

June was deadliest month for foreign troops in Afghan war

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With 102 NATO and US troop fatalities, June 2010 was the bloodiest month for foreign forces since the October 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan.

The death toll far exceeds the highest previous monthly total set in August 2009, of 77 fatalities. Last month's fatality figures mean that, on average, three foreign soldiers died every day. On average, in each month of the first half of 2010 there has been a doubling of the death rate of foreign troops over the same month in 2009—with the exception of June, which saw almost a threefold increase.

Of the 102 soldiers killed in June, 60 were members of the US military and 20 were British forces. The total number of foreign troop fatalities for the first half of 2010 now stands at 322. This is a higher number of deaths than for any *entire* year since the invasion, except for 2009, the deadliest year for NATO and US forces, when there were 521 killed.

The vast majority of foreign troop fatalities in 2009 (297) occurred during the months of July to September. If the present fatality rate follows a similar trajectory, the next few months could prove to be particularly bloody and dangerous for both foreign forces and Afghan civilians.

On July 1, the Taliban in Afghanistan issued a statement to the BBC insisting there was no question of their entering into negotiations with NATO forces. "The Taliban statement is uncompromising, almost contemptuous", said the BBC. "They believe they are winning the war, and cannot see why they should help NATO by talking to them".

Leading members of the British and US political establishments have recently made clear that they will not tolerate talk of a timetable for withdrawal of NATO-US troops. On June 28, Sir David Omand, the former Permanent Secretary for Security and Intelligence,

while chairing a session at a summit of chief executives organised by the *Times* of London, asserted it was inevitable that the Armed Forces' engagement in Afghanistan would be a long-term one.

In the talks with business leaders, he declared, "The most difficult of all the issues we discussed was Afghanistan. We all foresaw difficulties there and we all agreed that Britain cannot act unilaterally. We have to work with the US. The only way to succeed there is to be there for the long haul and there were worries that some other countries may not see it through".

The *Times* commented that "the former senior civil servant [Omand] noted that there was consensus from the delegates that the private sector must help to structure defence spending and that there was strong support to try and maintain the distinct identity of the three Armed Forces.

"Sir David's seminar on Britain's security formed part of a series of summit meetings to encourage business leaders to discuss the biggest challenges facing the country".

The *Times* noted that "The views of the business leaders over Britain's potential long-term military commitment in Afghanistan stands in contrast to the policy position of David Cameron and President Obama. When the US President announced an increase in US troop numbers in Afghanistan, he also said that he wanted to start the withdrawal in mid-2011. Earlier this month, the Prime Minister indicated that he wanted Britain's engagement in Afghanistan to have drawn to a close by 2015".

Two days later, Britain's defence secretary, Liam Fox, was calling for "strategic patience" and stating that UK troops would be among the last to leave Afghanistan.

Helmand was likely to be "one of the last places they

will be able to transition from”, Fox told the BBC. The strategy should be given “time to work...without constantly trying to change and question it”, he said.

Fox was speaking after meeting with US Defence Secretary Robert Gates and other senior figures. He said in a speech that speaking of an early departure “would send the signal that we did not have the moral resolve and political fortitude to see through what we ourselves have described as a national security imperative”.

Appearing at preliminary confirmation hearings before a US Senate committee June 29, the new US commander in Afghanistan, General David Petraeus, who replaces the ousted General Stanley McChrystal, made clear that any talk of “drawdown” would merely be “the beginning of a process”.

Petraeus is pushing for a bloodier stage of the counter-insurgency war in Afghanistan. He warned the committee to expect an increased Afghan resistance: “My sense is that the tough fighting will continue; indeed, it may get more intense in the next few months. As we take away the enemy’s safe havens and reduce the enemy’s freedom of action, the insurgents will fight back”.

Sen. John McCain, who visited Kandahar city July 5 with two other US lawmakers, forecast increased casualties. “The Taliban know that Kandahar is the key to success or failure”, McCain told a news conference at the airport in Kabul. “So what happens in this operation will have a great effect on the outcome of this conflict. But I am convinced we can succeed and will succeed, and Kandahar is obviously the key area. And if succeed there, we will succeed in the rest of this struggle”.

Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham and Sen. Joseph Lieberman, an Independent from Connecticut who chairs of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, met with Petraeus, Afghan President Hamid Karzai and US Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry. Lieberman said he understood that Obama wanted to use the July 2011 timetable to send the message that the US would not be in Afghanistan forever, but said he thought he had been wrong to set it: “We hear it everywhere we go here. They say they think we’re leaving. We’re not going to leave until we win”.

NATO reported that three US service members died

Monday—two in a roadside bomb explosion in western Afghanistan, and another following a roadside bombing in the eastern part of the country. Also on Monday, a British soldier was killed in a blast during a vehicle patrol in southern Helmand province, the British Defence Ministry announced. Their deaths brought to 12 the number of US and international troops killed so far in July.

As of this writing, 1,899 foreign forces have now been killed in the occupation of Afghanistan since 2001.



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