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Reuters

Fact Box-The Worsening Security Picture in Afghanistan

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The United Nations said on Thursday it would temporarily evacuate hundreds of its international staff from Afghanistan due to deteriorating security, a sharp blow for Western efforts to stabilize the country. [ID:nISL354255]

Security has worsened in Afghanistan since the Taliban insurgency re-grouped in 2005. Following are key facts about the security situation in Afghanistan:

WORSENING SECURITY

* Between January and the end of July this year, 898 conflict-related incidents took place, compared with 677 for the same period in 2008, according to the U.N. [ID:nISL268109]

* An Afghan government security map seen by Reuters in August showed almost half of Afghanistan was at a high risk of attack by insurgents or was under "enemy control". [ID:nSP430154]

* Incidents involving home-made, insurgent-laid bombs, or Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), spiked sharply from January to July 2009, averaging more than eight each day, or an increase of 60 percent, compared with the same period in 2008.

* In a security report published in September, the United Nations said "insecurity continued to be the single greatest factor impeding progress in Afghanistan".

CIVILIANS

* According to the United Nations, there were 1,500 civilian casualties between January and August 2009, with August being the deadliest month.

* As well as being the biggest killer of foreign troops, IEDs, including suicide bombs, have also killed more civilians than any other weapon in the conflict.

* The commander of foreign forces in Afghanistan, U.S. Army General Stanley McChrystal, said in his assessment of the war, the strategy's focus must be on protecting the population and prizing them away from the insurgency.

HUMANITARIAN GROUPS

* There were 75 attacks against civilians working for NGOs, charities and humanitarian groups from January to June 2009, according to the Afghan National Safety Office.

* The International Committee of the Red Cross which has more than 1,000 staff, including Afghan employees, in Afghanistan has said it will not be removing workers from the country in response to escalating violence.

KABUL

* Nearly 130 Afghan and foreign civilians have been killed in major attacks in Kabul from January 2008 to the present.

* In January 2008, several Taliban gunmen stormed the luxury Serena hotel near the presidential palace, killing six people including a Norwegian journalist.

* Foreigners have also been targeted by gunmen in Kabul. In 2008 a British woman working for a charity and a South African man working for a courier company were shot in central Kabul.

* The worst attack on diplomats was a July 2008 suicide car bomb attack which killed 58 people, including three Indian diplomats, outside the Indian Embassy.

* Attacks outside the German embassy, NATO headquarters and on various foreign troop convoys in Kabul have all pushed up the death toll for foreigners working in Kabul over the past year.

THE PROVINCES

* The southern provinces of Kandahar and Helmand are the most dangerous in Afghanistan. A total of 538 troops have been killed there since U.S. and Afghan forces toppled the Taliban in 2001 according to www.icasualties.org, an independent website that monitors foreign troop deaths in Afghanistan and Iraq.

* Foreign and Afghan troops are also locked in daily gun battles with insurgents in the southeast of Afghanistan, where 530 foreign soldiers have been killed across 13 provinces.

* Security in the north and west of Afghanistan, long considered to be safe, has deteriorated significantly over the past year and a half.

* Kunduz and Badghis, which are the only Pashtun-majority provinces in the north, have seen a significant rise in violence and Taliban attacks.

* Herat province in the west, Afghanistan's commercial hub, has also seen rising violence and

a strengthening of the Taliban. Attacks on officials and hangings of Afghans the Taliban accused of being government spies have significantly increased.