The Afghanistan NGO Safety Office

Jan 1st—June 30th 2009

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ANSO QUARTERLY DATA REPORT Q.2 2009

SUMMARY & ASSESSMENT

Instability continues to threaten humanitarian assistance with NGOs involved in 75 security incidents within this 6 month period. These include ten fatalities and 29 abductions within an increasing number of violent attacks initiated by Armed Opposition Groups. The motives have included influencing the organizations activity, settling personal grievances, fatal mistakes of identity and pure bad luck. The total volume of incidents is consistent with the same period of 2008 and, although the most serious consequences—death and abduction—are slightly reduced new forms of risk, such as roadside IED and IMF airstrikes, are emerging as notable threats to NGO operations.

The profile of NGO abductions appears to be changing, with fewer victims being held for significant periods, while the fact that all abductions and fatalities are Afghan nationals this year may be indicating “risk transfer”. Relocating staff and resources out of conflict areas remains the dominant response strategy although incident mapping reveals an ongoing NGO presence in practically all areas of the country.

Conflict metrics are following a familiar annual pattern with a 65% growth in AOG initiated attacks over the 2008 Q.2 period, predominantly in the close range and indirect fire attack classes, and the number of operations utilizing multiple suicide devices for ‘spectacular-effect’ is increasing. The South and East remain conflict epicenters although substantial growth has been observed in Kunduz, Herat and Badghis as AOG reinforce conducive population strongholds and annex their own priorities to local grievances.

At the strategic level two issues have dominated the period being the Elections and the IMF surge.

Pre-election violence has centered around Provincial Council Candidates/Members with ten targeted for attack since the beginning of the year and four dying as a result. Similar attempts are anticipated prior to election day along with escalating attacks on election related convoys, staff and security mechanisms.

On the day itself attacks are anticipated on some of the 28,000 polling stations not least because that is where the majority of security forces will be based that day. Spectacular attacks against high profile targets cannot be dismissed as a means of diverting attention from, and discrediting, the election process.

Post-election announcement of results may inspire orchestrated demonstrations and related violence. A full election period threat matrix, with recommended NGO responses, is annexed to this report.

The IMF surge, essentially a rerun of the 2001 conflict but with more foreign forces involved, remains in its infancy but is considered likely to result in the short-term deterioration of conditions though the displacement of combatants to new areas and an increase in civilian casualties.

Nic Lee,

ANSO Director,

July 2009

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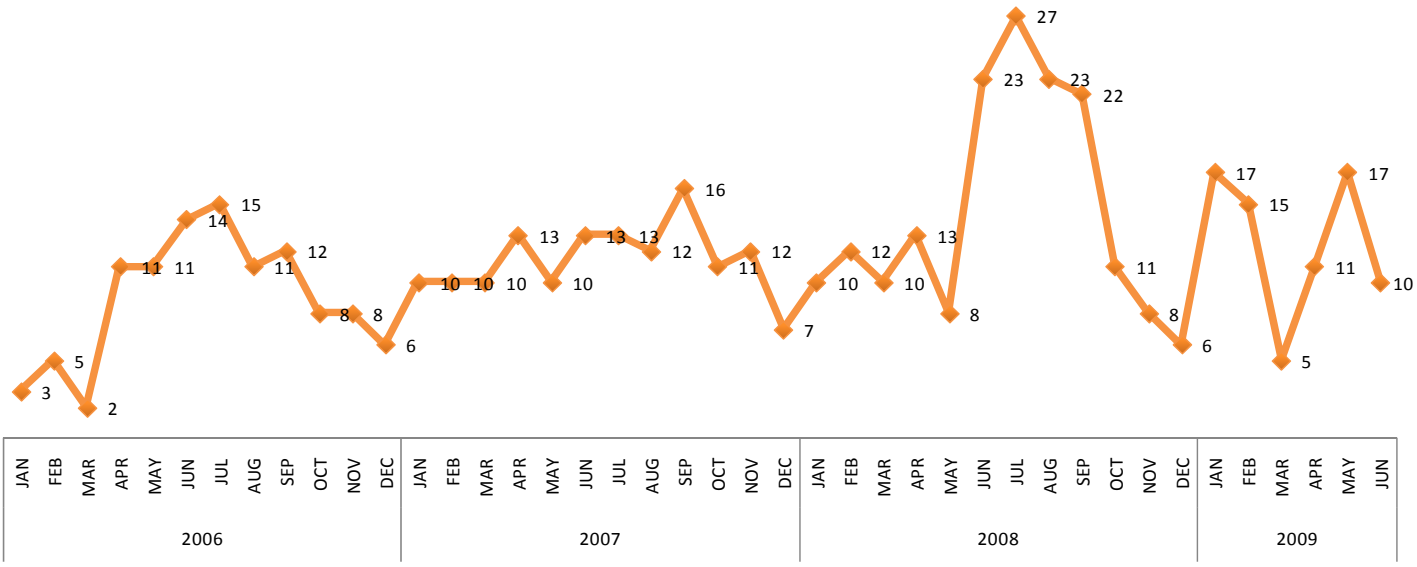
1. THE IMPACT OF CONFLICT & CRIMINALITY ON NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGO)

1.1 GENERAL NGO TRENDS

ANSO Fig 1: Total # security incidents directly involving NGO per month

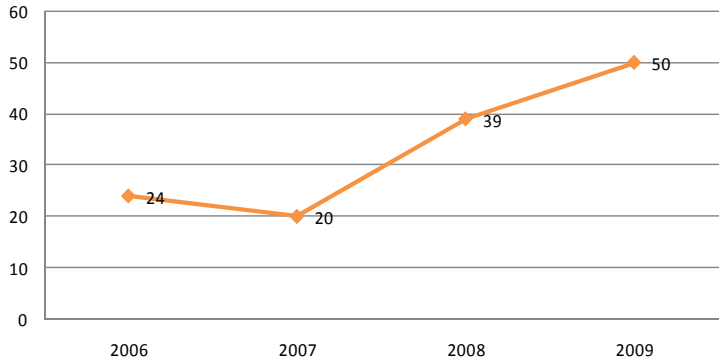


Non-Governmental Organizations have been involved in 75 direct incidents from January to June 2009 (Fig 1). This figure is comparable in total volume to the 2008 figure for the same period of 76 however the more significant swings between peaks and troughs of the period (6 points Vs 12 points) points to a more volatile and fluid conflict environment.

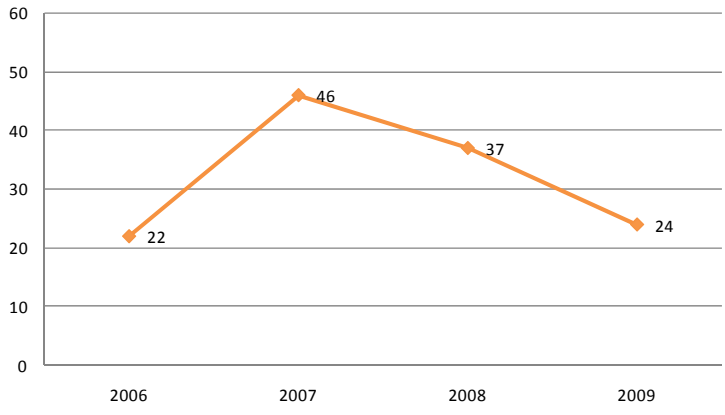
Figure 2 and 3 reinforce this interpretation in demonstrating that NGO incidents assessed to have been caused or perpetrated by Armed Opposition Groups have grown by over 100% since conflict began to escalate in 2007 while there has been a near simultaneous drop in criminally related events. Attacks attributed to AOG now account for close to 70% of the total, up from 30% in 2007. (*The missing 75th incident was initiated by IMF*)

In many cases it remains impossible to meaningfully differentiate between criminal and politically motivated actors and attacks, however from a victims perspective this is not necessarily important to achieve.

ANSO Fig 2: NGO incidents caused by **AOG**, Jan-Jun period, 06-09



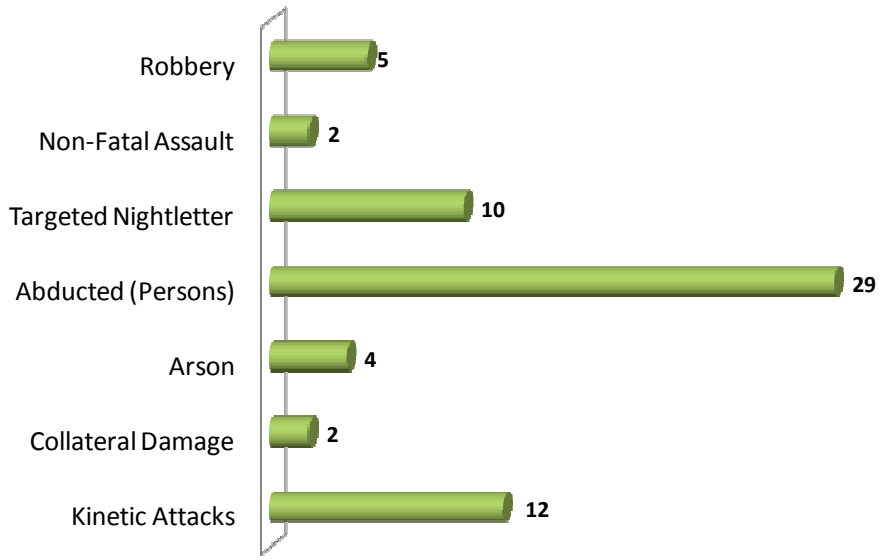
ANSO Fig 3: NGO incidents caused by **ACG**, Jan-Jun period, 06-09



1.2 TYPES OF NGO INCIDENTS

Of the types of NGO incidents caused by AOG (Fig 3) abduction remains the primary concern although 21 of the 29 would be better classified as 'temporary detentions' as the victims were released within short time frames (often less than 24hrs).

ANSO Fig 3: Types of **AOG** initiated incidents against NGO, Jan-Jun 2009



AOG 'Kinetic Attacks' include two RPGs, three small arms fire and seven IED for a total of five persons killed.

The latter category has escalated alarmingly with just two IED attacks occurring within the same period of 2008. Some of the recent attacks have been directly targeted, and aim to influence or disrupt the NGO activities, while others have seen NGO vehicles inadvertently trigger devices that were intended for Government or military convoys. Vehicle color and profile may have played a role in some of these with NGO 4 x 4 vehicles confused with Government convoys.

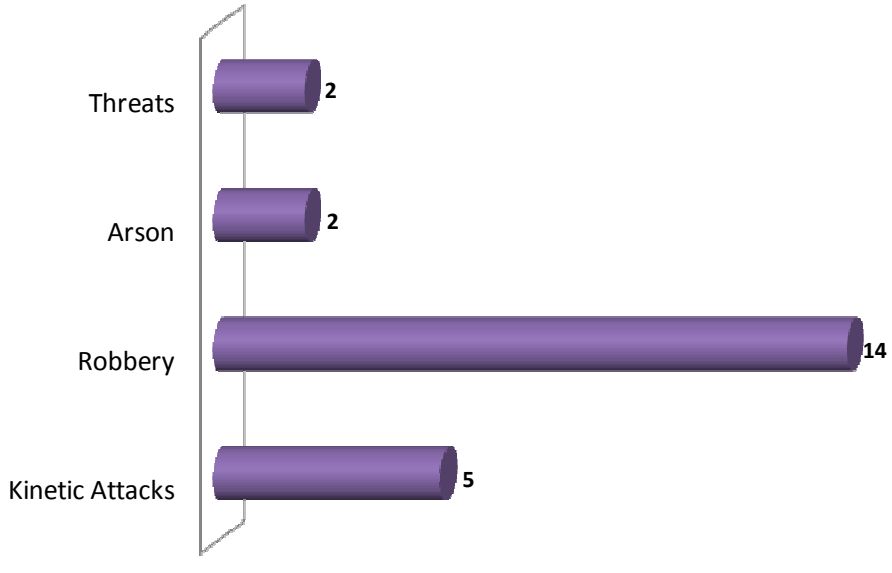
The 'collateral damage' category includes one NGO employee killed in a Government office that was attacked by suicide bombers (Kandahar) and another killed by an IMF airstrike on the village he lived in (Logar), the fourth NGO staff member to die in such circumstances since July 2008.

Remaining incidents (unlisted) include various attempts at information gathering and an impromptu, overnight occupation of an NGO office.

Criminal incidents (Fig 4) show that armed robberies remains the #1 crime against NGO with nine of the total occurring at the roadside.

The five criminal Kinetic Attacks include two grenades thrown in to NGO compounds and two fatal shootings of NGO staff.

ANSO Fig 4: Types of **ACG** initiated incidents against NGO, Jan-Jun 2009



1.3 DOMINANT NGO RISK VECTORS

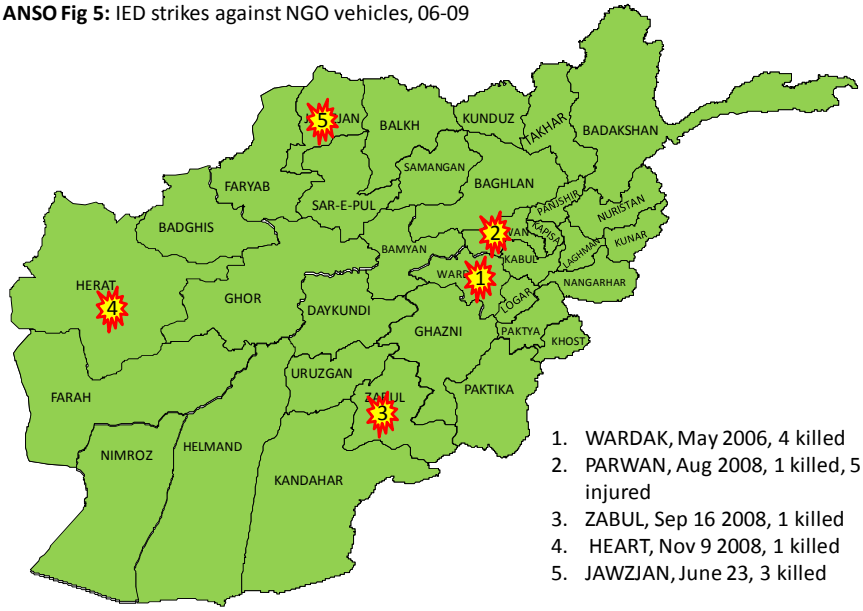
Within the Q1. 2009 report we noted that the lack of fatalities from IED strikes at that point was a result of "*luck rather than intent*"

The luck ran out in Jawzjan Province, June 23rd, when an IED targeted an NGO vehicle instantly killing all three persons onboard.

This bought to ten (10) the total number of NGO staff killed in IED strikes since 2006 (Fig.5)

In four of the five (exl.#2) events the device had been "command-wire" detonated meaning that an observer was in place to initiate the device on visual identification of the target.

ANSO Fig 5: IED strikes against NGO vehicles, 06-09



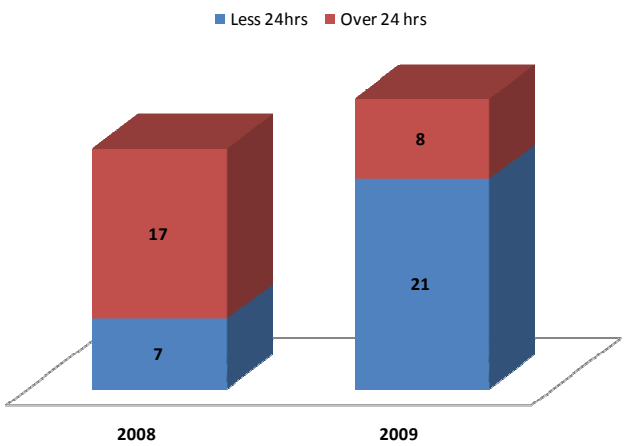
1. WARDAK, May 2006, 4 killed
2. PARWAN, Aug 2008, 1 killed, 5 injured
3. ZABUL, Sep 16 2008, 1 killed
4. HEART, Nov 9 2008, 1 killed
5. JAWZJAN, June 23, 3 killed

In two of the cases (3&4) the NGO worker was travelling in, or as part of, a Government convoy while in another two (1&5) the color and 4x4 profile of the NGO vehicle was such as to make it easily confused with a Government or security force vehicle from a distance. These facts, which have been mirrored in recent non-fatal cases also, would seem to reinforce the dangers of association to Government/Military.

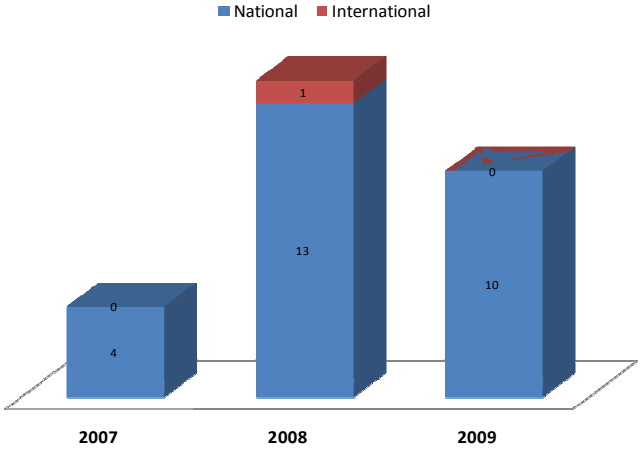
Abduction remains a concern with a slight increase in total figures over last year although the number of instances in which the victims are held for >24hrs has declined (Fig.6). This *could* indicate a growing AOG reluctance to deal with the pressure and effort of hosting hostages although effective policing has also had an impact with 14 of the 21 early releases this year resulting from a single event in Kabul in which a captured NGO mini-bus was rescued by Police within 3 hours. Unusually all of the 2009 abductions have been Afghan nationals indicating a possible "risk transfer". Approximately 202 NGO staff have been abducted since ANSO records begin in January 2006.

NGO fatalities are also slightly in decline (Fig.7) and also include no internationals this year. None of the deaths this year give cause to believe NGO are being generally targeted.

ANSO Fig 6: Abduction of NGO workers, Jan-Jun period, 08 vs 09



ANSO Fig 7: NGO Fatalities, Jan-Jun period, 07-09

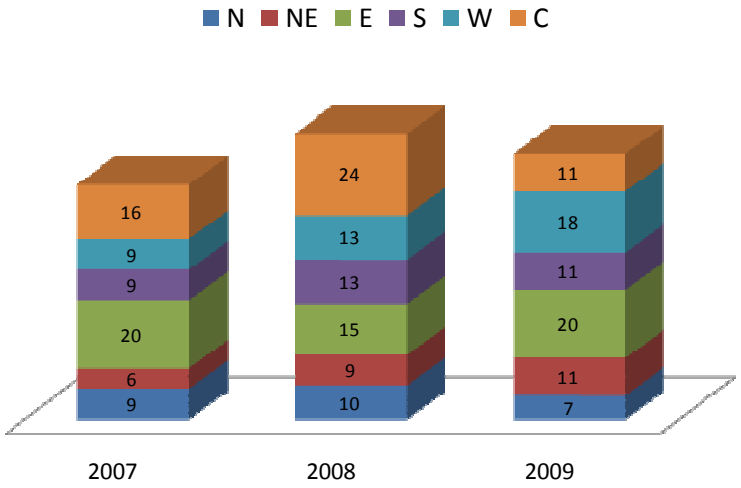


1.4 NGO INCIDENT MAPPING

Figure 8 shows the split of NGO incidents between regions since 2007.

Western region (Badghis, Herat, Farah, Ghor) has seen the most dramatic change, up by nine points over the period, although many incidents have been within the less serious categories such as threatening letters and calls or non-violent intelligence gathering and plain robberies. Surprisingly the severe ethnically based conflict in Gormach district of Badghis has yet to result in any serious NGO related violence.

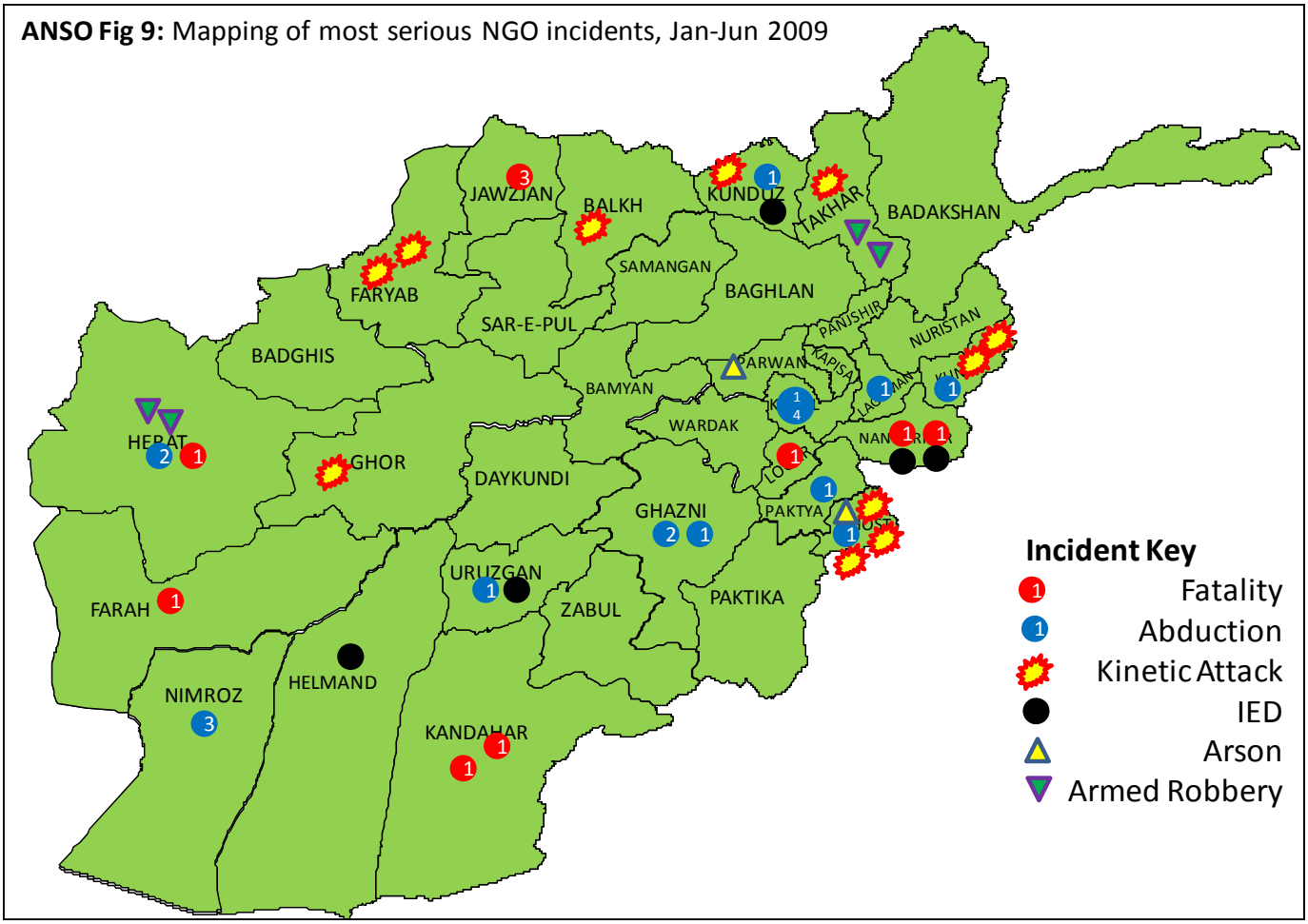
ANSO Fig 8: NGO incidents per ANSO region, Jan-Jun, 07-09



The North-East region (encompassing Kunduz, Takhar, Badakshan, Baghlan) has also escalated by five points as a result of the stepped up AOG activity in Kunduz (up 300% over the same period).

Figure 9 maps the most serious NGO events of the year and displays a diverse threat profile.

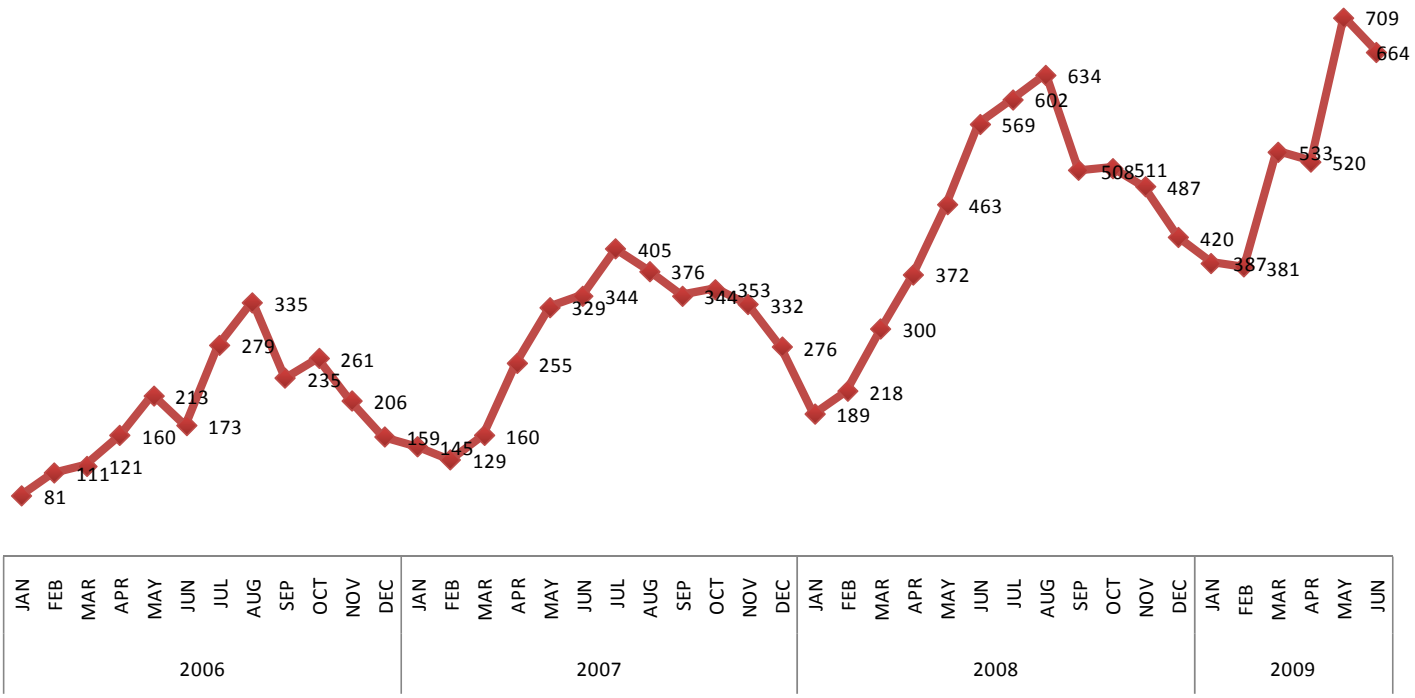
ANSO Fig 9: Mapping of most serious NGO incidents, Jan-Jun 2009



2. CONFLICT TRENDS & ANALYSIS

2.1 AOG INITIATED ATTACKS

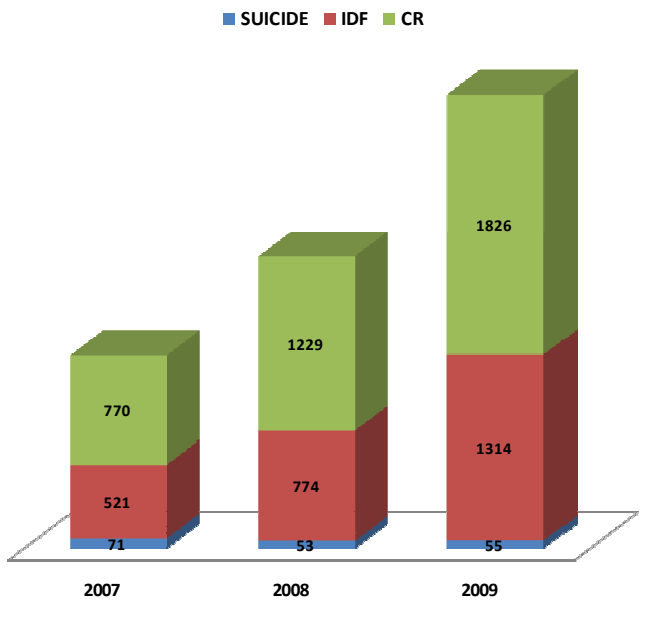
ANSO Fig 10: AOG initiated attacks, 06-09
(IMPORTANT NOTE: Includes only close range, stand off and suicide attacks types conducted by AOG. Does not include criminal activity)



The established pattern of intra-annual cycles and inter-annual growth (Fig.10) does not yet appear to have been interrupted by the International Military reinforcements deploying across the country. That some of this ongoing growth is caused as IMF '*push in to strongholds'* is a reasonable explanation for the actual figures, as they are providing more targets for AOG attacks, but it is difficult to see how this is interpreted as an indicator of IMF 'success' given that it fails to result in a curbing of AOG ability to initiate operations (attacks in Kandahar have grown >50% over the year and in Helmand they have stayed consistent with 2008 rates).

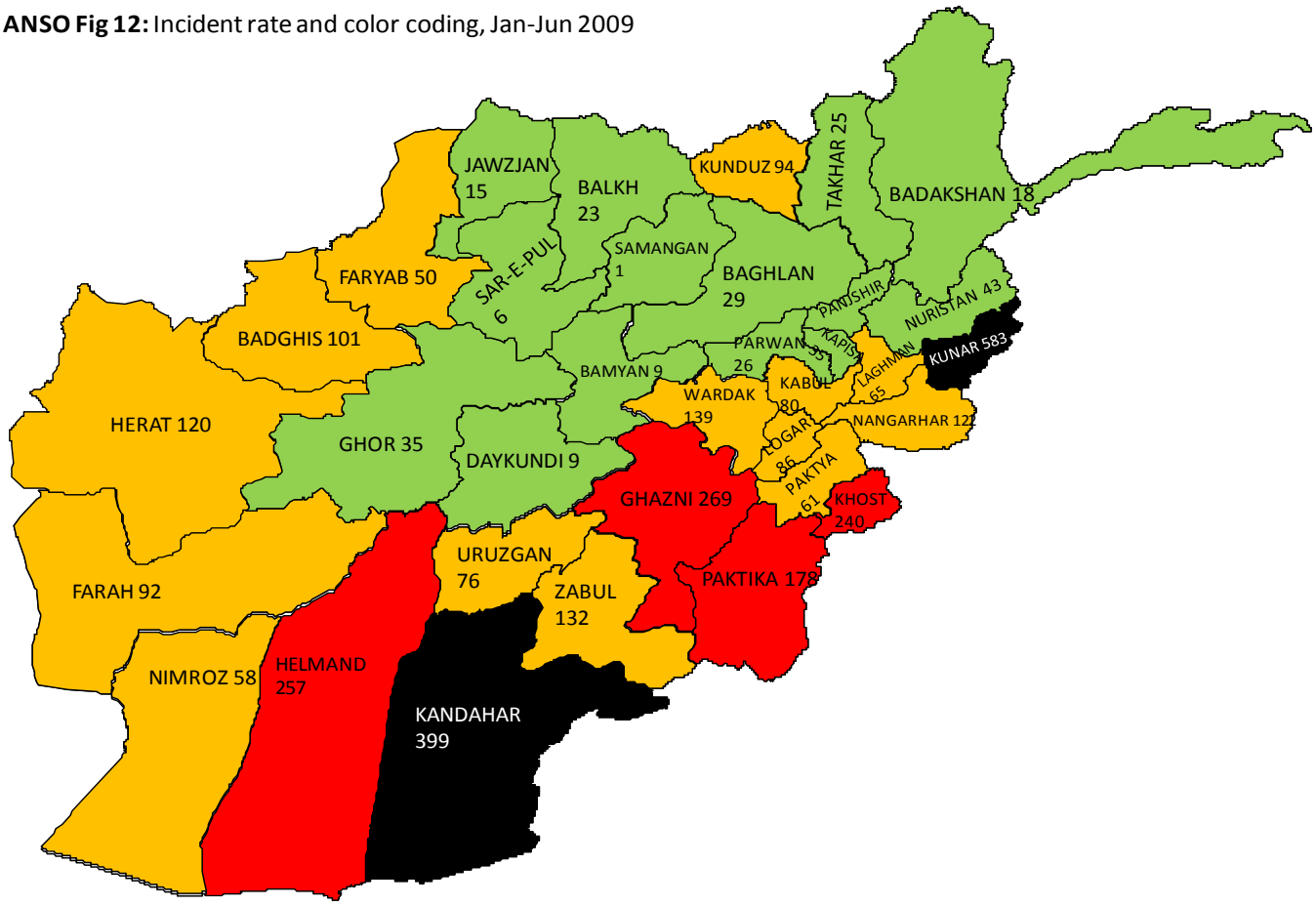
Close range attacks have grown by c.50% over the Q.2 2008 period (Fig.11) while Indirect Fire attacks (including IED) have more than doubled. The deployment of suicide attackers has been less frequent but the volume of operations involving more than one device has grown.

ANSO Fig 11: Tactic composition of AOG attacks, Jan-Jun, 07-09



2.2 CONFLICT AREA

ANSO Fig 12: Incident rate and color coding, Jan-Jun 2009



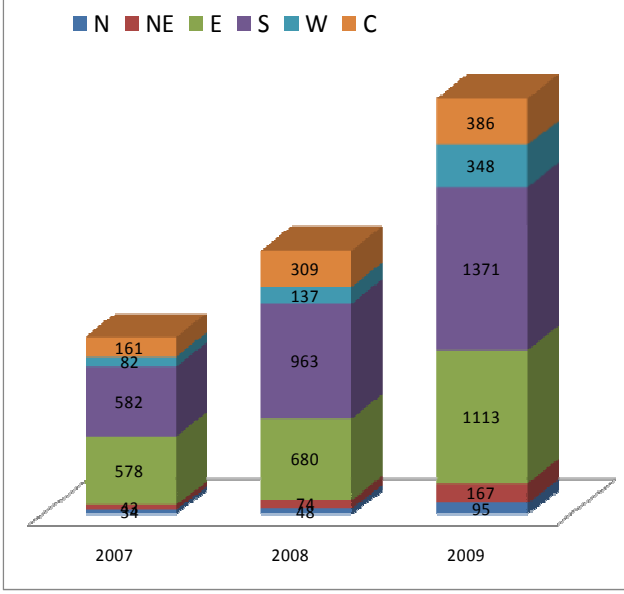
Disclaimer – This is not a Threat Map but just a visual representation of the incidents reported to ANSO. We in no way imply that GREEN areas are safer and remind readers that a lack of incident reporting can indicate extreme volatility.

Figure 12 applies a simple color grading to provinces experiencing comparable levels of AOG initiated attacks reported to ANSO (with the number of attacks listed).

Some provinces have witnessed significant change over the same period last year such as Kunduz (94v39) which is now estimated to have a permanent AOG presence of 200-300, Herat (120v45) and Badghis (101v30) which have both substantially destabilized as result of underlying ethnic/resource conflict and AOG migration from South and Khost (240v157) which has seen a sustained, cross-border effort at destabilization this year.

Figure 13 reinforces this data with macro-level trends showing a near tripling of AOG activity in North-East and Western regions over the 3 years.

ANSO Fig 13: Volume of AOG initiated attacks occuring per region, Jan-Jun, 07-09



2.3 ELECTION RELATED VIOLENCE

Presidential and Provincial Council elections will take place on August 20th 2009. Votes, over 13 million of them, may be cast for the 41 presidential candidates and 3,180 Provincial Council Candidates in approximately 28,000 polling stations across the country, including 126 districts classified as '*high risk'* and 12 considered '*under enemy control*'

The pre-election period has seen some violence directed towards Provincial Council Candidates and Members (Fig.14), most likely perpetrated by competitors rather than AOG, but otherwise the process has yet to present any significant targeting opportunities. It is likely that such direct attacks on candidates will continue for the entire pre-election period with the main risk to NGO being of sustaining collateral damage in an attack.

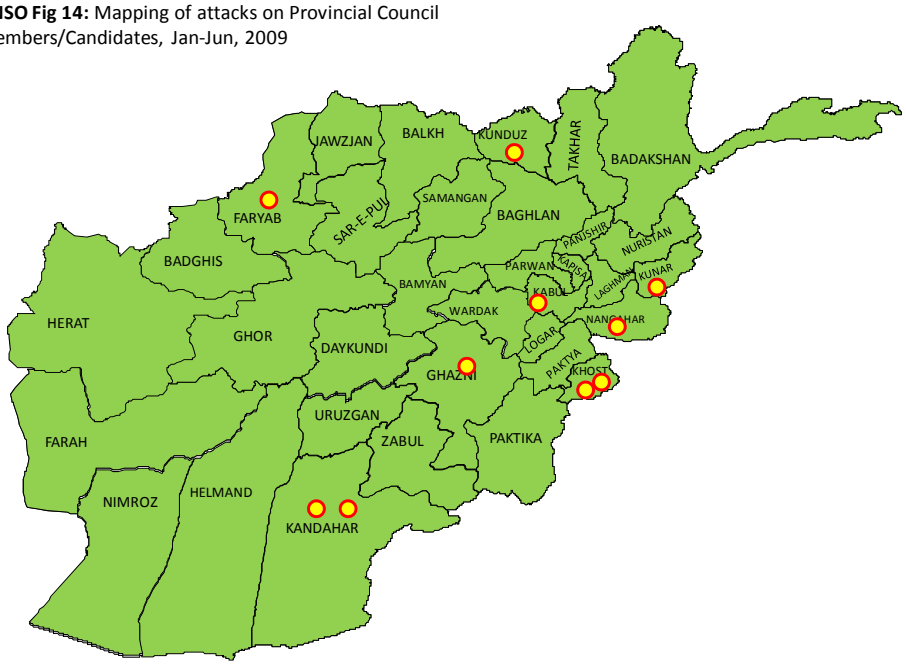
As the time draws closer and election related activities become more visible a number of other risks will emerge including (i) distribution of materials to sites (early August) will increase the risk of road based attacks on convoys (ii) announcement of the location of, and deployment of staff to, polling stations (from July 20) will invite attacks on those facilities (iii) reinforcement of local ANSF/IMF will present more target opportunities (iv) the ramp up of public rhetoric regarding the importance and value of elections will increase the incentives for 'spectacular attacks' aimed at discrediting local or national governance.

Current attempts to mitigate these threats (considered Phase 1 of 3) include IMF 'clearing' operations focused on Highway 1 and High Risk Districts (due to cease August 10); the deployment of an additional 600 ANP in a 'Ring of Steel' around Kabul; and joint operations centers in districts and provinces intended to coordinate activities between ANSF branches with input from IMF and IEC.

At the time of writing a number of observers report that the latter district level efforts are unimpressive.

A full Threat Matrix for the pre, during and post election period is attached to this report

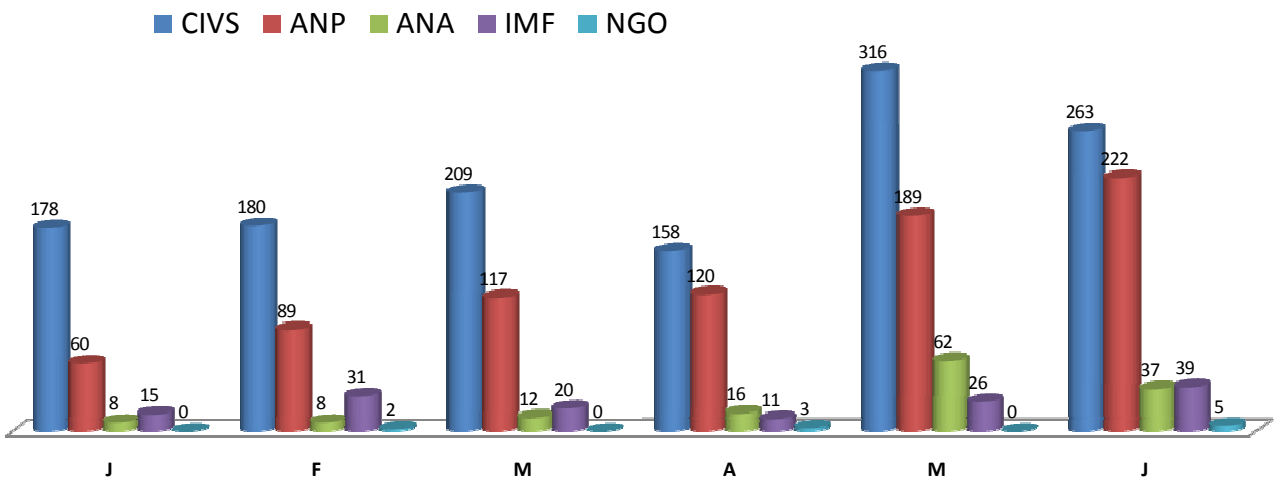
ANSO Fig 14: Mapping of attacks on Provincial Council Members/Candidates, Jan-Jun, 2009



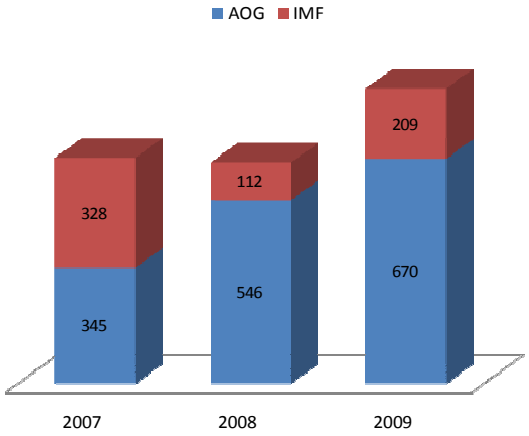
Feb 7 – Nangahar-Dara-i-Nur – Provincial Council **Member** killed in ambush
Apr 1 – Kandahar–City – 3 x provincial Council **Members** wounded in BBIED
Apr 8 – Khost-City – IED outside Provincial Council **Offices**
Apr 12 – Kandahar-City – 1 x Provincial Council **Member** (female) killed in ambush
May 15 – Kunduz-City – 1 x Provincial Council **Candidate** kidnapped & released
May 18 –Kabul-Surobi – 1 x Provincial Council **Member** attacked in ambush
May 25 – Ghazni-City – 1 x Provincial Council **Candidate** abducted & murdered
May 28-Khost-City – 1 x Provincial Council **Candidate** killed with magnetic IED
Jun 23 – Faryab – Qatsar – 1 x Brother of Provincial Council **Candidate** abducted
Jun 30 – Kunar-Dangam – 1 x Provincial Council **Member** ambush with IED

2.4 FATALITIES

ANSO Fig 15: Gross fatalities per sector, all causes, 2009

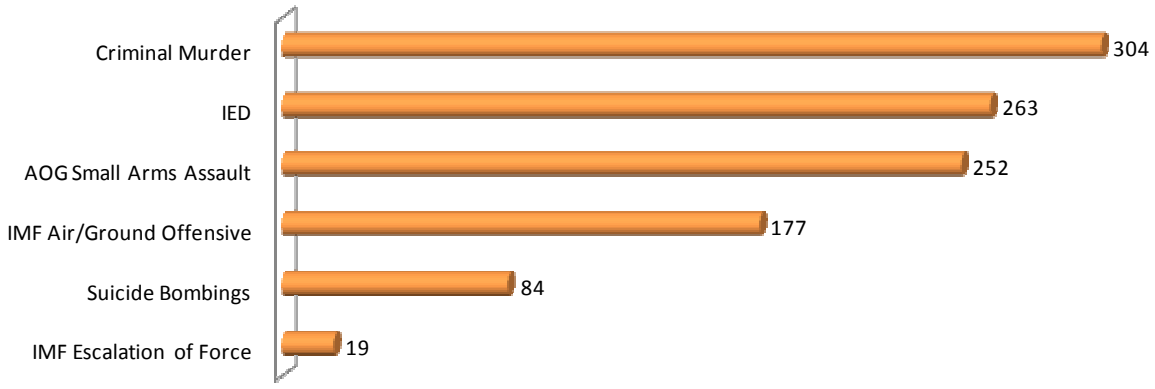


ANSO Fig 16: Total conflict related civilian casualties and cause, Jan-Jun, 07 to 09



Data shows that Afghan civilians and the Afghan National Police continue to bear the brunt of casualties (Fig.15) although significant surges in ANA and IMF fatalities are also visible (Note: ANSO records 142 IMF deaths to end June whereas official military figures cite 192 to July 10). Disaggregation of conflict related civilian casualties (Fig.16) shows growth over the same period last year and that AOG remain responsible for more than 75% of civilian deaths but also that IMF share has increased in total number as well as percentage. Figure.17 provides graphic evidence of ambient insecurity with criminal murder leading the rankings in the 'cause of death' chart for the period.

ANSO Fig 17: Leading causes of civilian death, Jan-Jun 2009



REPORT END

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