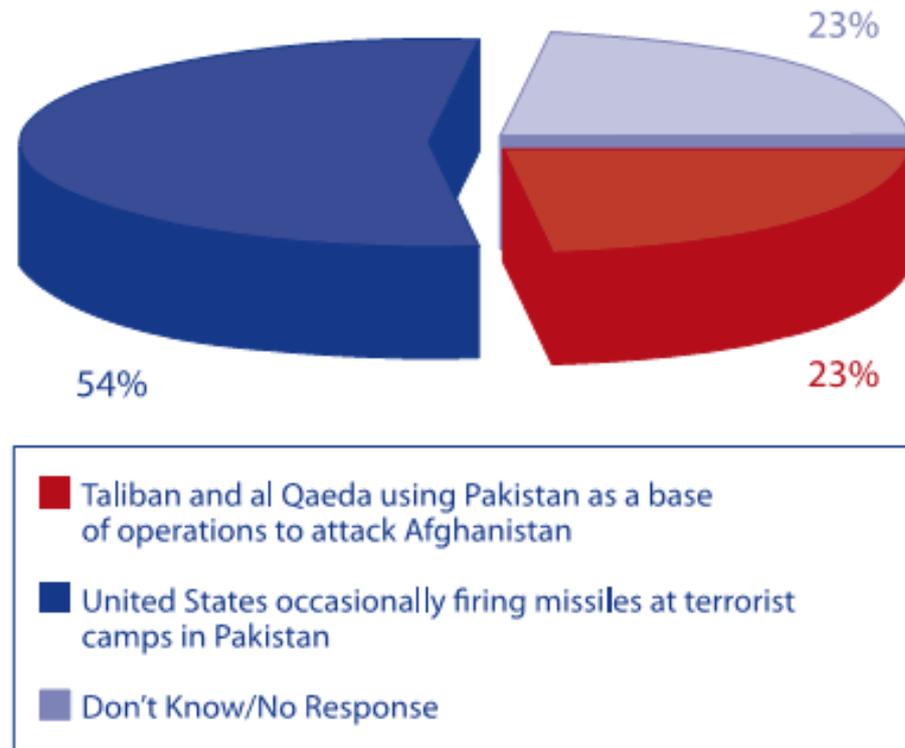


Alan Cullison, "Suicide Bombers Afghan," War, Wall Street Journal, August 1, 2008, p. 1.

# Rise in Violent Incidents Per Month: July-September 2008 (UN Estimate)



# Pakistanis More Concerned by Missile Strikes Than by al Qaeda or Taliban – October 2008



Source: IRI Index, Pakistan Public Opinion Survey; October, 2008

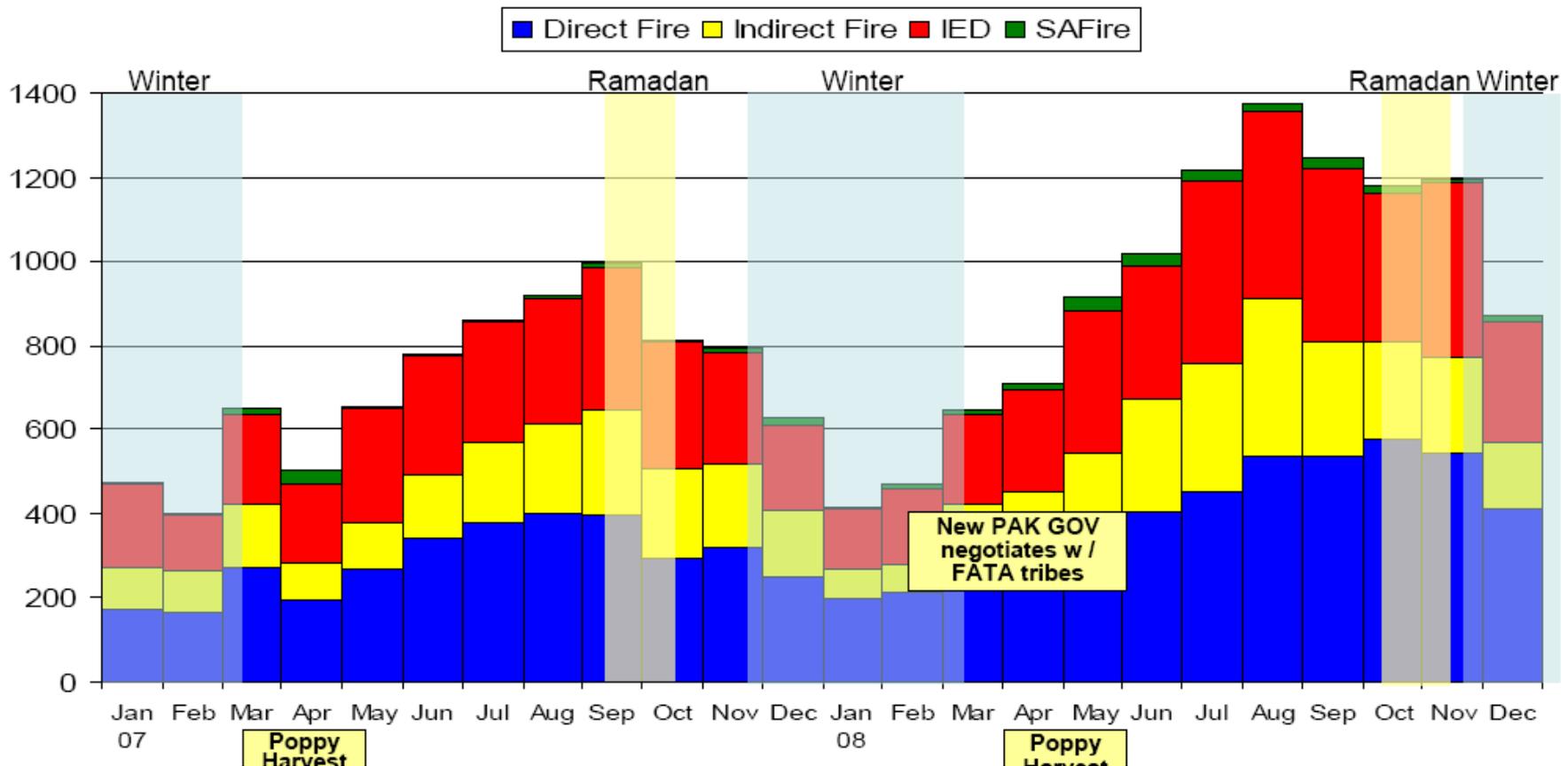
“Triage: The Next Twelve Months in Afghanistan and Pakistan”, Andrew M. Exum, Nathaniel C. Fick, Ahmed A. Humayun, David J. Kilcullen”, June 2009, Page 19

# NATO/ISAF Kinetic Events in 2008

- INS attacks up 33% in 2008

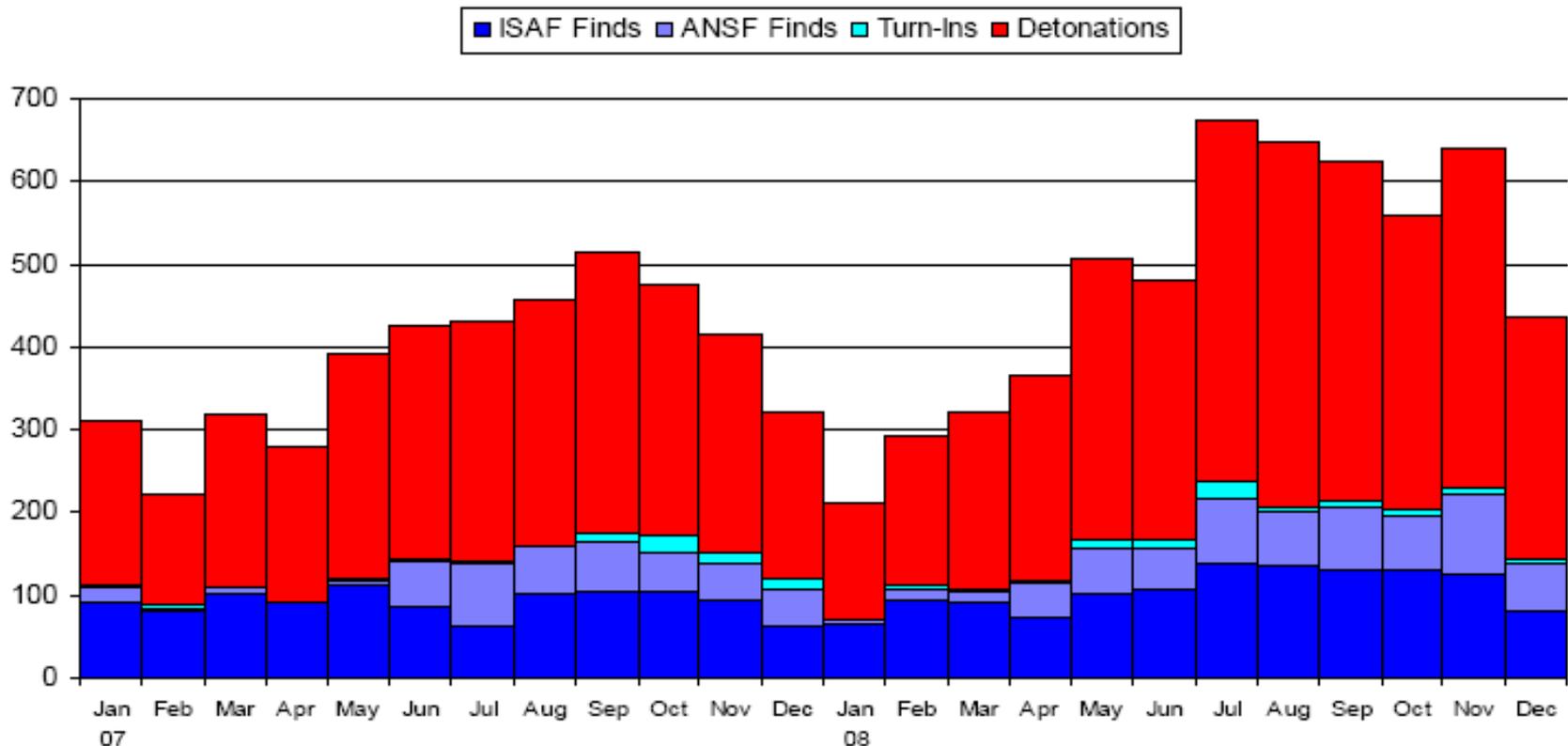
- Direct Fire up 40%
- Indirect Fire up 27%
- IEDs up 26%
- Surface to Air Fire up 67%

- INS remains seasonal
- More asymmetric



# NATO/ISAF IED Events in 2008

- 27% increase in IED events / 29% increase in casualties
- 24% increase in discoveries\* (by volume)
  - 2007 / 2008 discoveries\* = 35% of all IED events
- 21% increase in civilian turn-ins



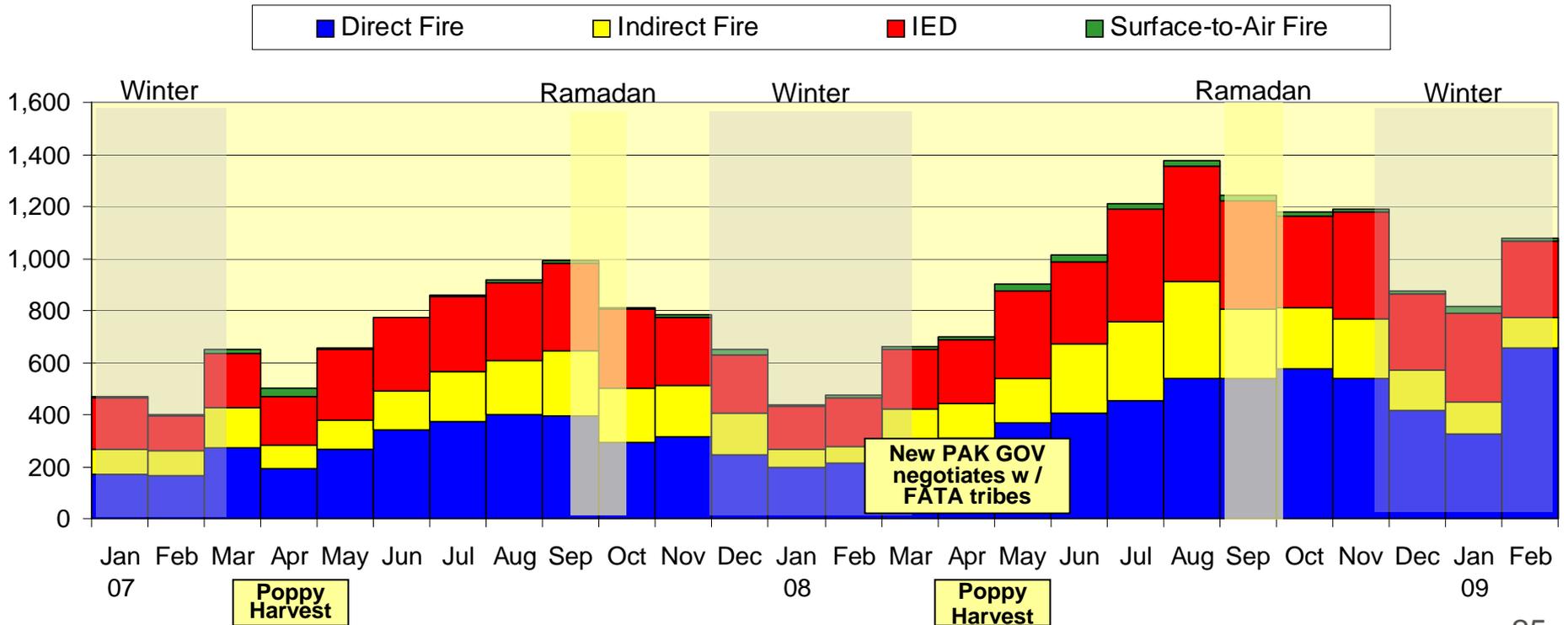
\*discoveries = IED finds + turn-ins

# Insurgent Attacks

• Comparing Feb 09 to the previous three month period (Nov 08 – Jan 09), insurgent attacks are up **12%** overall:

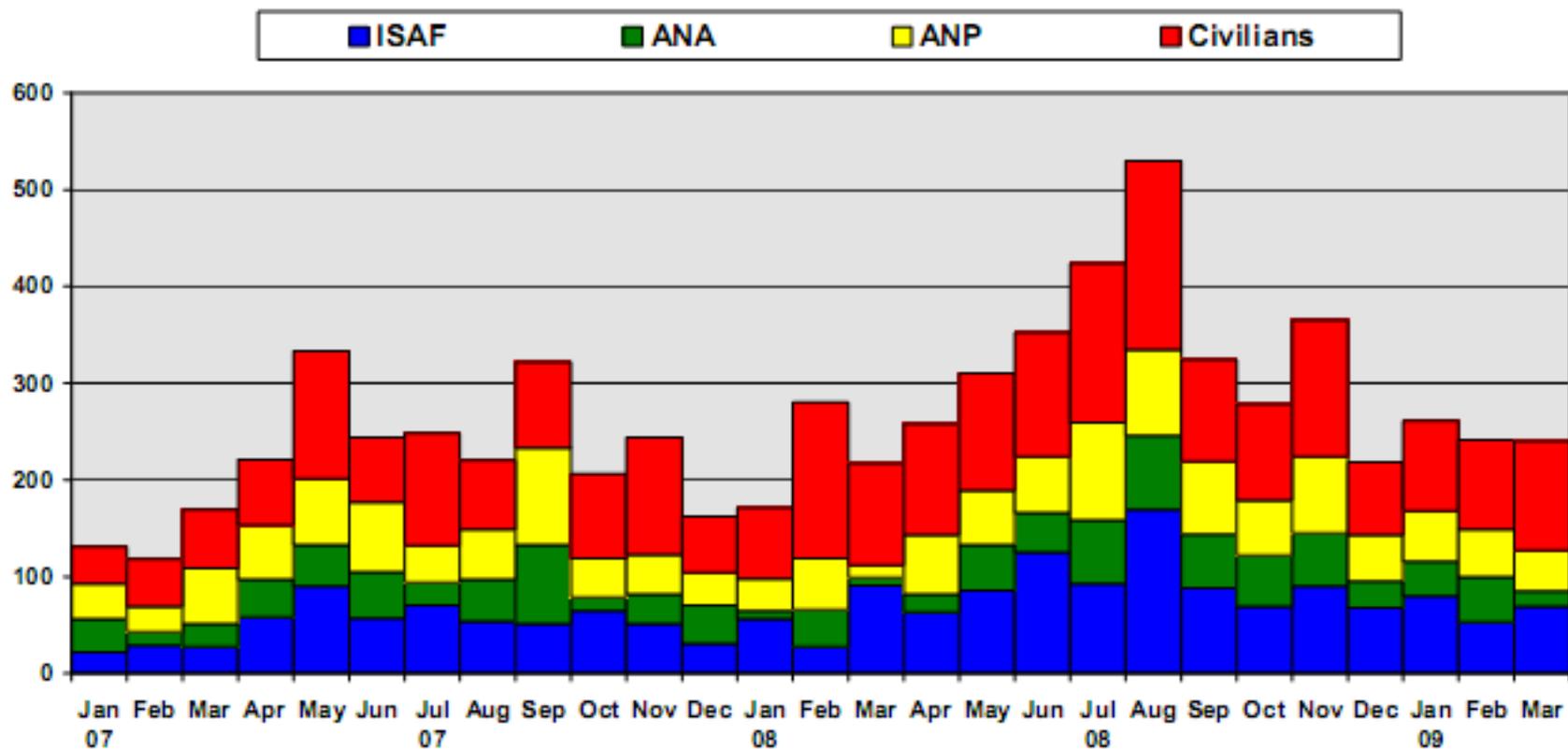
- Direct Fire attacks are up **54%**
- Indirect Fire attacks are down **32%**
- IEDs are down **15%**
- Surface to Air Fire is down **50%**

- Mild weather, increased troop strength, and an offensive spirit resulted in significantly more kinetic events this winter
- Insurgents shifting tactics toward softer targets



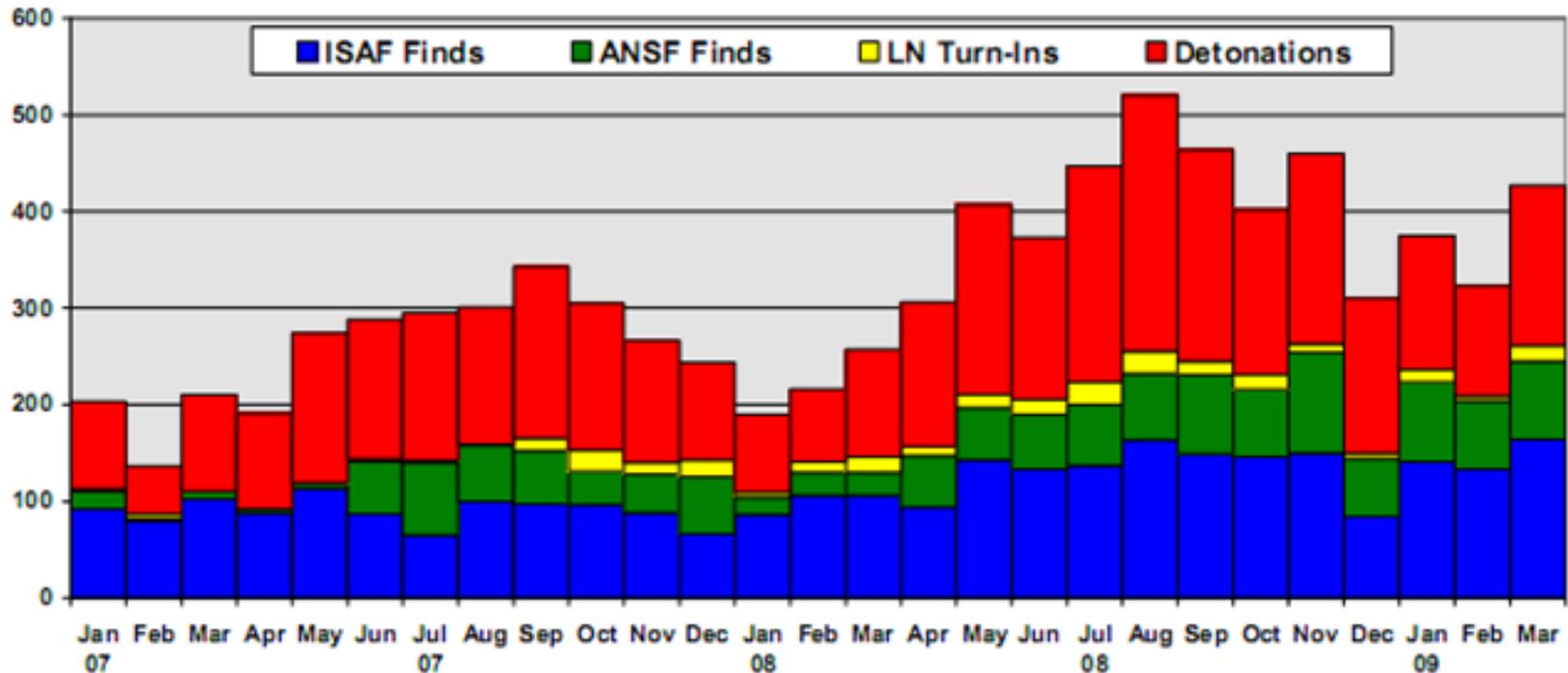
# IED Related Casualties

- Comparing Jan-Mar '09 to the same time period in 2008, IED casualties were down 2% despite an 87% increase in IED events
- IEDs remain the leading cause of total casualties: 60% of casualties Jan-Mar '09



# IED Events (Found and Detonated)

- Comparing Jan-Mar '09 to the same period during 2008, IED discoveries (finds plus turn-ins) were up 78%
- Since January 2007, discoveries have accounted for 54% of all IED events



# Pro-GIRoA Events

## Cache, IED turn-ins and anti-INS activity

- 2009 Pro-GIRoA Events (through March): 85
- Comparing Jan-Mar '09 to the same time period in 2008, Pro-GIRoA Events were up 15%

