



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on September 19, 2012

U.S., Coalition Suspend Joint Operations With Afghan Troops

The American-led military coalition in Afghanistan has temporarily suspended joint operations with Afghan forces, due to a recent surge in the number of U.S. and NATO soldiers killed and wounded by members of the Afghan units they have been training and supporting in combat. Military officials are also concerned that those incidents might increase further due to the recent riots and demonstrations of anti-American sentiment in the region over a film made in the United States that mocks the Muslim prophet Mohammed.



The move comes less than a month after NATO Special Operations forces suspended training of new recruits while the vetting process for weeding out those with ties to the Taliban or other insurgents is being reviewed. Afghan government soldiers and policemen have killed 51 NATO soldiers in 36 attacks this year, the *Guardian* of London [reported](#). At least 12 of the attacks, leaving 15 dead, occurred in the last month, and “rogue” attacks by Afghan soldiers and policemen killed four Americans and two British soldiers over the weekend of September 14, the British paper reported. The *Guardian* quoted U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey’s assessment that the attacks are “a very serious threat to the campaign” by NATO and Afghan forces to defeat the insurgency. The suspension of joint operations also throws into doubt the plan to have Afghan forces fully trained and able to defend the country on their own by 2014, the target date for withdrawals of U.S. combat forces.

The coalition campaign suffered a serious blow September 14 when a [raid](#) by 15 insurgents on Camp Bastion in Helmand Province killed two U.S. Marines, wounded nine coalition personnel, and inflicted \$200 million worth of damage on one of the largest and most heavily guarded posts in Afghanistan. The insurgents completely destroyed six U.S. Marine Corps aircraft and severely damaged two others, while damaging three refueling stations and three aircraft hangars, a military news release said. The camp’s defenders killed 14 of the 15 attackers, with the survivor taken into military custody. The United Kingdom’s Prince Harry, doing a tour of duty as a helicopter pilot, was at the camp during the attack, but was not injured.

Afghanistan’s Defense Ministry responded to the suspension of joint operations by saying that its armed forces already conduct many operations on their own and would continue to do so. But Afghan security forces, totaling 350,000, continue to rely on coalition units for routine security duties on shared bases, as well as aid in patrols, firefights, and medical evacuations. Afghan and coalition units often man posts together and split duty in guard towers. Until now, junior officers from both sides were able to organize patrols or small operations on their own. Now coalition units need approval from a two-star general, commanding thousands of service members, before coming to the aid of Afghan forces under attack.

“We are not stepping away from this,” said Lt. Col. Richard W. Spiegel of the U.S. Army, acting as coalition spokesman. “Things might look a little different, but we’re not walking away.” But a number of



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Afghan soldiers and security personnel believe their units are not ready to fight the insurgents on their own, a major reason for the continued presence of U.S. and other NATO forces.

“It’s better to announce a cease-fire so we can also step back and take a nap,” Abdul Qayom Baqizoi, the police chief of Wardak Province in central Afghanistan, told the [New York Times](#). An Afghan officer said under the new rules, Americans did not respond to a request for the evacuation of four wounded soldiers after an Afghan Army unit struck a hidden bomb September 17, killing two. The Afghans had to wait for help from their own forces, which do not have medical evacuation helicopters, he said. “It took them six hours to bring the soldiers to the hospital. One of them has lost a lot of blood, and he might die,” Major Salam told the *Times*.

The United States and its allies have been fighting in Afghanistan since shortly after the al-Qaeda attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. U.S. and coalition forces invaded and quickly toppled the Taliban government for harboring al-Qaeda units and training camps. The 11-year war that followed is the longest in U.S. history and recent setbacks have underscored the difficulty of the mission at a time when the United States has its hands full defending its own embassies in that part of the world.

U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other American diplomats were killed last week when a heavily armed mob attacked the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya, where U.S.-led air strikes last year rescued rebel forces now in control of the government and helped turn the tide against Libyan strongman Moammar Gadhafi. Another anti-American mob scaled the walls of the U.S. embassy in Cairo, Egypt and tore down and shredded the American flag. Four protesters were killed when a mob stormed the grounds of the U.S. embassy in Yemen September 13, while demonstrators also [marched](#) in the capitals of Iran, Iraq, and Bangladesh, chanting “No to Israel” and burning the American flag.

The anti-Mohammad film “The Innocence of the Muslims” has been blamed for the latest rash of anti-American hostility in the Muslim world, where ridicule of the prophet is widely regarded as intolerable blasphemy. Some critics of U.S. foreign policy, however, argue that the far greater cause is a history of military interventions in the Middle East by the United States and other Western nations that continue to endanger rather than defend America’s national security.

That [assessment](#) is offered in a September 19 column by American defense analyst and author Ivan Eland:

Yet the film was only the trigger, and the real underlying issue is U.S. and Western meddling in Islamic lands and culture. The U.S. superpower has been pursuing an interventionist policy in the Islamic world since World War II — ramping it up even further after 9/11 with the unnecessary invasion of Iraq — and is roundly hated for it, thus making it the target for such blowback attacks, even among peoples the U.S. tried to “help.”

Photo of Afghan military officers at graduation ceremony in Kabul, Afghanistan: AP Images



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