



## Greater Number of Defections This Winter

Insurgents appear to be surrendering in far greater numbers this winter (1 November 2010 to 31 January 2011) than in the previous winter (1 November 2009 to 31 January 2010). Approximately 1,865 fighters have reportedly surrendered to the Afghan Government, compared to approximately 443 fighters in the last winter, an increase of almost 400 percent.

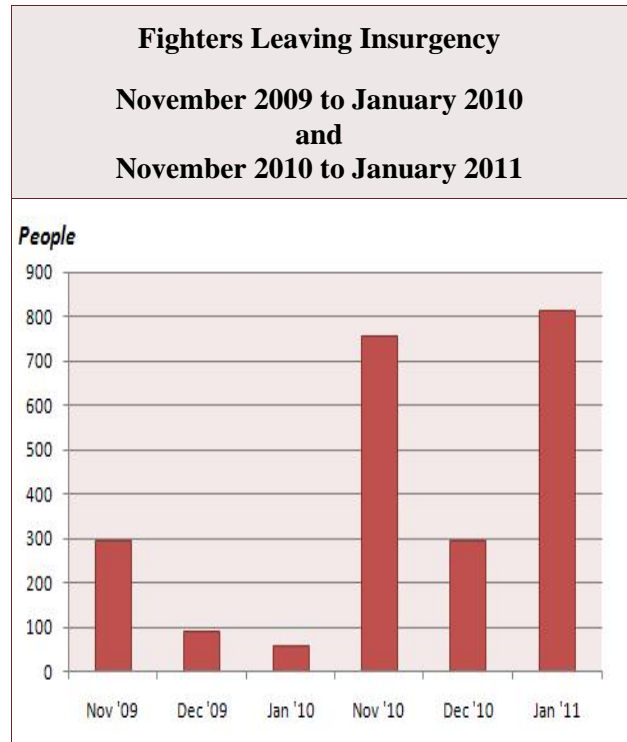
- Of the six months reviewed, the three months with the largest number of fighters leaving the insurgency all occurred this winter: November 2010 (755), December 2010 (295), and January 2011 (815).

## Defections Concentrated in North, West

Insurgents have overwhelmingly surrendered in the relatively peaceful areas encompassing the International Security Assistance Force's (ISAF) North and West regional commands rather than in the much more violent South and East, although it is unclear why. As suggested in a previous OSC Analysis,<sup>3</sup> the greater numbers of Taliban fighters and greater concentration of Pashtuns -- the ethnic group to which most Taliban belong -- in the South and East may increase Taliban cohesion, making it more difficult for disaffected insurgents there to switch sides. It is also possible that insurgents leaving the battlefield prefer to resettle with their families in the safer North and West and that some provinces in these areas offer better benefits to defectors.

- The vast majority of insurgents were reintegrated into seven provinces this winter: Baghlan (241), Balkh (141), Faryab (140), Jowzjan (153), and Kunduz (330) in Regional Command (RC) North; and Badghis (240) and Herat (400) in RC West.

**Taliban** spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid "rejected" reports of insurgents joining the government, claiming that "these people are not mujahidin" and are not affiliated with the Taliban.<sup>4</sup>



Source: Afghan media reporting

## Scope, Limitations

This paper is based on over 100 independent and state media reports selected by OSC, covering the period 1 November 2009 to 31 January 2010 and 1 November 2010 to 31 January 2011. These reports include a large, but not exhaustive, number of Afghan television, radio, Internet, and print media translations.<sup>a</sup> Selected reports were all drawn from Afghan media sources, with the exception of Afghan Islamic Press, which is a Pakistan-based Afghan news agency. Only reports that described a specific or estimated number of insurgents "surrendering," "turning themselves in," "joining the government," "joining the peace process," or taking similar steps in specifically named provinces were selected. There were a large number of reports that referred to defecting insurgents but gave no specific numbers or province names, and these were not used in this paper. The actual number of insurgents reported as reintegrating, therefore, could be larger than indicated. In addition, the data set excluded any incidents of reconciliation that were not reported in the media.

The majority of reports were from independent media outlets, leading OSC to assess that most of them represent actual events rather than a government information campaign. There is considerable uncertainty, however, regarding the reported participants. The reports refer to individuals leaving the insurgency by a variety of terms, including "Taliban," "insurgents," "criminals," and "Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin." Most importantly, given the lack of specific information about these individuals and their relationship to the insurgency, it is likely that an unknown number were not insurgents at all or were at most only loosely affiliated with the insurgency and were enrolled in reconciliation programs for financial gain.

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<sup>a</sup> All numerical data are available from OSC upon request.

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<sup>1</sup> [Online Publication | The Sunday Times | Major-General Richard Barrons puts Taliban fighter numbers at 36,000 – Times Online | 3 March 2010 | | <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol.news.world/afghanistan/article7047321.ece> | 9 December 2010]

<sup>2</sup> [Online Publication | Al Jazeera | US: Taliban has grown fourfold – Americas – Al Jazeera English | 9 October 2009 | | <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/americas/2009/10/20091091814483962.html> | 9 December 2010]

<sup>3</sup> [OSC | | OSC ID: SAF20101213497001 | 12 December 2010 | | OSC Analysis: Most Afghan Insurgents Switch Sides in Calmer Areas, Seasons | | (U//FOUO) | (U//FOUO) | ]

<sup>4</sup> [Online Publication | | Voice of Jihad | Interview With Islamic Emirate's Spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid About Recent the Political and Military Situation in the Country | 30 January 2011 | | <http://alemarah-iea.net> | 7 February 2011 | ]

This OSC product is based exclusively on the content and behavior of selected media and has not been coordinated with other US Government components.