The Afghanistan NGO Safety Office

Oct 1st —Dec 31st, 2009

ANSO and our donors accept no liability for the results of any activity conducted or omitted on the basis of this report.
-Not for copy or sale-

ANSO QUARTERLY DATA REPORT Q.4 2009

welt hunger hilfe

SUMMARY & ASSESSMENT

Over the past year, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) were involved in 172 incident in which 19 NGO staff were killed and 18 seriously injured. All the victims were Afghan nationals this year. Murders due to personal (non-work) related dispute and roadside attacks were the primary caused of death. While crime continues to have an important impact on NGOs, the expanding conflict as well as the perception of armed opposition groups (AOG) towards NGOs have become much more significant factors of NGO security, or insecurity.

AOG made significant gains again this year. They now control or exert effective influence over nearly half of Afghanistan, maintain a substantial presence in 80% of the country, and consistently increase their attack rate by 40-50% every year (since 2006). If the tide is turning for international military forces (IMF), it is not reflected in this data.

With such a widespread and expanding presence, it is not surprising that AOG were behind most NGO incidents reported across Afghanistan this year. Fortunately, the Taliban and most AOG still do not systematically target NGOs. While the militarization and the politicization of aid have made it difficult for AOG to distinguish between neutral and non-neutral actors in the field, there is concrete evidence that AOG are making the effort when time and means allow. This is partly evidenced in the targeting data which shows that private and governmental development organisations supporting counter-insurgency or other political/ military objectives are being increasingly targeted by AOG, while NGOs are not. But perhaps the most direct evidence is that most of 59 NGO staff abducted by the AOG this year were released unharmed once the activities, local acceptance and neutrality of their NGO employer had been verified.

While it seems that neutrality affords NGOs with some protection in AOG controlled zones, NGOs are still very vulnerable in new or emerging conflict areas where the situation often deteriorates faster than they can adapt. This year, NGO suffered 3 times more serious incidents and 5 times more fatalities in new conflict zones than in the areas dominated by one party, either GoA or AOG. NGOs should also continue to be wary of attempts by IMF and some donors to lure NGOs into areas recently "secured" by IMF, as these are some of the most dangerous areas for NGO due to risk of being associated to the military effort. This will be particularly important in the coming months given U.S. plans to expand military operations and 'counter-insurgency' focused "aid" operations.

In summary, the data collected over the past two years confirms that neutrality and local acceptance, not the military or counterinsurgency, have become the dominant factors of security for NGOs in the vast areas of the country now dominated or controlled by the Taliban and other armed opposition groups. Given the current rate of AOG expansion, NGOs working in all provinces would be well served to adhere to humanitarian principals as AOG are harshly unforgiving to those who do not.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Humanitarian Aid

NORWEGIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC

The views expressed in this report remain the sole responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of ANSO donors or partners.

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

1.1 GENERAL NGO TRENDS

NGOs are usually more vulnerable when the conflict is expanding to new areas. This is reflected in the data which shows that NGO incidents increased most (if only moderately) from 2006-2008 when AOG made most territorial gains. This was also evident this year as nearly half of all serious NGO incidents and fatalities occurred in a few northern and western provinces that saw only low to moderate (or isolated) AOG activity until this year. A total of 172 NGO incidents were recorded in 2009, the same as in 2008 (170).

Fig 1: Total NGO incidents reported to ANSO, 2006-2009

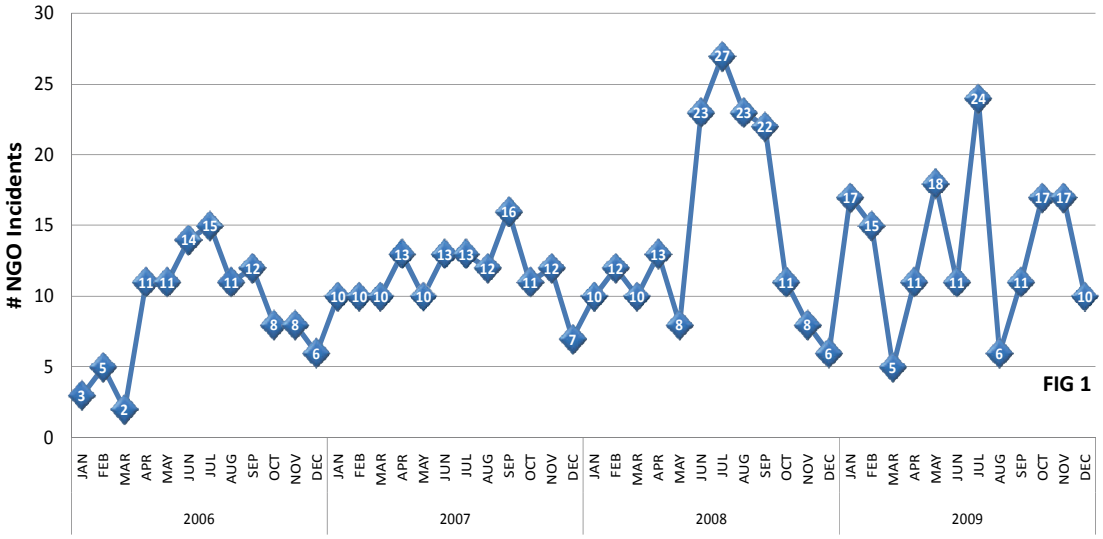


Fig 2: Regional Distribution of NGO incidents

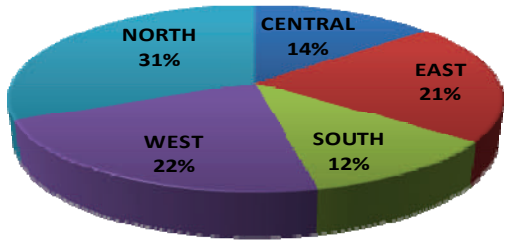
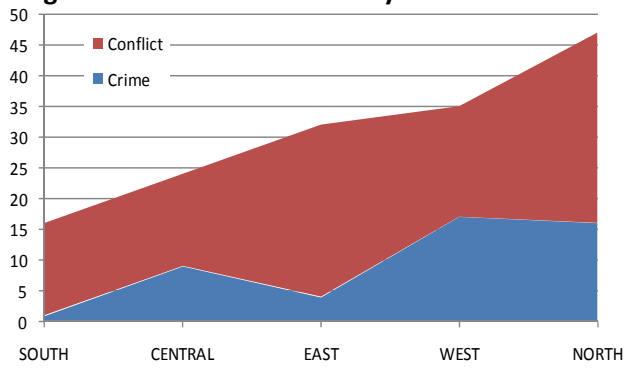


Fig 3: NGO incidents caused by conflict and crime



While crime still impacted NGOs considerably this year, most NGO incidents were conflict related (see Fig 3.) In general terms, conflict and a deteriorating criminal environment remain closely associated, which compounds the problem for NGOs working in emerging conflict areas.

More NGOs will probably come into contact with AOG next year as AOG begin to establish a more permanent presence in the more densely NGO populated provinces of the west and north. Due to the severity of roadside attacks in the north this year, NGOs will likely adopt a lower travel profile in 2010, which should reduce the number of serious, deadly roadside incidents. However, NGOs can expect more AOG visits and abductions (or detentions) in the north and west as AOG tend to "inspect" organisations in their areas of operation. The AOG sorting process tends to be strict and harsh, with some NGOs having no difficulties while others are threatened and directly attacked. Fortunately, direct attacks against NGOs remain rare and are often preceded by warnings. Perceived neutrality and local acceptance are the determining factors of NGO security in areas with an established AOG presence. Associating with counterinsurgency or military related aid projects is highly risky and will likely become more so given that AOG now maintain a significant and permanent presence in at least 26 of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan.

1.2 IMPACT OF AOG ACTIVITY ON NGOs

The total number and overall profile of AOG attacks against NGOs was similar to 2008 despite the increase in fighting observed over the past year (see Fig 5&6.)

More importantly, data collected this year confirms that ***the threat to NGOs is different, and often more severe, in areas where the conflict is expanding than in areas dominated by AOG or the GoA.*** Therefore, the AOG threat to NGOs is discussed below in terms of "areas under effective AOG control" and "areas not under AOG control".

Fig 5: AOG attacks on NGO by category: 2008 vs 2009

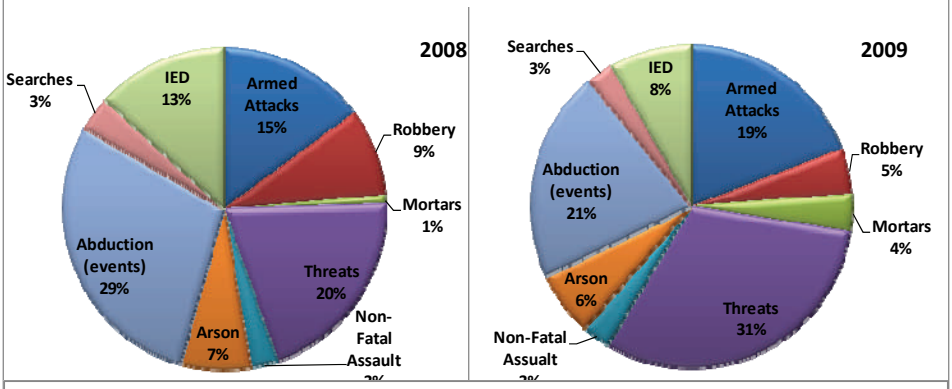
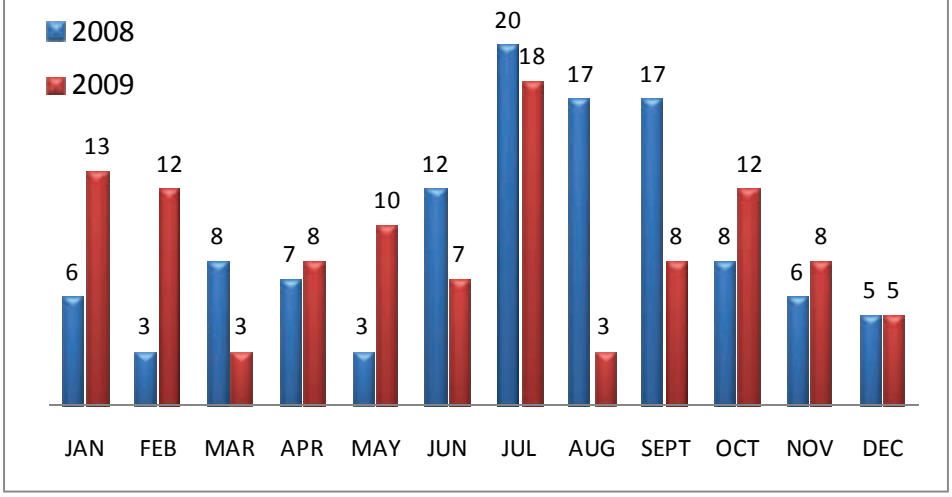


Fig 6: AOG attacks on NGO by month: 2008 vs 2009



1.2.1 Areas under AOG control

AOG control or exert effective influence over nearly half of the country, maintain a substantial presence in 80% of provinces, and have a presence in at least 95% of the country [1]. With such a widespread presence, it is not surprising that AOG were behind an estimated 114 NGO incidents in 32 provinces (or 95% of the country) this year.

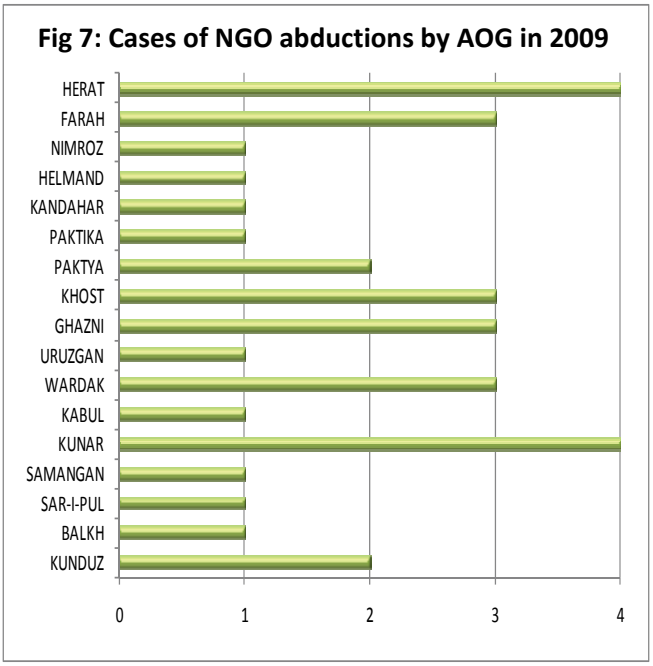
Fortunately, ***NGOs were not systematically targeted by AOG this year.*** The low targeting rate and widespread release of NGO abductees in AOG controlled zones ***are strong indicators that NGOs remain off the AOG target list [2].*** While AOG routinely executed GoA employees and others they perceived linked to the government of military, they ***released most of the 59 NGO staff they abducted (in 17 different provinces) within hours or days, unharmed.*** Furthermore, less than 15% of all AOG incidents recorded against NGOs this year were targeted attacks, and most of these occurred in a few localised areas where local AOG commanders are particularly hostile to all relief and development activities within their sector[3].

However, field reporting and post abduction debriefings suggest that NGO status offered only limited protection - and that neutrality, activity types and local acceptance were more important factors, as discussed on the next page.

1. *Refer to page 11 for more details.*
2. *International NGO staff remain a primary abduction target for AOG, but this is not specifically linked to their NGO status.*
3. *Most directed attacks against NGOs occur in south-eastern districts dominated by the Haqqani network.*

1.2 IMPACT OF AOG ACTIVITY ON NGOs

NGO neutrality was the determining factor in most <u>targeted</u> attacks and abductions conducted by AOG this year. AOG repeatedly targeted organisations perceived to be supporting government or military objectives, and NGO status offered seemingly no special protection.



Fortunately, it seems increasingly clear that ***AOG, especially Taliban, do make an effort, when time and means allow, to distinguish between neutral and non-neutral actors.*** The first indication that AOG make this distinction is reflected in the targeting data, which shows that contractors and governmental development ***organisations involved in government and military related aid projects are increasingly targeted,*** while NGOs are not. The UN's political mandate and heavy involvement in the presidential elections, which resulted in them being directly targeted by AOG this year, is another good indication that taking sides has consequences. The third indication is that NGOs implementing government programs tend to suffer more incidents than other NGOs. But perhaps the most direct evidence, is that in many NGO abduction cases, AOG focused their questioning and investigations on the victim's (NGO) employer. More specifically, ***the NGO's activities, links to the government, and local acceptance or integration were the determining factors in most abductee releases according to field reports and abductees debriefings.***

Unfortunately, ***some armed groups as well as some local AOG commanders interpret the definition of "a neutral actor" very differently or much more narrowly than others, which leads to inconsistent targeting*** across districts and provinces. In a few southeastern and western districts, for example, NGO projects are considered legitimate targets by a few local commanders that perceive all (or most) humanitarian and development work as being in support of the government or linked to the foreign occupation. Fortunately, in most of the country it seems that the threshold "of acceptable neutrality" is much higher. AOG sectors considered hostile to NGOs can often be identified by tracking cases of attacks and arson against compounds, as these show more evident target selection than the more random targeting seen in roadside attacks.

There is also a tendency to believe that few NGO incidents happen in established AOG zones because there are few, or no NGOs there; however, this assumption is not supported by ANSO data. First, ANSO registration and survey data indicate that a significant proportion of NGOs still maintain operations in many of the southern, eastern and central districts effectively under AOG control. So while ***exposure rates certainly do factor into security figures, is it perhaps more useful to begin focusing on other emerging factors of NGO security such as perceived neutrality*** (especially since AOG have the means to target NGOs in most of the country today.)

1.2 IMPACT OF AOG ACTIVITY ON NGOs

1.2.2 Areas *not* under AOG control

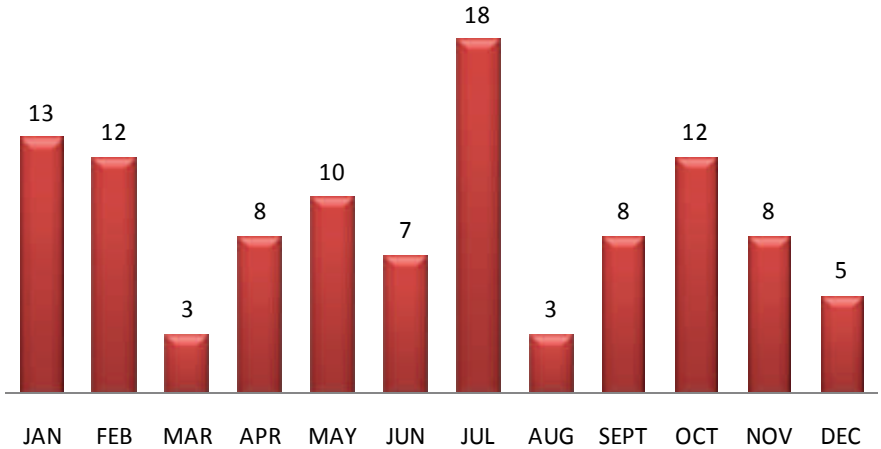
Serious NGO incidents and fatalities are much more frequent in low intensity conflict areas where AOG are attempting to gain control than in provinces under Taliban control (or in provinces hosting a significant AOG presence). More specifically, in 2009 ***NGOs suffered 3 times more serious incidents and 5 times more casualties in new or emerging conflict areas than in the rest of the country where AOG are more established or in control*** [4]. In areas with a low or emerging AOG presence, NGOs tend to have a higher travel profile and lower security posture which makes them more susceptible to the types of tactics used by AOGs in these areas.

While AOGs may resort to compound attacks, assassinations and set up regular checkpoints in areas under their control, they are often limited to hit-and-run attacks when they expand into new areas or begin to attack new supply routes. These attacks, which are usually carried out on more remote stretches of a main supply route (MSR), tend to be quick and violent attacks that allow little space or time for proper target identification. This is particularly true of roadside attacks involving IEDs and ambushes as they often require sighting and engaging a target from a distance. White or high profile (marked or antennae bearing) vehicles, often used by NGOs in the north in early-mid 2009, were particularly susceptible to accidental attack as they were more easily confused with the white/grey/ antenna bearing vehicles commonly used by government officials, military, and private security companies. This is evidenced by the fact that ***5 of the 6 NGO vehicles hit by an IED this year were white or grey high profile vehicles, and most were hit in the northern provinces.*** While it is always difficult to determine the intended target of such attacks, investigations indicate that at least 50% (and possibly all) of these roadside attacks were not intended for NGOs. ***IED strikes now account for approximately 13% of all NGO incidents and 40% of all NGO fatalities caused by AOG.***

Incidents and attacks against NGOs also occasionally spike in areas that AOG are vying to control as they are less familiar with the organisations working within their sector and usually have less time and means to identify those that are neutral and those with links to the GoA/IMF.

The problem may be further compounded in the coming years by AOG's growing ability to carry out roadside attacks and abductions year round in many part of Afghanistan, even during the traditional "winter lull" period. As shown in Fig 8, NGOs are now susceptible to AOG incidents almost year round.

Fig 8: AOG attacks on NGO by month in 2009



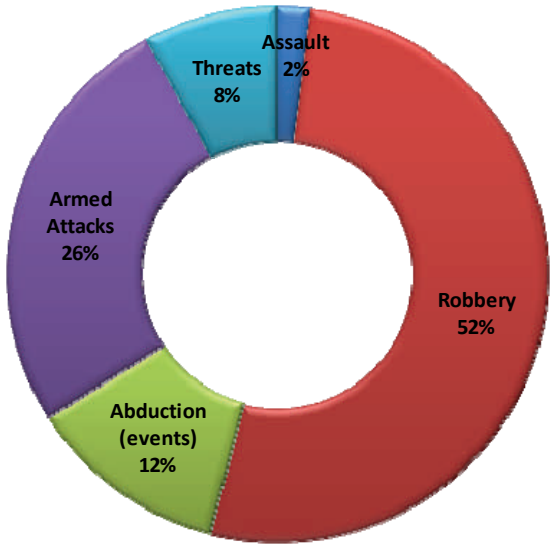
4. This does not factor in criminal incidents against NGO which also tend to rise in emerging conflict zones.

1.3 IMPACT OF CRIME AGAINST NGOs

No significant change was noted this year as the total number, types and geographical distribution of crimes against NGOs were similar to 2008 (see Fig 9 & 10.)

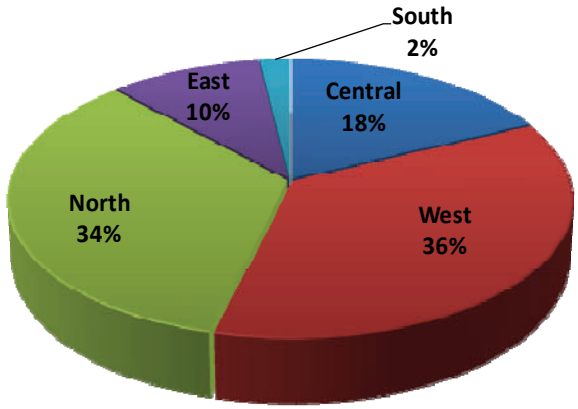
Only 49 criminal incidents were reported against NGOs this year. While crime rates against NGOs remain relatively low, they still account for most NGO deaths. 9 NGO staff were murdered this year, but few (or none) of these were work or NGO related. Instead, they were committed during non-working hours as the result of personal or family disputes. These murders account for the high percentage of armed criminal attacks reported against NGOs this year (as shown in Fig 9 to the right).

Fig 9: Criminal attacks on NGO by category: 2009



Armed robbery remains the most common crime against NGOs, accounting for 52% of the total. Approximately 62% of robberies occur on the road, 34% at home/office and the remaining 4% fail or are aborted. Deaths and serious injury during armed robberies remain rare.

Fig 10: % of criminal attacks on NGO by region: 2009



Crime also tends to be a compounding factor of NGO insecurity in new or expanding conflict areas, especially in areas with traditionally high crime rates. The crime data collected this year shows that criminal incidents against NGOs increased in several districts taken over by AOG. While some AOG resorted to crime when they entered into a new area, it seems that armed criminal groups were the ones who took advantage of the situation, especially to conduct roadside robberies. This is a logical development as policing resources are often diverted to counter-insurgency priorities and the police are usually less able or willing to patrol for fear of being targeted by AOG in these areas.

Criminal abductions of NGO staff remain infrequent and went down by 33% from last year, with only 6 recorded all year (all during road travel). It should be said that a certain number of criminal kidnappings are probably being attributed to AOG, as this often provides a good cover for criminal activity. Differentiating between the two is also becoming less relevant as criminal groups tend to collude with AOG on this issue, especially in AOG dominated provinces where most NGO abductions took place.

1.4 NGO FATALITIES

Fig 11: NGO staff killed, 2006-2009

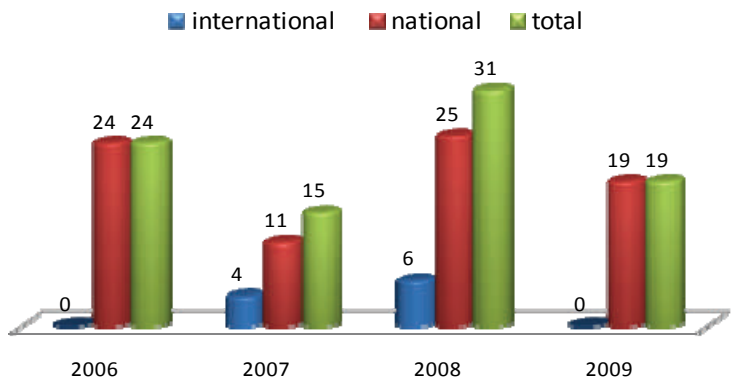
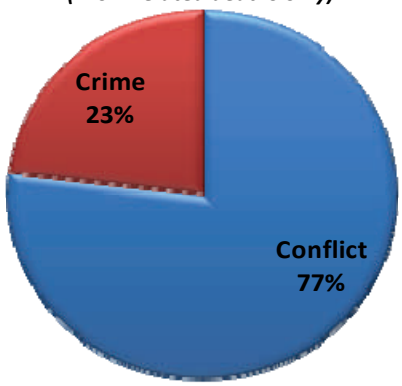


Fig 12: Cause of NGO staff deaths, 2009

(Work related deaths only)



19 NGO staff were killed this year and all were Afghan nationals. As shown in Fig 11, NGO fatalities continue to vary significantly from year to year with no discernable pattern except that Afghan nationals remain more exposed than their international counterparts.

Much like in 2008, the ***conflict caused a much greater proportion of work-related NGO deaths than crime*** (see Fig 12) . Half of conflict related deaths occurred during road travel as a result of IEDs and ambushes, while most others were the result of collateral damage from IMF and AOG attacks. As explained earlier in this report, most roadside IED attacks were not intended for NGOs, but rather for GoA, IMF, and others using similar looking vehicles. Therefore, adopting a lower travel profile can significantly reduce the number of NGO fatalities. ***Few NGO fatalities were the result of direct targeting or murder by Taliban or organised criminal groups***, and attacks against compounds remain relatively rare.

When taking into account both work and non-work related deaths, then ***murders due to personal or family disputes were the #1 cause of NGO staff deaths this year*** (see Fig 13 below).

Fig 13: Circumstances of NGO death: 2009

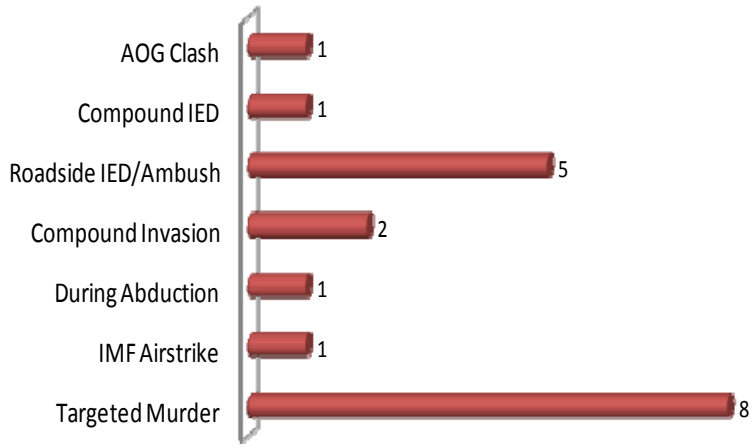
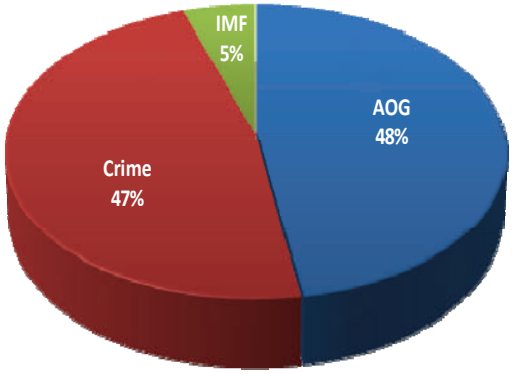


Fig 14: Cause of NGO staff deaths, 2009

(including Work and Non-Work related deaths)

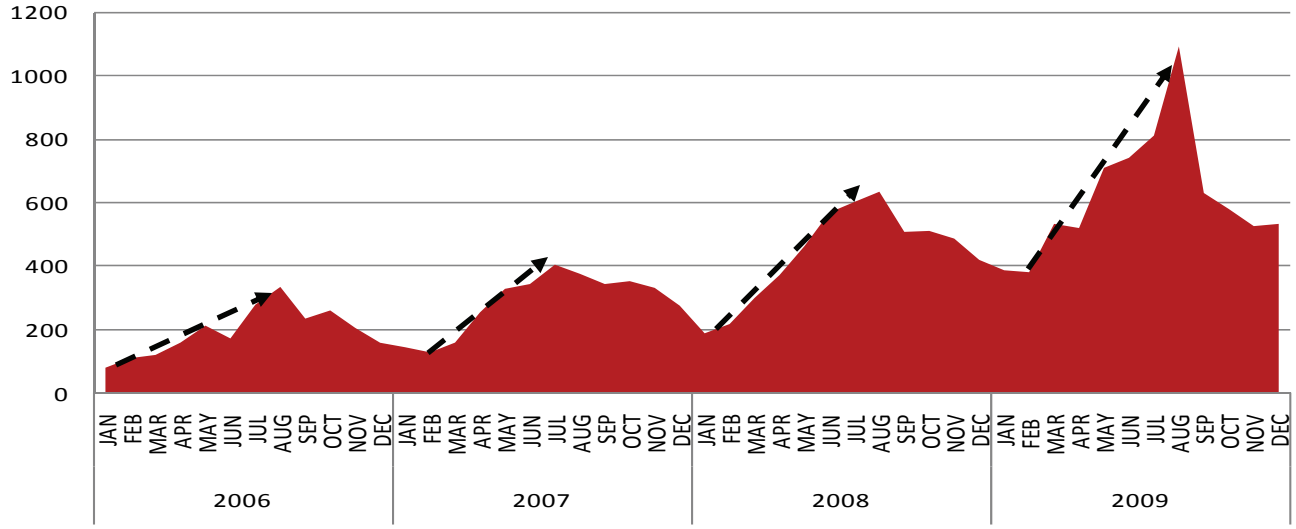


2. CONFLICT TRENDS & ANALYSIS

2.1 AOG INITIATED ATTACKS

Fig 15: AOG initiated attacks, 2006-2009

(IMPORTANT NOTE: includes only close range, stand off and suicide attack type conducted by AOG. Does not include criminal activity)



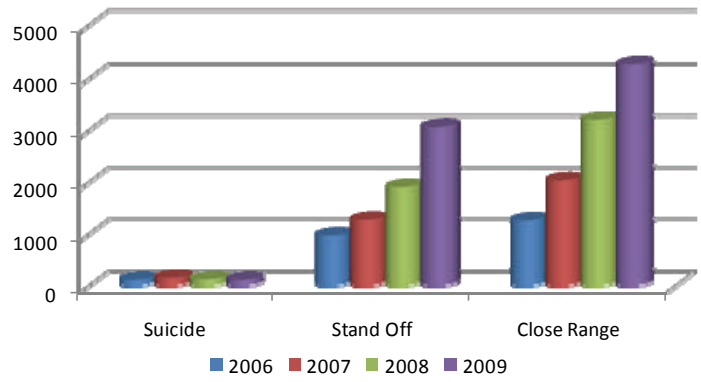
The conflict is growing ever more intense with 7474 AOG initiated attacks[5] recorded by ANSO over the past year, up from 5244 in 2008. This represent a 42% increase in AOG attacks over the previous period, and a doubling of the attack rate since 2007 (up 116%). Proof of the intensifying conflict is also reflected in the record number of IMF casualties reported this year, with over 500 foreign troops killed in 2009 alone, up from 281 in 2008. The consistent 40-50% yearly increase in AOG activity, as well as AOG's expanding control and influence over many new districts, indicate that ISAF and ANSF strategies are at most only slowing the rate of AOG expansion across Afghanistan.

Fighting is also resuming and escalating much more quickly after each winter (as shown by the black arrows in Fig 15). And while AOG attacks always decrease over the winter, they rarely dropped far below the peak of the previous summer fighting season. This would indicate that weapons, ammunition and personnel are readily available and that reliable re-supply lines have been established.

As noted last year, such continuity in tempo indicates a well resourced operation with fighters now able to sustain relatively high levels of operations year round, even during the winter months, thereby allowing AOG to quickly resume operations in the early spring and make considerable gains over the summer and fall.

Conventional close range (small arms & RPG) and stand off attacks (mortars and IEDs) still form the backbone of the AOG strategy. Most commonly, these have been ground attacks on IMF/ANSF fixed positions or convoys. While IMF and ANSF ability to detect IEDs continues to improve, this is countered by the increasing number and size of IEDs planted by AOG. IEDs accounted for over 61% of IMF fatalities this year.

Fig 16: Criminal attacks on NGO by Category: 2009



5. Includes only close range, stand off and suicide attack type conducted by AOG.

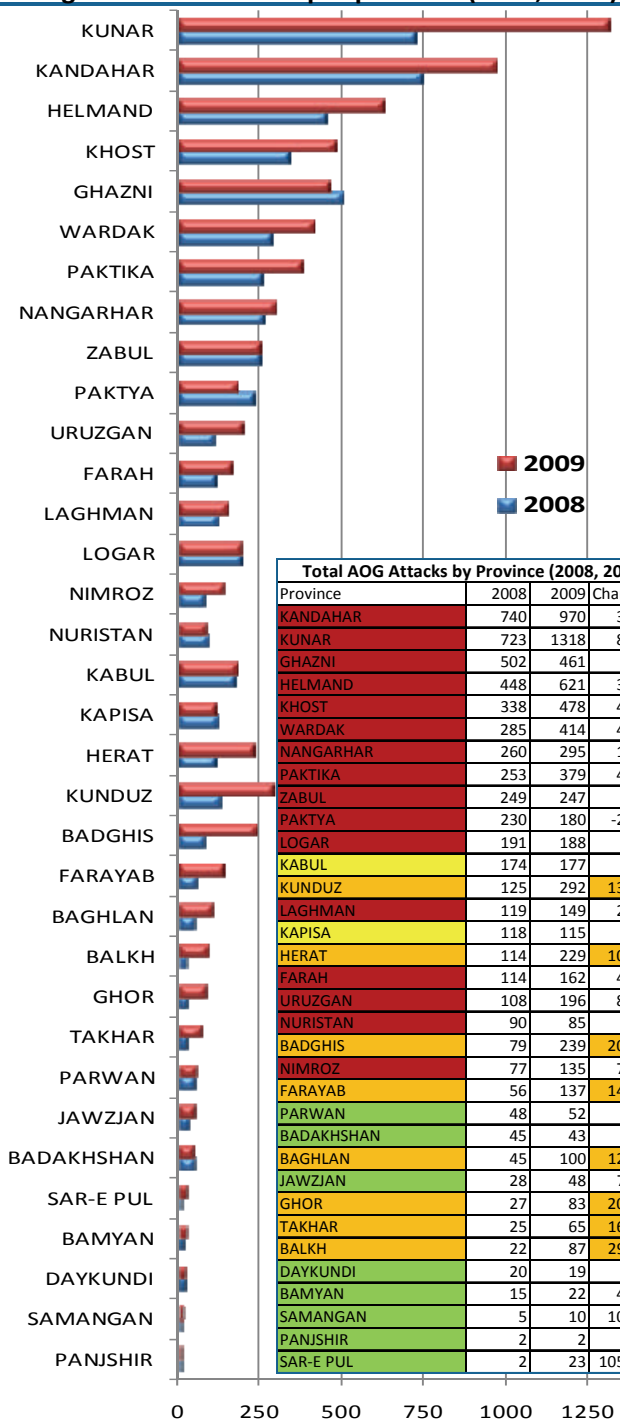
2.2 CONFLICT AREAS

A number of recent reports suggest that AOG control or exert effective influence over 40-59% of the country, maintain a permanent presence in 80%, and have a presence in at least 97%. These figures seem reasonable, perhaps even conservative, given that ANSO records show AOG attacks in every province this year, with 12 provinces registering between 200 and 1200 attacks, and 10 other provinces registering over 100 attacks in 2009. Furthermore, ANSO field reporting and data indicate that 16 (or 47%) of the 34 provinces have a significant and established AOG presence (marked in red in Fig 17 below). While AOG activity remains highest in the south and east, the conflict expanded considerably in 8 northern and western provinces this year (marked in orange in Fig 17). The bulk of conflict related NGO deaths and serious incidents were reported in these eight northern and western provinces.

If you consider the 24 provinces noted above and take into account the permanent AOG presence in other provinces, such as Kapisa and Daykundi, then it is not difficult to see why AOGs are said to have a permanent and heavy presence in roughly 80% of the country (or 26-27 of 34 provinces).

Provinces marked in green in Fig 17 saw little conflict this year (less than 1 incident per week) or have a lower overall AOG footprint. AOG activity levels (and hence these colors) do not necessarily, and often do not, directly correlate to NGO security.

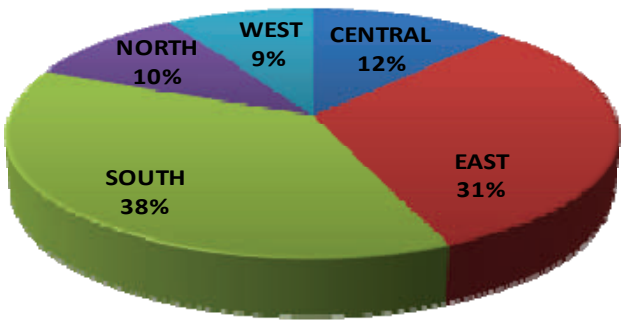
Fig 17: AOG incidents per province (2008, 2009)



Total AOG Attacks by Province (2008, 2009)

Province	2008	2009	Change
KANDAHAR	740	970	31.08%
KUNAR	723	1318	82.30%
GHAZNI	502	461	-8.17%
HELMAND	448	621	38.62%
KHOST	338	478	41.42%
WARDAK	285	414	45.26%
NANGARHAR	260	295	13.46%
PAKTIKA	253	379	49.80%
ZABUL	249	247	-0.80%
PAKTYA	230	180	-21.74%
LOGAR	191	188	-1.57%
KABUL	174	177	1.72%
KUNDUZ	125	292	133.60%
LAGHMAN	119	149	25.21%
KAPISA	118	115	-2.54%
HERAT	114	229	100.88%
FARAH	114	162	42.11%
URUZGAN	108	196	81.48%
NURISTAN	90	85	-5.56%
BADGHIS	79	239	202.53%
NIMROZ	77	135	75.32%
FARAYAB	56	137	144.64%
PARWAN	48	52	8.33%
BADAKHSHAN	45	43	-4.44%
BAGHLAN	45	100	122.22%
JAWZJAN	28	48	71.43%
GHOR	27	83	207.41%
TAKHAR	25	65	160.00%
BALKH	22	87	295.45%
DAYKUNDI	20	19	-5.00%
BAMYAN	15	22	46.67%
SAMANGAN	5	10	100.00%
PANJSHIR	2	2	0.00%
SAR-E PUL	2	23	1050.00%

Regional Distribution of AOG incidents: 2009



ANSO ACRONYMS

IMF-International Military Forces / **AOG**-Armed Opposition Groups / **GOA**-Government of Afghanistan / **ACG**-Armed Criminal Groups / **ANA**-Afghan National Army / **ANP**-Afghan National Police / **ANSF-**Afghan National Security Forces / **IED**-Improvised Explosive Device / **RPG**-Rocket Propelled Grenade / **IDF**-Indirect Fire (ex: mortars) / **SAF-**Small Arms Fire

REPORT END

For further information
director@afgnso.org

© ANSO, January 2010