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## A Knock on the Door

*22 Months of ISAF Press Releases*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Capture-or-kill operations conducted by ISAF have long been presented by the military as one of the more effective parts of the international military mission in Afghanistan. Statistics speaking to this effectiveness are released periodically through ISAF channels; these tell of the numbers of 'leaders', 'facilitators' and/or 'insurgents' that were killed or captured during a particular period. A closer examination of this data reveals a certain amount of inconsistency, though, particularly surrounding the classification of who is considered an insurgent 'leader'.

ISAF does not regularly release aggregate numbers relating to the capture-or-kill raids – or, indeed, the overall number of people that have been captured or killed. ISAF does, however, issue daily press releases that detail incidents resulting in death and/or detention. The findings in this paper are based on a systematic recording of all the information presented in these press releases. Although ISAF probably does not release information about all the operations that they conduct, cross-checking with other aggregate figures that they provide suggests that the figures obtained from ISAF press releases roughly correspond to the realities and trends of the

targeting campaign. Moreover, they provide a baseline figure of the total acknowledged kills and captures during ISAF operations between 1 December 2009 and 30 September 2011.

From 1 December 2009 to 30 September 2011, 3,771 ISAF press releases reported a total of 3,157 incidents (including 2,365 capture-or-kill raids) in which 3,873 individuals were killed and 7,146 detained. Among these were at least 174 'leaders' who were killed and 501 detained, and 25 'facilitators' who were killed and 423 detained. The number of 'leaders' and 'facilitators' killed amounts to approximately 5 per cent of the total number of deaths, while the number of 'leaders' and 'facilitators' detained consists of approximately 13 per cent of the total number of detentions.

The data gathered for this report indicates that the terminology used by ISAF in its own aggregate figures (that is, the number of 'leaders' being captured or killed) is inconsistent. To start with, ISAF often classifies 'facilitators' as being 'leaders'. Moreover, in a number of instances, the number of 'leaders' and 'facilitators' mentioned in the press releases didn't match the claims made by ISAF in their aggregate form. The extent to which this is intentional or not is, of course, difficult to prove, but it

should make policy-makers and analysts evaluating ISAF's progress think twice about accepting these body-count figures without more serious scrutiny.

The data suggests that ISAF is pursuing a 'networked' targeting strategy, targeting not only specific individuals (presumably on the basis of evidence) but also others perhaps only tangentially connected to them (for which there may be no evidence of wrongdoing). For instance, in July 2010, there was roughly one leader killed for every 20 individuals who ended up dead in capture-or-kill raids across Afghanistan, the second lowest monthly figure during the 22-month period.

The data indicates that ISAF conducts its operations differently in different parts of the country. In Kunar, for instance, there were 66 ISAF incidents involving a death or detention and only eight of them were capture-or-kill raids (as far as the data shows). A reported 456 people were killed in those 66 operations while 32 were captured. Relative to the other provinces, this is an unusual ratio of deaths versus detentions. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Helmand province saw 622 operations, 377 of which were capture-or-kill raids, in which at least 821 people were killed and 1,263 were captured, which is a much lower ratio both in terms of deaths per incident and deaths versus detentions. Part of the explanation for this difference is likely to be found in the terrain and the nature of the troops deployed to certain parts of the country.

The two peaks of ISAF activity were in September 2010 and June 2011. The numbers show a steady general increase in reported kills and captures each month until June 2011, with a slight decrease over the winter (2010—11). When considering only the capture-or-kill raids, the dip was, however, much less steep. The data did reflect what seemed to be a greater effort to ensure that individuals were not killed in capture-or-kill raids as time passed; following November 2010 the average number of people killed in capture-or-kill raids has been almost universally below the same figures for the previous year.

Perhaps most interestingly, there has been a steady decline in almost all the metrics analysed for this data set from the highpoint of June 2011 onwards. (In some cases, this decline has been steep.) The steady decrease includes the overall number of capture-or-kill raids, the overall number of those being killed or captured in all ISAF incidents mentioned, the number of leaders and facilitators killed or captured (apart from September which registered a slight increase), and so on. The decline may well be linked to the seemingly unsustainable pace of capture-or-kill operations, coupled with the departure of General Petraeus (whose command saw an increased emphasis on capture-or-kill raids).

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*Dawn is close, a knock on the door.  
 The youth went out, the group is standing;  
 It's the gun of the others,  
     the uniform of the others.  
 A small group of those people are standing;  
 They take him; the house grows full of  
     noise and shouting.  
 A bullet stands in every barrel,  
 Tears are falling on his collar.  
 The moon is standing at the depth of  
     the water;  
 Years passed but in this heart  
 The entire world is waiting, it's not moving.  
 —Nawa Jan Baheer, 'The Waiting Bullet'<sup>1</sup>*

*COIN doctrine believes in killing people; it just  
 believes in killing the right people.  
 —John Nagl, prominent counter-  
     insurgency theorist<sup>2</sup>*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The capture-or-kill raids conducted by ISAF forces are commonly held as one of the most effective parts of the military effort against the insurgency in Afghanistan, yet very little is known about their scope or efficacy.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is only part of the poem. It is translated from Pashto and was published on the Taleban's website. The original link no longer works; it was part of an older mirror-site.

<sup>2</sup> Nagl stated this in a Frontline PBS documentary entitled, 'Kill/Capture', broadcast in May 2011. [www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/kill-capture/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/kill-capture/) (accessed 11 October 2011).

<sup>3</sup> The authors prefer to use the term 'capture-or-kill' even though 'kill-capture' is better known. The moment at which 'kill-capture' became part of a general public discourse is not entirely clear, nor is it a term that is used much by the military or their public relations apparatus. In terms of accuracy, 'capture-or-kill' is preferable since many more of the night raids result in capture rather than in death, and it seems clear that ISAF would prefer to detain insurgent suspects for interrogation rather than simply kill them. For claims of efficacy, see Heidi Vogt, 'Report: Night raids a losing tactic in Afghanistan' *Associated Press* 18 September 2011 at [www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5haz7VxEpks1ubc2o-IOC7hoLUfg?docId=9a2e7adef3a2411eb728a5876aa48f30](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5haz7VxEpks1ubc2o-IOC7hoLUfg?docId=9a2e7adef3a2411eb728a5876aa48f30) (accessed 19 September 2011) and Carlotta Gall, 'Night Raids

American military sources began to release aggregate data describing the number of 'insurgent leaders' they were capturing in mid-2010 and since then have released some sort of aggregate figure most months. This usually includes the number of capture-or-kill operations carried out, the number of 'insurgent leaders' detained or killed and sometimes the total number of insurgents killed or captured. This is useful, albeit patchy, data for attempting to understand the extent and nature of ISAF's capture-or-kill campaign, but it offers a partial picture.

One consequence of the limited transparency of the capture-or-kill raids is that the public debate over their efficacy is conducted on either a purely emotional level or with reference to specific events in which civilians were killed, for example. These events are then dismissed by ISAF as being anomalies, not representing the full picture of the capture-or-kill raids. Those who say that ISAF has been broadly successful in its operations over the past year argue in part based on claims regarding the efficacy of the capture-or-kill raids; those who seek to challenge that do so with reference to specific cases, but lack a broader position since they have no access to the overall data.

ISAF actually releases a large amount of information about its activities in the form of press releases. These press releases range from two to fifteen per day.<sup>4</sup> Although this data is

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Curbing Taliban, but Afghans Cite Civilian Toll' *The New York Times* 8 July 2011 at [www.nytimes.com/2011/07/09/world/asia/09nightraids.html?pagewanted=print](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/09/world/asia/09nightraids.html?pagewanted=print) (accessed 19 September 2011). This ABC News report cites military spokesmen as having called the capture-or-kill raids their 'safest and most effective tool': Nick Schiffrin, 'Challenging the US Military's Favorite Tactic in Afghanistan' *ABC News* 19 September 2011 at [www.abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2011/09/challenging-the-us-militarys-favorite-tactic-in-afghanistan/](http://www.abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2011/09/challenging-the-us-militarys-favorite-tactic-in-afghanistan/) (accessed 20 September 2011).

<sup>4</sup> These press releases are issued in English. Only relatively rarely were press releases translated into Dari or Pashtu, and never on a regular basis. A Dari/Pashtu-language ISAF website is reportedly being constructed ('on our horizon') but does not exist at present. See ISAFmedia 17 September

not the complete picture (not all operations are written up as press releases),<sup>5</sup> it offers insight into how ISAF sees its contribution to the war and presents a far more differentiated picture of the capture-or-kill raids than the released aggregate data on its own.<sup>6</sup>

An aggregation of all this press release data, therefore, can help us better understand what is happening where and how much of it is happening over time. In the absence of other data, the only way to examine trends and assess other figures released by ISAF is to go through their press releases and systematically capture that information. Perhaps most importantly, it allows for the aggregation of some absolute minimum figures for the number of people claimed to have been killed or captured during the course of operations around the country. This can function as a benchmark figure for future research and for queries to be posed to ISAF and the various individual countries with troops operating in Afghanistan.

This short paper offers a summary of the data relating to incidents in which an Afghan either was killed or captured<sup>7</sup> covering the 22-month period from 1 December 2009 up until 30 September 2011.<sup>8</sup> This period was chosen on

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2011 at [www.twitter.com/#!/ISAFmedia/statuses/115052975789056000](http://www.twitter.com/#!/ISAFmedia/statuses/115052975789056000) (accessed 8 October 2011).

<sup>5</sup> A remark issued from ISAF's twitter account confirms this. 'We don't publish release for every single capture or kill [sic]. Releases generally deal with high numbers or senior insurgents captured.' See ISAFmedia 5 October 2011 at [www.twitter.com/#!/ISAFmedia/statuses/121523953352187905](http://www.twitter.com/#!/ISAFmedia/statuses/121523953352187905) (accessed 5 October 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Note that there are also press releases issued by the Afghan Ministries of Defence and Interior and the NDS relating to the targeting of the Taliban. These are not as regular as ISAF's output, nor was there a single set available for the authors to evaluate. We hope to compare the differing characterisations of operations in a future paper.

<sup>7</sup> The extremely limited number of deaths or detentions of non-Afghan fighters are also included.

<sup>8</sup> *The Guardian* newspaper was given access to this compiled press release data and has produced visualisations to accompany this paper. You can view these at [www.guardian.co.uk/datablog/afghan-kill-capture](http://www.guardian.co.uk/datablog/afghan-kill-capture).

account of the availability of a complete set of press releases on ISAF's website and its RSS feed; moreover, it offered enough scope to assess ISAF's activities over multiple 'fighting seasons'. Not all incidents described in the press releases were capture-or-kill missions. Sometimes, for example, ISAF may have been carrying out a patrol, or there might have been an attack on an ISAF base during which people were killed or captured. The analysis in this paper looks both at overall operations and the capture-or-kill operations.<sup>9</sup>

Section 2 describes the data in terms of all incidents contained in the press releases; Section 3 focuses on the capture-or-kill raids; and Section 4 takes the data overall and evaluates them more broadly in the context of other statements ISAF has made.

## 1.1 Research questions

This research first of all sought to answer the following basic questions about the capture-or-kill campaign: How many raids are taking place? How many people are being detained, and how many are being killed? And how are operations distributed geographically and over time?

This report additionally examines two further questions:

- First, is the ratio of captures to kills different in certain provinces? Press releases don't usually identify the troops' nationalities or offer any other identifying information as to which unit was carrying out a raid, for example, but this would present a starting point into a discussion of the differences between the troops of different nations operating in Afghanistan.
- Second, is there a quantifiable difference between Generals McChrystal, Petraeus and Allen with regards to the capture-or-kill raids? Has there been any noticeable change in the period since General Petraeus left his position and General Allen took over?

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<sup>9</sup> The authors would like to thank the two peer reviewers who offered critiques of this paper when it was in draft form as well as AAN and Martine van Bijlert for support and useful comments.

## 1.2 Methodology and data sources

The data used in this study was taken from the archive of press releases issued by ISAF.<sup>10</sup> Every press release issued by ISAF from 1 December 2009 until 30 September 2011 (3,771 in total and spanning 22 months) was examined, with any that didn't include references to the death or detention of an individual being discarded.<sup>11</sup>

The press releases were then processed into individual incident reports (3,157 incidents in total). Press releases often included reports of multiple incidents, and these were split up in order to compile a full list of reported incidents. The incident reports were then entered into a database taking into account the following variables:

- **Basic data.** An incident name was recorded, along with a reference number (usually the press release number) and the date of the incident. Unfortunately, the exact dates were sometimes imprecise. As many of the capture-or-kill raids take place at night, there was confusion as to whether a raid took place on the night of the previous day or on the morning of the day on which a press release was issued. Occasionally, a press release would make reference to an incident that occurred 'last week' (or something similarly imprecise).<sup>12</sup> There were even instances where ISAF referred to the same event in separate press releases as having occurred on different dates.<sup>13</sup> The

variance was usually within a range of a single day, however, and therefore does not significantly affect this study.

- **Location data.** The province, district and village name (if given) of each incident were recorded. The province was given for all but 23 incidents (for which 'southern Afghanistan' was usually specified), as was the district name. Village names were given quite often until mid-2010, when the amount written about each incident started to decrease. There were occasional problems with district names in that the writers of the press releases claimed a particular district was in one province whereas in reality it was in a neighbouring province, or sometimes places were identified as districts when they were villages and so on. The authors tried to correct these errors when spotted, but sometimes it wasn't clear.
- **Target data.** The target group as specified in the press releases was recorded. As this paper examines ISAF's own assessment of its operations, no efforts were made to check whether the targeting information was correct for each operation – that is, whether someone was actually a member of al-Qaeda and so on. If a group name was not given, or if the generic 'insurgent' was used, the field was left blank. We noted whether ISAF claimed it had captured a 'leader' or someone who qualified for a leadership position.<sup>14</sup> We also noted what position ISAF stated that the target, detainee or dead individual occupied in terms of their job; these were usually quite specific.
- **Numerics.** We noted whether someone was killed or detained in the incident and

<sup>10</sup> This is accessible at

[www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/index.php](http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/index.php).

<sup>11</sup> These press releases made references to development or training projects (and so on) and so were not part of the military operations carried out by ISAF.

<sup>12</sup> For example, press release 2010-06-CA-098. <http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/june-24-afghan-isaf-operations-in-eastern-southern-northern-afghanistan.html> (accessed 11 October 2011).

<sup>13</sup> For example, the event referred to in press releases 2010-09-CA-292 4727 and 2010-09-CA-302 is the same event, but two different dates are given. See <http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/cross-border-attack-repelled-by-air-weapons-team.html> (accessed 11 October 2011) and <http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/update-cross-border-attack-repelled-by-air-weapons-team.html> (accessed 11 October 2011).

<sup>14</sup> We will return to a broader discussion of this below, but for this study we classified a 'leader' as such if he was: (a) mentioned as such in the press release; (b) referred to as a 'commander'; or (c) referred to as being 'senior' or 'key'. We did not classify 'facilitators' as 'leaders', even though it became apparent (see below) that ISAF considers a large number – if not all – of these to be 'leaders'.



made an estimate for the minimum number who were killed or detained. ISAF almost always made some kind of estimation of the number killed and/or captured, even if they didn't always specify a precise figure. Accordingly, we fixed and defined minimum numbers for each term used.<sup>15</sup> For each incident we also noted the exact terms (that is, 'several' or 'a few') used to refer to those detained or killed. We tracked the number of 'leaders' and 'facilitators' claimed to have been killed or captured in each incident. We tracked whether an incident was described as a 'capture-or-kill' raid.<sup>16</sup> We also tracked whether it was reported that an air strike had been carried out in the incident.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> If a press release said that 'insurgents' were detained, without further details, we assigned that incident a minimum number of two detained (since we could not be sure of more). 'A couple' we took to mean two. 'Several' we took to mean at least three, even though on other occasions 'several' was used to refer to seven or eight. Other terms we classified as denoting at least three included: 'a few', 'some', 'a group', 'a small group' and 'multiple'; these terms sometimes were used to refer to far larger numbers but we chose the smaller number (if no other information was available in the press release) in order to come up with a minimally acceptable figure. 'Numerous' and 'a handful' we took to mean at least four, and 'a large number' at least five.

<sup>16</sup> A 'capture-or-kill' raid, for the purposes of this study, was an operation mounted based on specific information to target a specific individual or individuals. This therefore excludes those detained or killed while on patrol or while searching for drug caches and so on. It does not preclude the inclusion of raids conducted during the daytime (ie, this report is not exclusively about 'night raids', although this is true for the most part). We did not consider that 'clearing operations' (often lasting for several days) qualified for the designation of 'capture-or-kill' raids since the targeting information was often imprecise or the goal was to reclaim territory rather than to remove an individual or individuals from the network of insurgents in a particular area.

<sup>17</sup> The authors only assessed an 'air strike' as having occurred when ISAF classified it as such or when the press release mentions a bomb being dropped (or equivalent wording). There was

To check the reliability of the data and get an overview of the extent to which the figures in ISAF's press releases represent the complete number of raids being carried out – which is to say, including so-called 'black ops' and other variations of Special Forces operations – the data set was cross-referenced with the aggregate numbers released by ISAF sources to the media independently of the daily press releases. American sources started doing this in early summer 2010 (in off-the-record disclosures) as the debate over the American/international strategy in Afghanistan again intensified; these numbers were, media sources noted, an indication of the efficacy of the military effort. These aggregate numbers would usually reference how many 'insurgent leaders' had been captured or killed.<sup>18</sup> The cross-referencing of the data helps to uncover ISAF's criteria for what constitutes an 'insurgent leader' and allows for a better evaluation of the aggregate data that is released to media outlets periodically.

### 1.3 How representative is the data set?

The data gathered for this paper provides a picture of the information that was publicly released by ISAF in press releases. It does not offer a complete picture of ISAF's capture-or-

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frequent mention (particularly in months towards the end of the data set) of 'air weapons assets' or 'air weapons teams' that were 'engaging' targets on the ground, but there was no indicator to distinguish between weapons like bombs or missiles and machine-gun fire. Accordingly, the number of 'air strikes' recorded in the data set is extremely low, particularly when compared with the publicly available data on air operations in Afghanistan. See Noah Shachtman and Spencer Ackerman, '5,800 Attacks Are Just The Beginning After Petraeus' Year-Long Air War' *Wired* 5 July 2011 at [www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/07/5800-attacks-are-just-the-beginning-after-petraeus-year-long-air-war](http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/07/5800-attacks-are-just-the-beginning-after-petraeus-year-long-air-war) (accessed 7 September 2011) for more.

<sup>18</sup> These numbers seem to offer a fuller picture as overall aggregate figures, since some include not only ISAF operations, but Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) and all other forms of special forces (including NATO, Green Berets) and so on. Thanks to Stephen Grey for this observation.

kill operations in Afghanistan – a complete catalogue of these raids will most likely never be released – but the number of incidents described during this 22-month period allows some initial conclusions as to the nature and extent of these operations. Despite not being sure whether we have all the information, there are indications that ISAF sees it in its interest to be consistent in putting out press releases, at the very least when an operation detains or kills someone, as is illustrated in the following statement:

I asked Kirchner to describe the Taliban's media strategy. He laughed. 'I would characterize [sic] it as fiction,' he said. 'General Petraeus believes that we have to be the first with the truth, and that means that every time we do an operation, we write a press release on it.' ISAF has learned that if it doesn't fill the early information void after an event, the Taliban will. And if ISAF's message isn't strong and clear enough – and usually it isn't – the Taliban will win the day.<sup>19</sup>

The repository of incidents used for this report is solely derived from and limited to what ISAF has itself issued as press releases. This is, by definition, a limited set of data.<sup>20</sup> But, as such, it offers a much more variegated understanding of ISAF's activities around the country than what has been otherwise available. It comes with its own set of limitations:

- First, the categorisation of those detained or killed may not be standardised across

the 22-month period studied, or certain incidents may not have been published.<sup>21</sup>

- Second, ISAF is not the only group carrying out capture-or-kill raids around the country. There is no systematic data in the public domain available on these non-ISAF operations.

However, there seems to be close enough correlation between the aggregate numbers released to the media and the press release data set to state that – while there is undoubtedly some variation – the number of raids mentioned broadly correlates to the reality of raids on which something happened (that is, someone was killed or captured). Better data (and more of it) would allow for more precise conclusions to be drawn as to the nature and efficacy of ISAF's capture-or-kill raids.

## 2 OVERALL DATA DESCRIPTION

### 2.1 Total deaths and detentions countrywide

The data set as a whole includes the deaths<sup>22</sup> of a minimum of 3,873 individuals and the detention of an additional 7,146, all of which took place between 1 December 2009 and 30 September 2011. This includes people specifically targeted or detained for their activities, as well as civilians accidentally killed and mentioned in ISAF press releases. It is not a complete figure in that it probably does not reflect all deaths and detentions that took place in Afghanistan in that period (there may have been unreported operations, and there may have been more deaths and detentions per incident than counted), but it serves as a minimum base figure to evaluate the other

<sup>19</sup> Vanessa M Gezari, 'Crossfire in Kandahar' *Columbia Journalism Review* January/February 2011 at [www.cjr.org/cover\\_story/crossfire\\_in\\_kandahar.php?page=all](http://www.cjr.org/cover_story/crossfire_in_kandahar.php?page=all) (accessed 4 September 2011).

<sup>20</sup> The Afghanistan Analysts Network has previously reported on discrepancies between ISAF's press releases and independently-gathered reports from the field. See Martine van Bijlert, 'Khas Uruzgan violence and ISAF press releases' *Afghanistan Analysts Network* 26 June 2011 at [www.aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=1846](http://www.aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=1846) (accessed 19 September 2011) and Kate Clark, 'The Takhar attack' *Afghanistan Analysts Network* May 2011 at [www.aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=1691](http://www.aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=1691) for more.

<sup>21</sup> One type of incident is particularly underrepresented in the data set: air strikes. In part, this relates to what we classified as an 'air strike' when reading through the press releases. The description of any 'air assets' involved in an incident is usually extremely vague, and it is impossible to make any guesses as to the type of weapons used or even what kind of aircraft was involved. For this reason, there is relatively little discussion of air strikes below.

<sup>22</sup> The term 'death' is used interchangeably with 'kill' in this report.

available data. Section 2 will assess the full data set, and Section 3 will separately discuss only capture-or-kill operations.

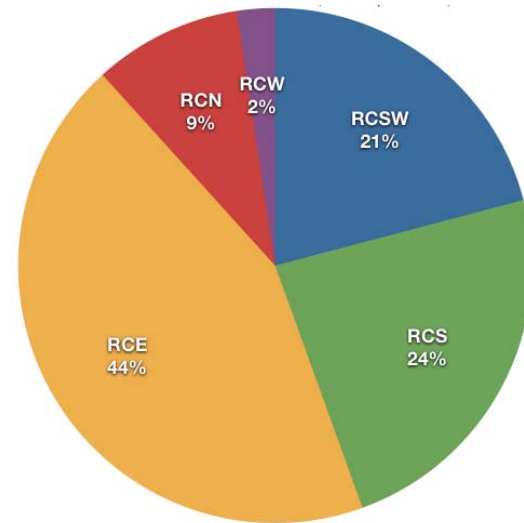
## 2.2 How are all the events in the data set distributed geographically?

The deaths and detentions that were reported by ISAF are distributed across the country in a manner that roughly correlates to the spread and distribution of foreign troops in Afghanistan.

Figure 1 shows the total operations resulting in a death or detention as distributed across the different ISAF regional designations. The provinces are not equally distributed within these regional command structures – RC-Southwest is made up of only two provinces (Nimruz and Helmand) while fifteen fall under the authority of RC-East.<sup>23</sup> The relatively large number of incidents (656) resulting in a death or detention in one Regional Command (RCSW) containing only two provinces indicates just how active ISAF is in this area.

When these total incidents are broken down by province (see Figure 2), three provinces are shown to be in a clear lead: Helmand, Kandahar and Khost. Note that this is for all incidents; the distribution shifts when only capture-or-kill incidents are examined (see Section 3.3 below). Figure 2 represents 79.5 per cent of all ISAF incidents described in the press release data set;<sup>24</sup> the top three provinces (listed above) represent 48.5 per cent of all incidents. This shows that the distribution of deaths and detentions is unequally spread throughout the country.

**Figure 1. ISAF operations during the 22 months, split per ISAF command structure**



*Note:* Per ISAF Command, 1 December 2009 to 30 September 2011

When we examine the district level (see Figure 3), two individual districts stand out (Sabari of Khost province and Kandahar<sup>25</sup> of Kandahar province) with 206 and 134 incidents respectively resulting in death or detention during the 22-month period. The top ten districts in this chart represent 30.9 per cent of the total number of incidents.

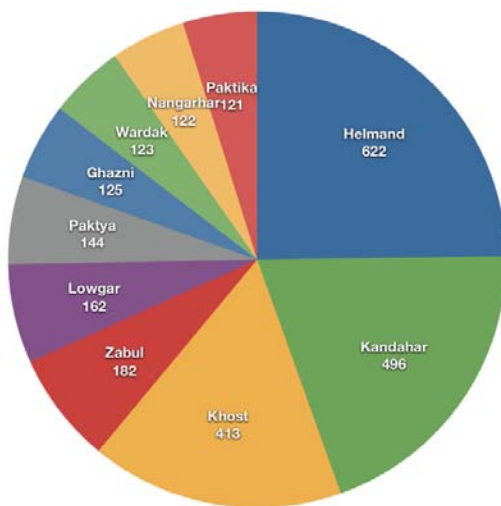
<sup>23</sup> This observation is valid as of 29 August 2011. See [www.isaf.nato.int/images/stories/File/Place mats/16%20August%202011%20Placemat.pdf](http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/stories/File/Place%20mats/16%20August%202011%20Placemat.pdf) for the latest official map showing how the provinces were allocated to the different regional commands in August 2011.

<sup>24</sup> That is, the remaining 20.5% of incidents took place in the remaining 24 provinces not specified in the figure.

<sup>25</sup> Kandahar district includes Kandahar City, but (depending on what maps ISAF use) may also refer to parts of Mahalajat (for example), at the outskirts of the city, or even parts of Dand district. The press releases often make it clear that operations were taking place outside what would generally be referred to as 'the city'.



**Figure 2. Top 10 provinces with ISAF operations resulting in death or detention**



### 2.3 How is this distributed over time?

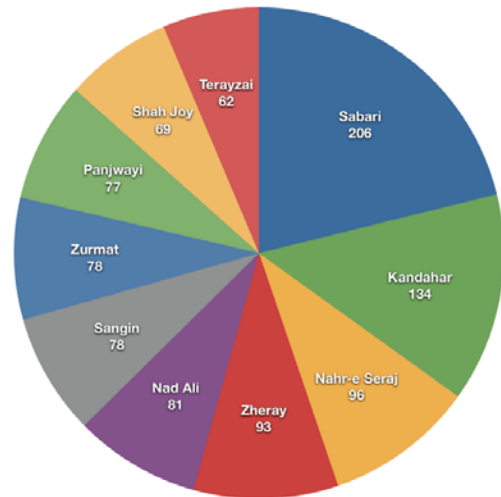
This section offers some different (albeit overlapping) perspectives on how ISAF operations have changed over time: the number of deaths and detentions month-by-month; the number of deaths for every detention; the average number of deaths and detentions every day; and the total number of incidents in which someone died or was detained month-by-month.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of the reported kills and captures in the ISAF press releases data set over the period, month-by-month.<sup>26</sup> It illustrates ISAF's common claim that they were capturing larger numbers of people than they are killing.<sup>27</sup> In general, the total number of those being killed and captured broadly increased over the 22 months of data, although the number of detainees increased at a faster rate than the number of those being killed. The winter period from late 2010 to early 2011 saw a temporary decrease in both detentions and

<sup>26</sup> For the entire 22-month period examined for this report, this amounts to an average (at minimum) of 5.79 people killed and 10.68 people detained every day (for the 639 days).

<sup>27</sup> Azmat Khan, 'Night Raids' Disrupting or Fueling the Afghan Insurgency?' *PBS/Frontline* 17 June 2011 at [www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/afghanistan-pakistan/kill-capture/night-raids-disrupting-or-fuel/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/afghanistan-pakistan/kill-capture/night-raids-disrupting-or-fuel/) (accessed 7 September 2011).

**Figure 3. Top 10 districts with ISAF operations resulting in death or detention**

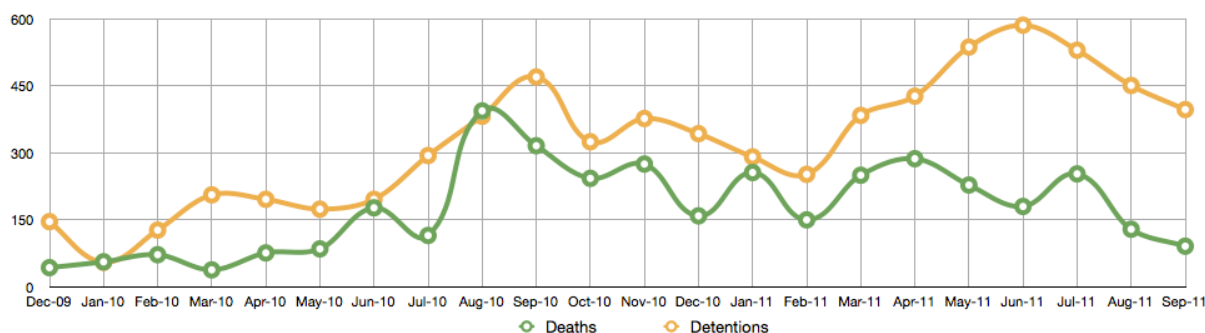


deaths. (Note, however, that the number of capture-or-kill raids did not decline during this period (see Figure 12)). The period from July to September 2011 saw a significant decrease in the number of those being killed and captured (from 253 killed in July to 91 killed in September). It is unclear what caused this decline.<sup>28</sup>

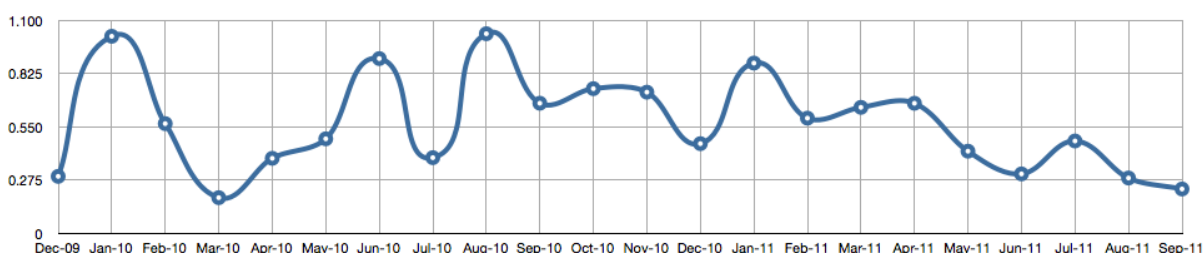
The only times the number of deaths exceeded the number of detentions was in January 2010 (when the numbers were in any case quite low) and August 2010 when a minimum of 394 individuals were killed and 382 were captured.

Figure 5 plots the number of deaths for every detention as described in the ISAF press releases. In the earlier months the number of deaths for every detention was quite high,

<sup>28</sup> Note, however, that one possibility is that ISAF started to release fewer reports detailing its military activities around the country. Two highly critical reports were released in May 2011 – a *Frontline*/PBS documentary entitled 'Kill/Capture' and a report by Kate Clark for the Afghanistan Analysts Network entitled 'The Takhar Attack' (see above) – and this may have put pressure on ISAF to be less transparent about these operations. There was also pressure on ISAF to give space for Afghan media relations units (of the Ministries of Interior, Defence and the NDS) to put out their own information, and the decrease could also be partly related to this.

**Figure 4. Number of deaths and detentions reported in ISAF press releases**

Note: These are minimum numbers.

**Figure 5. Number of deaths for every detention reported in ISAF press releases**

although this seems to partly be a reflection of the relatively low numbers overall (compare with Figure 4 and Figure 9). From March 2010 until August 2010 there is an overall increase in the number of those killed for every capture (from 0.184 killed for every capture in March 2010 to 1.031 in August 2010). This is interrupted only in July 2010, an interruption that is likely related to the departure of General McChrystal and the arrival of General Petraeus.<sup>29</sup> In 2011, however, there was a gradual decline in the number of deaths for every detention in the total figures. This seems to be related more to the rise in number of detentions (from 252 in February 2011 to 586 in June 2011) rather than the decline in the number of deaths (from a height of 287 in April 2011 to 91 in September 2011).

Figures 6 and 7 plot the average total number of deaths and detentions per day, measured by month, as described in the ISAF press

release data. The overall figures show a gradual increase in the number of deaths per day up until April 2011, at which point the monthly figure starts to decline. As in Figure 5, there is a temporary decrease in July 2010 (when compared to the previous month) but then a sudden and sharp rise (from 3.71 deaths per day to 12.71 deaths per day) from July to August 2010. This seems attributable to an increase in the overall number of troops – the last of the so-called ‘surge’ troops arrived in August 2010<sup>30</sup> – and to the arrival of General Petraeus. However, without a better understanding of internal discussions within ISAF during this period we can only suggest correlation rather than causation. Further research is needed to show the precise factors that resulted in this steep increase. Also recall Figure 4, in which August 2010 was one of only two months in which the total number of reported deaths surpassed the total number of detentions.

<sup>29</sup> *The Rolling Stone* article that was at the centre of these events was released in the last week of June 2010; General McChrystal was removed from his command on 24 June; and General Petraeus arrived on 2 July.

<sup>30</sup> Gareth Porter, ‘Despite Troop Surge, Taliban Attacks and U.S. Casualties Soared’ *IPS* 3 July 2011 at [www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=56342](http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=56342) (accessed 19 September 2011).

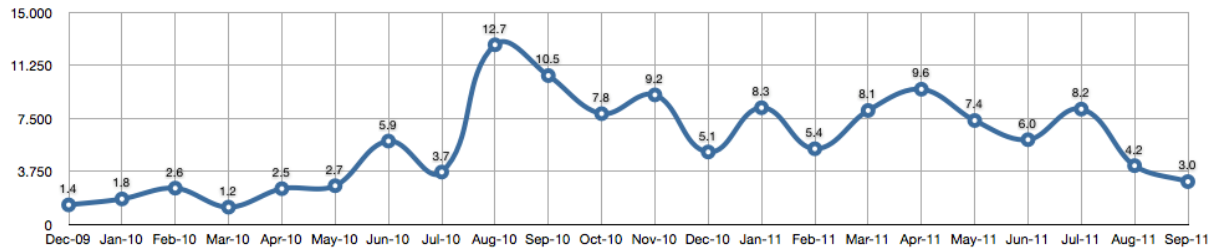
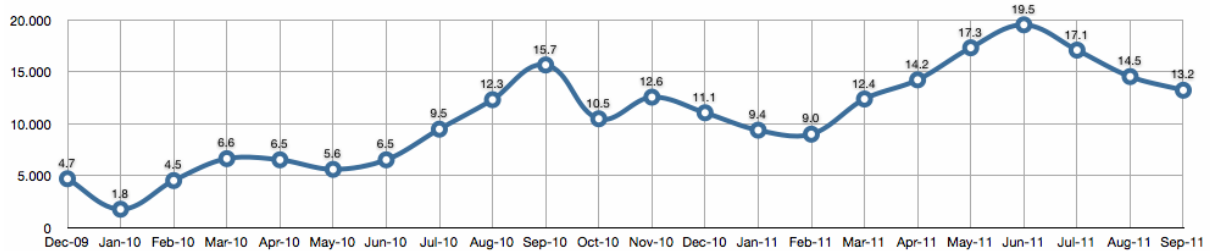
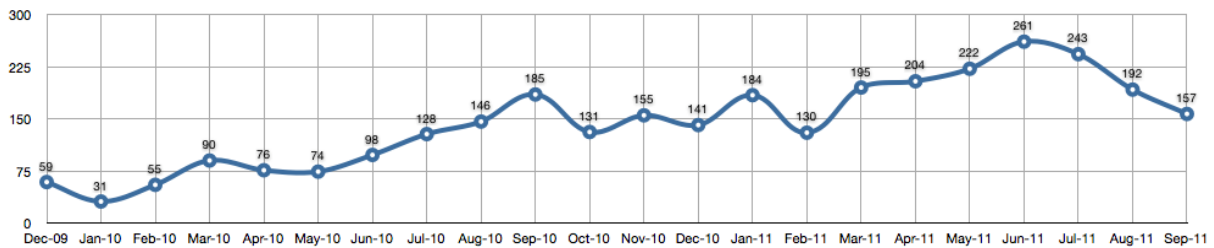
**Figure 6. Average number of deaths per day reported in ISAF press releases**

**Figure 7. Average number of detentions per day reported in ISAF press releases**

**Figure 8. ISAF incidents resulting in death or detention**


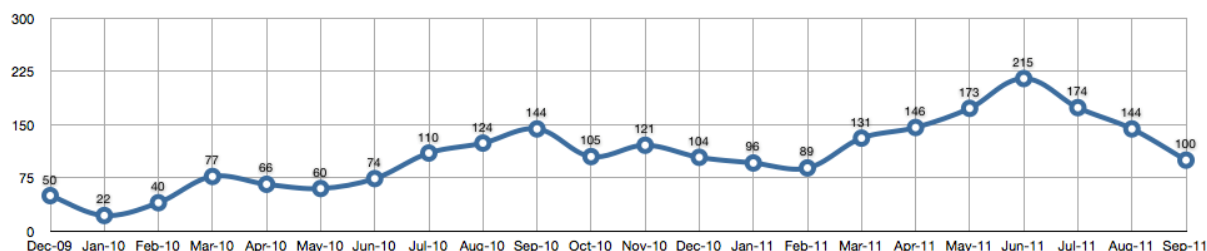
Figure 7 also shows a general and steady increase in the average number of those detained each day. This is partly a reflection of increased total number of operations and increased troop numbers (see Figure 8). As in Figure 4, the number of detentions per day also began decreasing, from a height of 19.5 in July 2011 to 13.2 in September. This decrease cannot be found in the data from 2010, when in fact the opposite trend can be observed.

Figure 8 illustrates the increase of incidents resulting in death or detention over the 22 months of data. There was a slight decline during the second winter, but incidents continued to rise until June 2011. Moreover, August and September 2011 saw a significant decline in the number of incidents (a trend not observable from July to August the previous year). It is unclear what caused this decrease in overall incident numbers. Note,

however, that General Petraeus stepped down as ISAF commander on 18 July 2011.<sup>31</sup>

All these illustrations (from Figures 4-8) show a broad trend, therefore: an overall steady increase in the number of deaths and detentions from December 2009 until June 2011 (with a spike around August 2010), at which point these metrics start to decline consistently.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Tait, 'New CIA chief Petraeus hands over command in Afghanistan' *Reuters* 18 July 2011 at [www.news.yahoo.com/cia-chief-petraeus-hands-over-command-afghanistan-083052494.html](http://www.news.yahoo.com/cia-chief-petraeus-hands-over-command-afghanistan-083052494.html) (accessed 29 August 2011).

**Figure 9. Number of capture-or-kill raids**

### 3 'CAPTURE-OR-KILL' RAIDS

The original impetus for this study was to learn more about the distribution of capture-or-kill operations both geographically and over time. The following sections describe what the data has to say with regards to these operations. Note that the strict application of the definition stated in the methodology<sup>32</sup> means that there were many instances in which it appeared that an operation fell into this category, but without specific characterisation as such, it was not included as a capture-or-kill operation. For this reason, the number of operations are only minimum baseline figures.

#### 3.1 How many raids are taking place?

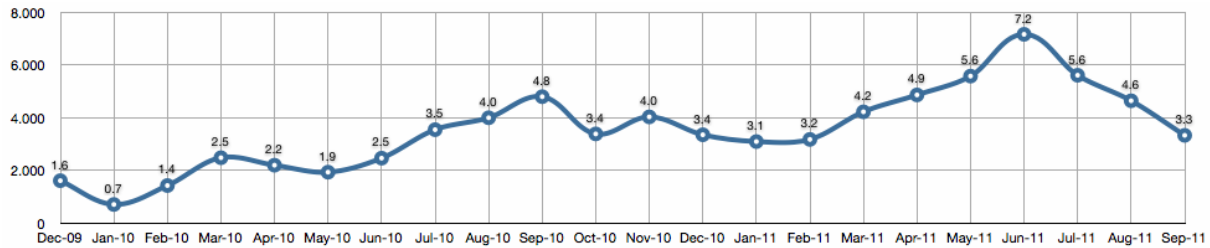
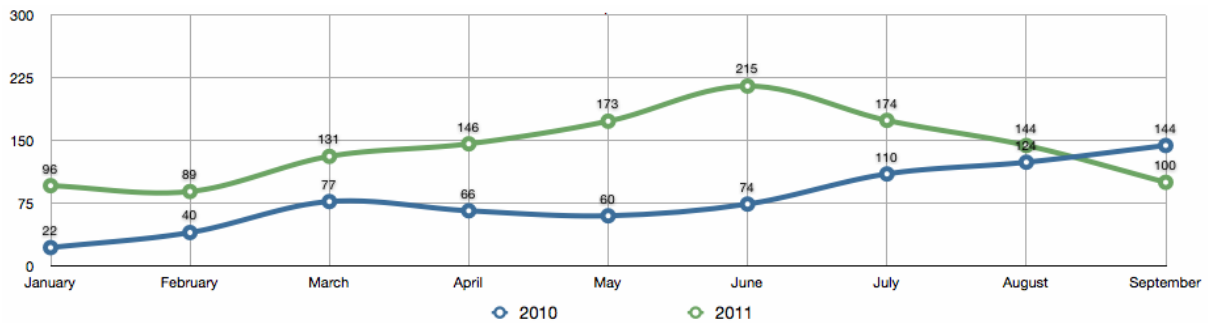
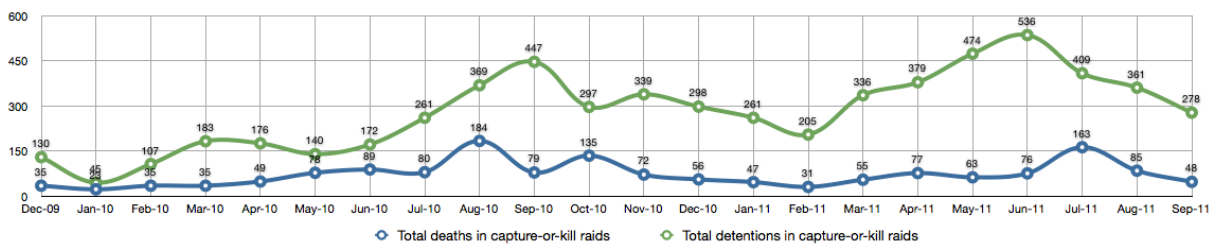
There were 2,365 capture-or-kill raids described in the 3,771 press releases issued by ISAF during the 22-month period. Figure 9 shows the number of operations that were explicitly described as capture-or-kill raids in the ISAF press releases shown per month. The chart shows an overall increase in numbers up until June 2011, after which there is a significant decline; this trend was observed in overall number of incidents and number of those killed as well (see Figures 4 and 8). The biggest increase took place from February 2011 (89 operations) to June 2011 (215).

Figure 10 shows the same trends by plotting the operational pace of the capture-or-kill raids. This ranges from a low in January 2010 (an average of 0.7 capture-or-kill raids per day) up to June 2011 (7.2 capture-or-kill raids per day), followed by a steep decline. Note,

however, that these figures represent only what ISAF chose to release; while they broadly match the aggregate numbers issued (see below), they do not present the complete picture, and, possibly, significant numbers of capture-or-kill operations were not reported. For instance, it seems (and would make sense) that completely unsuccessful (or uneventful) operations – that is, when nobody was killed or captured, and no shots were fired by ISAF forces – were not reported. The authors hope more data will come to light that can illustrate these trends more accurately.

Figure 11 superimposes the first nine months of 2010 and 2011, plotting the number of capture-or-kill raids. Overall numbers clearly increased from 2010 to 2011, and the trends from June to August of both years are also represented (an increase in 2010 but a decline in 2011).

<sup>32</sup> See footnote 16 for a description of a 'capture-or-kill' raid, for the purposes of this study.

**Figure 10. Average number of capture-or-kill raids per day**

**Figure 11. Number of capture-or-kill raids, January-August 2010 and 2011**

**Figure 12. Number of 'kills' and 'captures' during capture-or-kill raids**


### 3.2 How many people are being detained or killed on capture-or-kill raids?

Figure 12 shows the minimum number of people detained and killed during capture-or-kill raids, as specified in the ISAF press releases.<sup>33</sup> Given the tendency towards non-specificity of numbers, particularly in recent months, the actual or total of those killed or captured is likely to be higher. Broadly speaking, the number of kills and captures mirror each other. There are two exceptions:

- First, from August to September 2010 when the number of captures increased

from 369 per month to 447, while the number of kills decreased from 184 to 79;

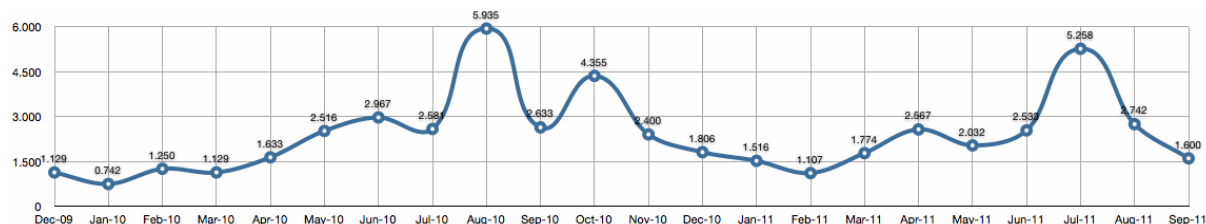
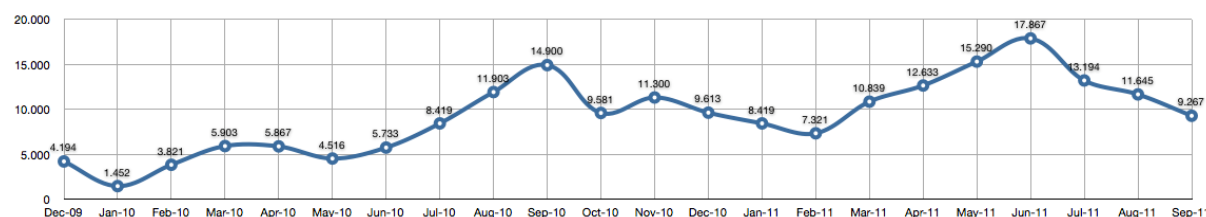
- Second, from June to July 2011, when the number of captures decreased from 536 to 409 while the number of kills increased from 76 to 163.

Note that the number of those being captured during capture-or-kill operations, as well as those being killed, decreased from June to September 2011 (as was observed in more general terms above in figures 4 and 8).

Figure 13 shows the minimum number of people killed on average per day during capture-or-kill raids, measured by month. The overall trend shows numbers increasing during the spring and summer of 2010, a decline during the subsequent winter, and an increase from February 2011 onwards (rising from 1.1

<sup>33</sup> For the entire 22-month period examined for this report, this amounts to a minimum average of 2.38 people killed and 9.27 people detained in capture-or-kill raids every day (for the 669 days).



**Figure 13. Number of 'kills' per day during capture-or-kill raids****Figure 14. Number of 'captures' per day during capture-or-kill raids**

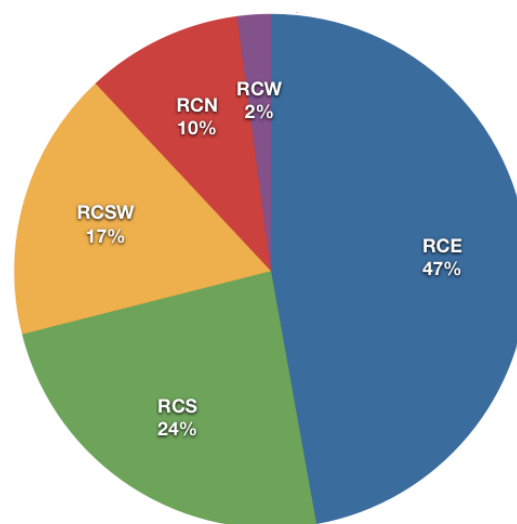
people killed every day in February 2011 to a high of 5.3 people killed every day in July). This declined in the two months after that.

Figure 14 shows the minimum number of people detained on average every day during capture-or-kill raids. These numbers generally rose over the course of the 22-month period, declining only during the winter season of 2010/2011. By June 2011, 17.9 people were being detained every day across Afghanistan in capture-or-kill operations. This number then declined over the three subsequent months; the reason for this decline is not clear. September 2011 saw a lower number of these captures (9.3) than March of the same year (10.8).

### 3.3 How are the capture-or-kill raids distributed geographically?

Figure 15 shows the total capture-or-kill operations broken down by ISAF regional command designation. These proportions are broadly similar to the total number of military operations as already seen in Figure 1, with the exception that Figure 1 allocates a greater percentage to the two provinces in RC-Southwest presumably on account of incidents while on patrol in Helmand. The disparity between RC-East and the other regional commands is partly a reflection of the larger number of provinces (fifteen) that RC-

East contains. When adjusted to take into account the number of provinces per regional command, the chart looks like Figure 16. Figure 16 shows that on a per-province basis RC-Southwest and RC-South had a higher average of capture-or-kill operations per province (201 and 141 respectively) over the 22-month period.

**Figure 15. Number of capture-or-kill raids per ISAF command**

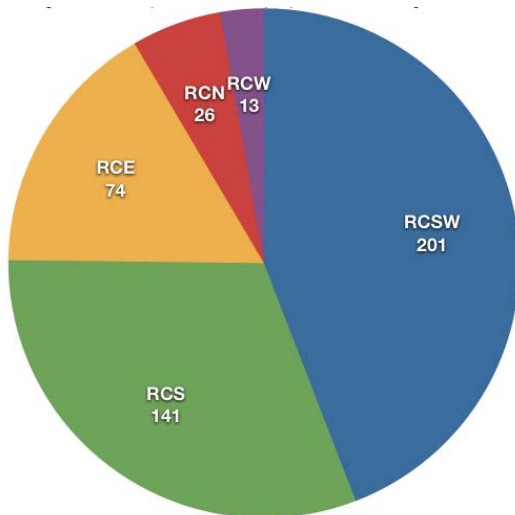
Note: 1 December 2009 to 30 September 2011

Figure 17 shows the ten provinces with the highest number of capture-or-kill operations that took place during the 22-month period. Kandahar, Khost and Helmand are again clear

front-runners, each with a little more than 360 such operations. These three provinces represent 47.9 per cent of the total capture-or-kill raids recorded during the 22 months. It seems to indicate that ISAF capture-or-kill operations were quite focused on just a few locations. This could be on account of a specific decision taken to focus on a particular area; something more structural (having better sources of information in certain places, for example); perhaps related to troop strength in certain places; or more reporting from these provinces.

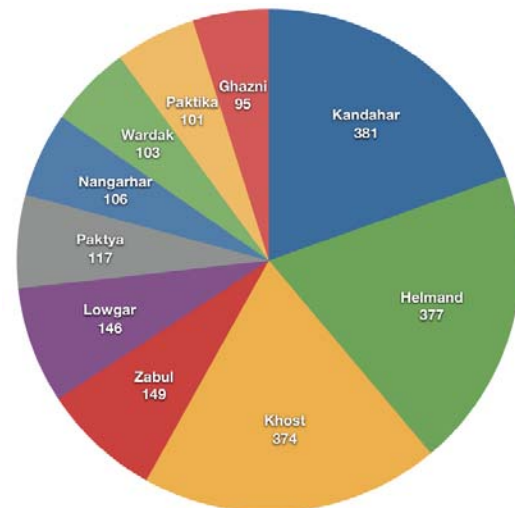
Figure 18 shows the ten provinces with the most individuals killed during capture-or-kill raids during the 22-month period. The top province, Helmand, had more than twice the number of the next province on the list, Nangarhar. Nangarhar, incidentally, was seventh in Figure 17, and its prominence in Figure 18 illustrates a considerably higher than average number of kills per raid (1.76 versus 0.57 in Khost, for example).

**Figure 16. Adjusted proportional representation of distribution of capture-or-kill raids per ISAF command**



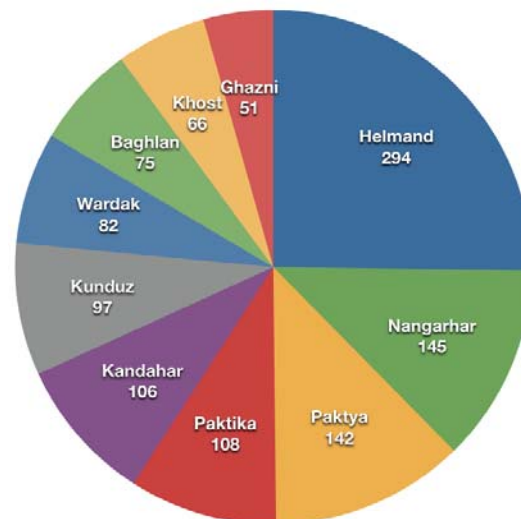
*Note:* This chart equalises the data to take into account of the number of provinces each regional command has. It represents the average numbers of raids per province within each regional command (ie, the figure will change depending on how many provinces are contained in a particular regional command).

**Figure 17. Top 10 provinces with capture-or-kill raids**



*Note:* Shows number of raids.

**Figure 18. Ten provinces with most individuals killed during capture-or-kill raids**

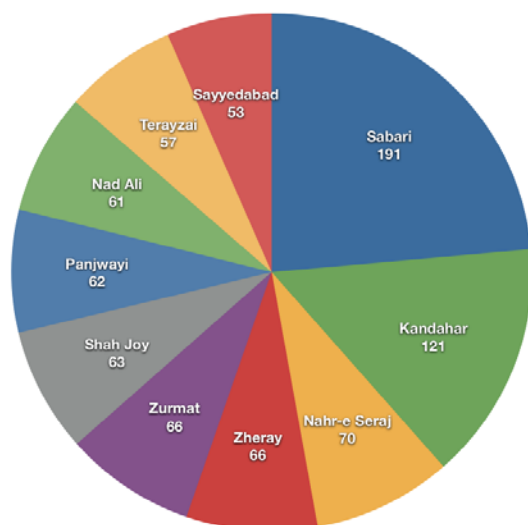


*Note:* Shows number of people killed.

Figure 19 shows districts with the most capture-or-kill raids. This corresponds to the ratios of the total number of operations seen in Figure 3. The highest three districts on this chart – Sabari, Kandahar and Nahr-e Seraj – represent 16.2 per cent of all capture-or-kill raids recorded over the 22 months. When assessing the campaigns district-by-district, therefore, some clearly had disproportionate

numbers of capture-or-kill raids compared to the rest of Afghanistan's 398 districts.<sup>34</sup>

**Figure 19. Top 10 districts with capture-or-kill raids**



*Note:* Shows number of raids.

### 3.4 Who is targeted in capture-or-kill raids?

The press releases describing capture-or-kill raids almost always mention a specific target, both of a specific group as well as the position that the individual or individuals occupied within it.<sup>35</sup> The group most-often specified was 'the Taliban' (or sometimes just 'the insurgency') but 15 other groups were also mentioned.<sup>36</sup> Of those, only four were the

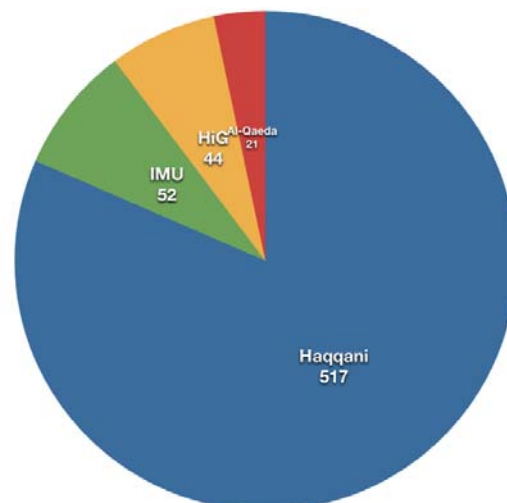
<sup>34</sup> The figure of 398 is from the National Solidarity Programme's website: [www.nspafghanistan.org/default.aspx?sel=26](http://www.nspafghanistan.org/default.aspx?sel=26) (accessed 9 October 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Positions within the insurgency hierarchy that were mentioned: leader, commander, facilitator, insurgent, militant, mayor, terrorist, explosive device doctor, IED maker, expert, chief of staff, IED emplacer, financier, fundraiser, military commission member, commissioner, planner, enabler, distributor, bomb-maker, officer and variations and combinations of these.

<sup>36</sup> These were (in order of frequency) Haqqani network, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Hizb-e Islami (Hekmatyar), al-Qaeda, criminals, Kunduz Attack Network, Lashkar-e Taiba, Hizb-e Islami (Khalis), Islamic Jihad Union, Jama'at ul-Da'wa wal-Qur'an, Mullah Dadullah Lang Allegiance

targets of significant numbers of capture-or-kill raids: the Haqqani network, the IMU, Hizb-e Islami (Hekmatyar) and al-Qaeda. Figure 20 shows the relative proportion of raids targeting these groups.<sup>37</sup>

**Figure 20. Top four non-Taleban groups mentioned in ISAF incidents involving a 'kill' or a 'capture'**



*Note:* Shows number of incidents in which the group is mentioned.

The raids in Figure 20, targeting these four groups, represent only 26.8 per cent of the total capture-or-kill raids conducted during the 22-month period. The main effort (that is, the other 73.2 per cent) seems to be directed at the Taliban insurgency in general. Note, too, that Figure 20 represents the number of times the respective groups were mentioned in the ISAF press releases; not all of these incidents will have resulted in actual detentions or deaths of members of these

Network, Net Khaliq Attack Cell, Taj Mir Jawad Network, 'The Jahadi Group' and Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan.

<sup>37</sup> This report does not attempt to check whether this targeting or group-name classification was accurate, although press releases indicated it might not be. Press releases #2010-08-CA-165 and #2010-08-CA-179, for example, refer to the same incident and same individual; in the first he is 'an Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan [IMU] sub-commander'; in the second he is 'a dual-hatted Taliban sub-commander and Al Qaeda group leader'.

groups (although others may have been killed or detained, since otherwise the press release would not have not been included in the dataset).

Figure 21 shows the data for Figure 20 disaggregated by province. As noted above, most incidents involving the Haqqani group took place in Khost, Paktika or Paktia. For incidents involving the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the most common locations were Baghlan, Kunduz and Takhar. Over half of the incidents involving Hizb-e Islami (Hekmatyar) took place in Khost.<sup>38</sup>

**Figure 21. Locations where main non-Taleban groups were targeted (by province)**

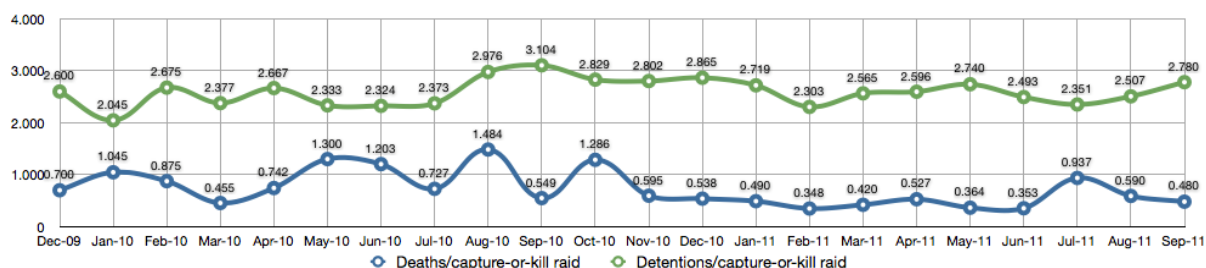
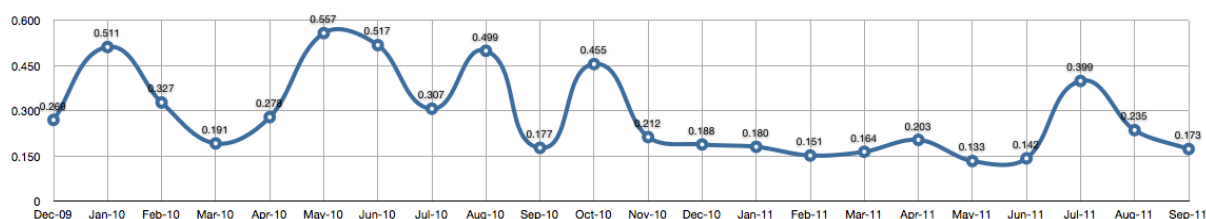
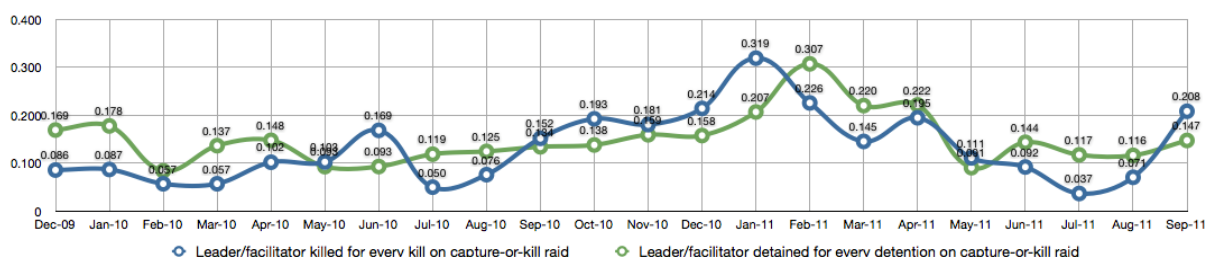
	Al-Qaeda	Haq-qani	IMU	HiG
<b>Badakhshan</b>			1	
<b>Baghlan</b>		1	12	3
<b>Balkh</b>	1	1	3	
<b>Ghazni</b>	2	6	1	
<b>Helmand</b>		1		
<b>Kabul</b>		2		1
<b>Kandahar</b>	1	3		
<b>Khost</b>		349		25
<b>Kunar</b>	5			1
<b>Kunduz</b>	2		22	
<b>Laghman</b>				1
<b>Logar</b>		6		1
<b>Nangarhar</b>	6	3		3
<b>Paktika</b>		60	1	
<b>Paktia</b>	1	79		
<b>Parwan</b>				2
<b>Samangan</b>			2	
<b>Takhar</b>			10	
<b>Wardak</b>		5		7
<b>Zabul</b>	3	1		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>517</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>44</b>

<sup>38</sup> Needless to say, but – short of ISAF opening up their data to outside scrutiny – there is no way to assess the veracity of claims that the capture-or-kill raids were targeting bona fide members of these groups. The data does give an indication, however, of whom ISAF thought they were targeting, so it retains some value even though this is not ideal.

### 3.5 How precise is the targeting?

Regarding the key questions as to the accuracy and precision of ISAF's capture-or-kill raids, the data examined for this report can only tell us so much. More research is needed, either using ISAF's internal data sources or by examining individual raids contained in the press release data set with the help of field interviews and by cross-referencing contemporary media reports. Such an investigation is outside the scope of this report, although it is important that it gets carried out. What can be done with the current data is to look at the average number of deaths and detentions per raid and the average number of leaders killed and detained compared to the total number of deaths and detentions; this allows for an evaluation of whether ISAF is managing to capture rather than kill, and the extent to which the targeting operations are mainly finding 'leaders' and 'facilitators' or others as well.

Figure 22 shows the average number of deaths and detentions that happen for every capture-or-kill raid each month. The number of reported detentions per raid per month varies only slightly throughout the 22-month period. This is noteworthy since although the aggregate number of capture-or-kill raids has increased throughout, the ratio of captures during these raids has remained somewhat steady at around 2.592 captures per raid. The number of reported deaths, however, seems to have fluctuated more often. It is unclear what caused these fluctuations, but changes in ISAF's internal guidelines for these raids, for example, could have played a role. The rising number of detentions per raid from July 2011 onwards suggests that although the overall number of raids is decreasing (see Figure 9), the number being detained in each raid is increasing. Note, too, that – aside from a spike in July 2011 – the number of those being killed on capture-or-kill raids from November 2010 has been almost universally below the same figures for the previous year. This would seem to suggest that ISAF is taking more care when it comes to the use of lethal force in capture-or-kill operations.

**Figure 22. Average number of deaths and detentions per capture-or-kill raid****Figure 23. Number of deaths for every detention during capture-or-kill raids****Figure 24. Number of 'leaders' or 'facilitators' killed or detained for every death or detention on capture-or-kill raids**

The suggestion that ISAF may be taking more care seems to be borne out in Figure 23, which shows the number of deaths for every detention during capture-or-kill raids. The numbers fluctuate quite rapidly from month to month until November 2010, when the ratio settles down and remains low (until a large spike in July 2011).

Figure 24 shows the number of 'leaders' or 'facilitators'<sup>39</sup> killed or detained for every 'kill' or 'capture' on the kill-capture raids. This allows for an assessment of whether ISAF feels successful by its own estimation. (This assumes, of course, that ISAF is seeking to be as precise in its targeting as possible and that it is trying to reduce the number of extra or

unintended deaths or detentions as far as possible).<sup>40</sup> In Figure 24, we can see, for example, that there were on average 0.05 leaders or facilitators killed for every other individual killed on capture-or-kill raids in July 2010; put another way, 20 individuals were

<sup>39</sup> ISAF's assessment or understanding of whom they are targeting is assumed to be sound for the purposes of this illustration.

<sup>40</sup> Another possible explanation is that ISAF may be pursuing a 'networking' strategy of targeting insurgents. This involves detaining not just the suspect being searched for, but also known associates, family and so on in order to learn more about the insurgent networks. See the report on night raids by the Open Society Foundations for more: 'The Cost of Kill/Capture: Impact of the Night Raid Surge on Afghan Civilians' *Open Society Foundations* September 2011 at [www.soros.org/initiatives/washington/articles\\_publications/publications/the-cost-of-kill-capture-impact-of-the-night-raid-surge-on-afghan-civilians-20110919](http://www.soros.org/initiatives/washington/articles_publications/publications/the-cost-of-kill-capture-impact-of-the-night-raid-surge-on-afghan-civilians-20110919) (accessed 4 October 2011).



killed for every 'leader' or 'facilitator' killed in capture-or-kill raids during that month. Aside from July 2011 (0.037) this was the least 'successful' month. The efficacy seems to improve month by month until January 2011 (0.319), at which point it starts to decline again.

One possible hypothesis that could explain this is that as operational pace increases (that is, during the spring and summer; see Figure 10), the inaccuracy and likeliness of killing individuals unintentionally on the capture-or-kill raids increases as well. At the same time, not every non-leader death or detention is necessarily unintentional (see Footnote 42 below). This could be the result of a networked approach to ISAF's targeting. There is not enough information available in the public domain to be able to make an accurate assessment of the reasons behind this trend.

Aside from cross-checking each individual event with other sources and field interviews, the press release data set does not allow for a more finely-grained assessment of the precision of the targeting than that offered here.

## 4 ANALYSIS

This section assesses ISAF's claims that they are killing large numbers of insurgent 'leaders'; examines the differences between the ratios of deaths versus detentions found in different areas of the country; and attempts to distinguish between the commands of Generals McChrystal, Petraeus and Allen in as much as the data offers answers.

### 4.1 ISAF's criteria for 'insurgent leaders'

Apart from the daily press releases, ISAF (or, sometimes, American military sources) has also released aggregate data relating to these operations to the media at several occasions since early-mid 2010. The details of these claims have been compiled and displayed in a timeline format.<sup>41</sup> Although it is impossible to check these claims since only ISAF has the full

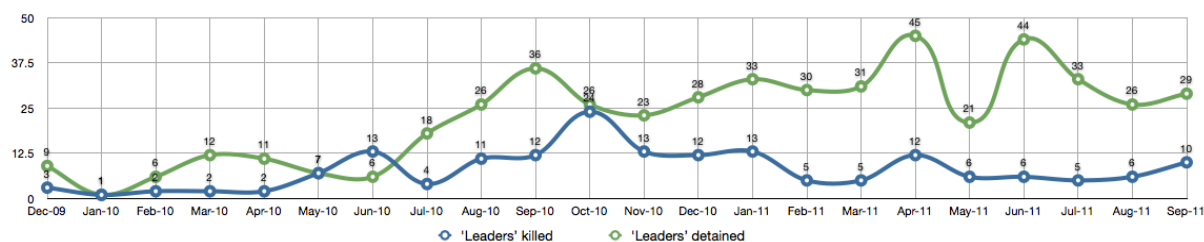
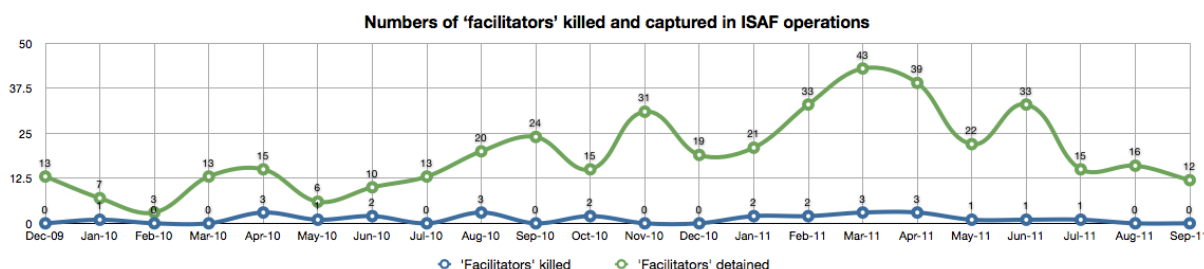
data set relating to all operations that it carried out, they are worth examining in more detail – and cross-referencing with the figures gathered from ISAF's press releases. This is particularly pertinent since ISAF seems to have attempted to obfuscate certain trends in the past.<sup>42</sup>

Of particular interest to the authors of this report were the claims made about the number of 'leaders' captured or killed in ISAF operations. At first glance, when they started to be released in 2010, they seemed very high. There was no way to assess the veracity of the claims, which were in any case quickly accepted by many media outlets and organisations in the United States, United Kingdom and elsewhere.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, the report by Gareth Porter showing that over 80% of those detained during a 90-day period in summer 2010 were released within days of their detentions. Gareth Porter, 'Petraeus' captured 'Taliban' were civilians,' *Asia Times* (online), 14 June 2011 [www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/MF14Df01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/MF14Df01.html) (accessed 4 September 2011). See also Kate Clark, 'Civilian Casualties 1: Progress in the war or a 'perpetually escalating stalemate'?' *Afghanistan Analysts Network* 21 July 2011. [www.aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=1957](http://www.aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=1957) (accessed 4 September 2011). A UN report on violent incident metrics released on 21 September 2011 (see 'The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security' at [www.washingtonpost.com/r/2010-2019/WashingtonPost/2011/09/29/Foreign/Graphics/110921\\_SG\\_Report\\_%20Afghanistan\\_Sept%202011.pdf](http://www.washingtonpost.com/r/2010-2019/WashingtonPost/2011/09/29/Foreign/Graphics/110921_SG_Report_%20Afghanistan_Sept%202011.pdf)) even prompted ISAF to hold a press conference and issue a document in response. See 'ISAF Violence Statistics and Analysis Media Brief' ISAF 29 September 2011 at [www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/isaf-violence-statistics-and-analysis-media-brief-sept.-29-2011.html](http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/isaf-violence-statistics-and-analysis-media-brief-sept.-29-2011.html).

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Tom Vanden Brook, 'U.S.: Raids have taken out 900 Taliban leaders' *USA Today* 7 March 2011 at [www.usatoday.com/news/world/afghanistan/2011-03-08-taliban-08\\_ST\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/afghanistan/2011-03-08-taliban-08_ST_N.htm) (accessed 7 September 2011) or Thom Shanker and Alissa Rubin, 'Quest to Neutralize Afghan Militants Is Showing Glimpses of Success, NATO Says' *The New York Times* 28 June 2010 at [www.nytimes.com/2010/06/29/world/asia/29military.html?partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&pagewanted=print](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/29/world/asia/29military.html?partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&pagewanted=print) for such claims.

<sup>41</sup> See [www.alexstrick.com/killcapture](http://www.alexstrick.com/killcapture).

**Figure 25. Number of 'leaders' killed and captured in ISAF operations****Figure 26. Number of 'facilitators' killed and captured in ISAF operations**

Figures 25 and 26 show the number of 'leaders' and 'facilitators' (see the methodology section for the precise definitions used for these terms) killed and captured in ISAF operations, based on the ISAF press releases. These numbers are substantially lower than those specified in many of the aggregate figures released to the media.<sup>44</sup> This is also assuming that all the individuals cited as being 'leaders' or 'facilitators' actually function as such; given that detainees are frequently released soon after capture, one might assume that at least some of those released were not, in fact, 'leaders' or 'facilitators'.

A chart showing several examples of the cross-referenced data is available at [tinyurl.com/isafprcrossref](http://tinyurl.com/isafprcrossref). (For each entry, the first row represents the claims that were made by ISAF or NATO, and the second row represents the figures as found in the press release data set studied here.) A selection is represented in Figure 27.

**Figure 27. Some examples of cross-referenced claims**

	Aggregate claims released to the media state . . .	ISAF press releases state . . .
8 July 2010–7 Mar. 2010	<b>2448</b> 'insurgents' killed <b>2870</b> 'insurgents' detained	<b>1920</b> individuals killed <b>2740</b> individuals detained
22–29 Jul. 2010	<b>75</b> 'insurgents' detained <b>42</b> capture-or-kill raids	<b>79</b> individuals detained <b>30</b> capture-or-kill raids
1–19 Jan. 2011	<b>175</b> individuals detained	<b>176</b> individuals detained
24 Apr. 2010–15 Apr. 2011	Almost <b>8000</b> 'insurgent fighters' detained <b>3200+</b> killed	<b>3764</b> individuals detained <b>2650</b> individuals killed
8 Jul. 2010–7 Mar. 2011	<b>900</b> Taliban leaders killed or detained	<b>500</b> 'leaders' and 'facilitators' killed or captured

<sup>44</sup> See Figure 27 for examples of these aggregate figures.

Two initial observations can be drawn from this comparison:

First, the data contained in the ISAF press releases, aggregated for this report, is sometimes very close<sup>45</sup> to the total estimates provided by the military in separate press releases or in statements to the media. For example, an article in *The Washington Post* stated that 'U.S. and Afghan commanders released data that showed they had killed 2,448 insurgents. . . . An additional 2,870 insurgents had been detained.'<sup>46</sup> The aggregate figures from the ISAF press releases indicate that a minimum of 1,920 individuals were killed and 2,740 captured.

Similarly, a press release<sup>47</sup> from July 2010 stated that 75 insurgents were captured in 42 capture-or-kill raids between 22 and 29 July 2010. The aggregate data for this period amount to a minimum of 79 individuals detained in a minimum of 30 capture-or-kill raids. A separate press release<sup>48</sup> stated that 175 individuals were detained from 1-19 January 2011; the aggregate data shows a minimum of 176 individuals detained.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Where an ISAF claim was sufficiently precise as to allow cross-referencing with the press release data set, there were more instances where this roughly matched our own set of aggregate numbers than not. However, there were still instances where it was unclear exactly why a discrepancy existed. This is, in part, a result of the opaque nature of ISAF's data reporting process (ie, how numbers are calculated).

<sup>46</sup> Greg Jaffe, 'Gates says U.S. 'well-positioned' for some troop reductions in Afghanistan in July', *The Washington Post* 8 March 2011 at [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/03/07/AR2011030704489.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/03/07/AR2011030704489.html) (accessed 6 September 2011).

<sup>47</sup> ISAF press release #2010-07-CA-208. [www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/afghan-led-security-forces-roll-up-several-insurgent-leaders-in-afghanistan-this-week.html](http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/afghan-led-security-forces-roll-up-several-insurgent-leaders-in-afghanistan-this-week.html) (accessed 11 October 2011).

<sup>48</sup> ISAF press release #2011-01-S-226. [www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/afghan-coalition-forces-detain-taliban-facilitator-in-paktiya.html](http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/afghan-coalition-forces-detain-taliban-facilitator-in-paktiya.html) (accessed 11 October 2011).

<sup>49</sup> Note that all of these figures make reference to total numbers of 'suspected insurgents' detained or killed.

There are also instances where the numbers do not match quite as neatly. The figures provided to Stephen Grey and published following the release of a PBS/Frontline documentary were that almost 8,000 'insurgent fighters' had been detained and 'more than 3,200 killed' between 24 April 2010 and 15 April 2011 in operations carried out by special forces.<sup>50</sup> The press release data examined for this report contains records for the detention of 3,764 individuals and the death of 2,650. Another report quotes figures released in December 2010: 'more than 4,100 'enemy fighters' captured in the previous six months, along with 2,000 rank and file Taliban killed.'<sup>51</sup> The press release data for the same period accounts only for 2,052 individuals captured and 1,527 killed.

The discrepancy starts to widen even more when examining the statements of how many 'insurgent leaders' were detained or killed. One point to bear in mind for what follows is that the ISAF press releases quite often fail to distinguish between a 'facilitator' and a 'leader'. Sometimes a press release begins by identifying someone as a 'facilitator' only to refer to that individual as a 'leader' later on in the statement.<sup>52</sup>

*The New York Times*, for example, published figures from ISAF on 29 June 2011 stating that

<sup>50</sup> Katherine Tiedemann, "'Kill Capture': A live chat with PBS' Frontline' *The Afpak Channel* 10 May 2011 at [www.afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/05/10/kill\\_capture\\_a\\_live\\_chat\\_with\\_pbs\\_frontline](http://www.afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/05/10/kill_capture_a_live_chat_with_pbs_frontline) (accessed 6 September 2011). This may provide an indication of the magnitude of special force operations that are not reported on in ISAF's press releases.

<sup>51</sup> Gareth Porter, 'Ninety Percent of Petraeus's Captured "Taliban" Were Civilians' *Inter Press Service* 12 June 2011 at [www.ipsnews.net/print.asp?idnews=56038](http://www.ipsnews.net/print.asp?idnews=56038) (accessed 6 September 2011).

<sup>52</sup> The word 'senior' also seems overused. ISAF press release #2011-04-S-074 described the death of a 'senior Haqqani leader' but later mentioned that he only led 20 fighters. This number would probably make him, in reality, only a lower-mid-level commander, not even a mid-level commander. [www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/isaf-confirms-haqqani-leaders-killed-during-security-operation.html](http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/isaf-confirms-haqqani-leaders-killed-during-security-operation.html) (accessed 11 October 2011).

'about 130 important insurgent figures' had been killed or captured 'in the last 120 days' (presumably referring to 30 March 2010 to 29 June 2010).<sup>53</sup> The press releases, however, only describe the following minimum numbers: 22 leaders captured, 22 leaders killed, 30 facilitators captured and 6 facilitators killed. Even all of these together do not match the number of 'important insurgent figures' that was claimed in the news article. Furthermore, it is unclear why facilitators should be classified as 'leaders'. ISAF's own descriptions of the work that these facilitators do seems to belie this fact.<sup>54</sup> Remarks by an American commander operating in Kandahar described by a journalist would also seem to suggest the classification is loosely applied:

He [the American commander] told me that when he arrived he was given a list of people that were considered 'Taliban facilitators,' people who provided safe houses and support. But, he said, these people were not really facilitators at all, just influential people, village elders and landowners, who had no choice but to cooperate with the Taliban when they controlled the area. Now, he said, 'they are working with us instead.'<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Shanker and Rubin, 'Quest to Neutralize Afghan Militants' at [www.nytimes.com/2010/06/29/world/asia/29military.html?partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&pagewanted=print](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/29/world/asia/29military.html?partner=rssnyt&emc=rss&pagewanted=print).

<sup>54</sup> ISAF press release #2010-10-CA-040 uses the terms 'facilitator' and 'leader' interchangeably. ISAF press release #2011-03-S-099 does the same. Press release #2011-06-S-071 mentions that a particular facilitator that was targeted 'assisted in the transfer of Uzbeks and Farsi speaking foreign fighters from Pakistan into Afghanistan'. Press releases #2010-09-CA-152 and #2010-09-CA-175 (both referencing the same event) use the terms 'facilitator' and 'commander' interchangeably to describe a single individual. Press release #2009-12-CA-072 describes a facilitator who 'is responsible for supplying IED materials to other militants in the area'. All press releases are available on the ISAF website at [www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/index.php](http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/index.php) (accessed 11 October 2011).

<sup>55</sup> John D McHugh, 'Endgame?' *Aljazeera* 15 June 2011 at [www.english.aljazeera.net/programmes/peopleandpower/2011/06/20116147412812990.html](http://www.english.aljazeera.net/programmes/peopleandpower/2011/06/20116147412812990.html) (accessed 19 September 2011).

An ISAF spokesman offered the following definition of a facilitator: 'A facilitator is someone who routinely supports people carrying out the insurgency. . . . In isolation, [giving someone a meal, or drinking tea] does not make one a facilitator.'<sup>56</sup> An exchange between one of the authors of this report and ISAF over twitter elicited the following response:

These facilitators are organizing networks. . . . – Yes, they are 'key leaders', capture is crucial to security.<sup>57</sup>

A story in *USA Today* on 8 March 2011, quoting figures provided by the US military, stated in its headline that 'raids have taken out 900 Taleban leaders.'<sup>58</sup> The body of the story states that these 'Taleban leaders' were captured or killed over a period of 10 months (approximately July 2010 to March 2011). The aggregate data in the press releases, however, describes the following: 215 leaders captured, 95 leaders killed, 180 facilitators captured, 10 killed. Even if we assume that all those described as 'leaders' and 'facilitators' in the press releases were who ISAF thought they were, that still leaves a shortfall of 400 individuals.

Another more recent example can be used: ISAF issued a press release on 3 September 2011 stating that their forces had killed someone called Sabir Lal, an alleged 'key affiliate' of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. At the end of that press release, they make the claim that 'coalition security forces have captured or killed more than 40 al-Qaida insurgents in eastern Afghanistan this year.'<sup>59</sup> The operations targeting al-Qaeda in 2011 as

<sup>56</sup> Jean MacKenzie, 'Night raids by US Special Forces anger Afghans' *GlobalPost* 17 March 2011 at [www.globalpost.com/print/5630894](http://www.globalpost.com/print/5630894) (accessed 19 September 2011).

<sup>57</sup> ISAFmedia 9 November 2010 at [www.twitter.com/#!/ISAFmedia/statuses/1918179106361345](https://twitter.com/#!/ISAFmedia/statuses/1918179106361345) (accessed 4 October 2011).

<sup>58</sup> Vanden Brook, 'U.S.: Raids' at [www.usatoday.com/news/world/afghanistan/2011-03-08-taliban08\\_ST\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/afghanistan/2011-03-08-taliban08_ST_N.htm) (accessed 17 September 2011).

<sup>59</sup> ISAF press release #2011-09-S-002. [www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/isaf-joint-command-morning-operational-update-sept-3-2011.html](http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/isaf-releases/isaf-joint-command-morning-operational-update-sept-3-2011.html) (accessed 11 October 2011).

mentioned in the ISAF press releases, however, were as follows:<sup>60</sup>

- **7 January 2011** (2011-01-S-091). 'Several' (minimum 3) suspected insurgents killed in an airstrike in Pech Valley, Kunar, while pursuing an 'al-Qaida-associated Taliban leader'. Later 'confirmed' that he was 'Qari Baryal, an al-Qaida-associated Taliban leader' (total: 1 'associated leader' killed).
- **8 January 2011** (2011-01-S-099). One suspected insurgent detained in Chaprahar, Nangarhar, while in pursuit of an 'al Qaida-associated Taliban leader'.
- **11 April 2011** (2011-04-S-039). Taleban leader detained in Behsud district, Nangarhar province. 'The leader operated for al-Qaida and the Taliban' (total: 1 leader captured).
- **11 April 2011** (2011-04-S-042; 2011-04-S-047; 2011-04-S-079). Several (minimum 3) 'al-Qaida insurgents, including the suspected al-Qaida leader in Kunar province' killed in Dangam district, Kunar province, in an airstrike. Editorial comment: 25 leaders and fighters killed between 14 March and 13 April (total: about 3 killed).
- **19 April 2011** (2011-04-S-060). Seventeen insurgents killed 'including foreign fighters' and one detained while searching for a senior al-Qaada leader in Dangam district, Kunar province (total: 17 killed, no indication who is Al-Qaada or not).
- **23 June 2011** (2011-06-S-079). Five detained in Gailan district, Ghazni province, with suspected ties to al-Qaada (total: 5 detained on suspicion of having ties to Al-Qaada).
- **2 September 2011** (2011-09-S-002). Key al-Qaada affiliate killed in Jalalabad district, Nangarhar province (total: 1 killed and several – minimum 3 – suspected insurgents captured).

**TOTAL: 22 killed and 10 captured.**

<sup>60</sup> Note that for all of Afghanistan there were 13 operations mentioned, several of which captured only 'Afghan insurgents' and three of which took place in either Zabul or Balkh. Ghazni (see No 6) is technically part of RC-East, so it was included in this list.

Note that the numbers don't reach the minimum '40' claimed in the press release, even if we assume that all those listed were 'al-Qaada insurgents'.<sup>61</sup> Several of those in the list above would have been Afghans, and many are simply noted as having had 'suspected ties'.

These various examples illustrate the shortfalls of the classifications used in ISAF press releases. Moreover, without verification of what exactly ISAF means by the term 'leader', these claims cannot be used as indicators of success in the way that they seem to have been intended.<sup>62</sup>

## 4.2 Provincial differences

An examination of the data on the provincial level offers some insights as to the nature of the operations being conducted. When comparing the different ratios of kills to captures from ISAF operations around the country, two provinces emerge as clear leaders: Nooristan and Kunar. Over the 22-month period in Nooristan, there were a minimum of 52 individuals killed but only one captured;<sup>63</sup> in Kunar, there were 456 killed but only 32 captured. Moreover, there were only 2 and 8 capture-or-kill operations carried out (respectively) in these two provinces. This offers a strong indication that the war ISAF is fighting in eastern Afghanistan is not being waged through the use of capture-or-kill operations, but rather with the use of air assets. Indeed, Kunar and Nooristan were

<sup>61</sup> There is also a far broader issue with the military's traditional association of the Taleban with al-Qaada in Afghanistan. See Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, *An Enemy We Created: The Myth of the Taliban / Al-Qaada Merger in Afghanistan, 1970-2010* (London, Hurst 2011) for more.

<sup>62</sup> Another instance where analysts have taken issue with claims made by General Petraeus was outlined here: Michael Hughes, 'Petraeus uses misleading data to claim progress in Afghanistan' 21 July 2011 at [www.examiner.com/afghanistan-headlines-in-national/petraeus-claims-of-progress-afghanistan-refuted-by-aid-organizations?render=print#print](http://www.examiner.com/afghanistan-headlines-in-national/petraeus-claims-of-progress-afghanistan-refuted-by-aid-organizations?render=print#print) (accessed 19 September 2011).

<sup>63</sup> These figures refer to total amounts, not per-month averages.



among the provinces with the lowest ratio of capture-or-kill raids among the total operations (0.4 and 0.12 respectively).

Other provinces also had high ratios of deaths versus detentions: in Kapisa there were 3.3 deaths for every detention, in Faryab there were 3.11 deaths for every detention, in Badghis, 2.98 deaths for every detention, and in Laghman, 2.74 deaths for every detention.<sup>64</sup>

Khost, Logar, Balkh and Nangarhar had the highest ratio of raids versus total operations at 0.91, 0.9, 0.89 and 0.87 respectively. With the exception of Balkh – which saw only 33 capture-or-kill raids and where these kinds of operations are relatively new – this suggests that one of the primary instruments of ISAF activity in these provinces is the capture-or-kill raid.<sup>65</sup>

In terms of violence or disruption caused by ISAF operations, Helmand, Kandahar and Khost are (as in Figure 2) the clear leaders. Helmand saw an average of 3.12 individuals killed or captured in ISAF operations every day over the 22 months; Kandahar had 2.38 and Khost, 2.12.

#### 4.3 Generals McChrystal, Petraeus and Allen

The data used for this report will undoubtedly prompt observations and speculations as to the reasons for certain shifts and trends. More detailed research is needed on internal ISAF dynamics. It is, however, possible to use the data for an initial assessment as to whether there was a difference between the different ISAF commanders in terms of the effects on operations.

Figures 4 and 9 both suggest answers. The departure of General McChrystal and the arrival of General Petraeus in the last week of June 2010 saw a significant increase both in the total number of capture-or-kill raids as

well as in operational pace. Moreover, the total number of those killed rose significantly from July to August 2010 (from 115 to 394). Similar increases were seen in the average number of those killed and captured in capture-or-kill raids from July to August 2010 (see Figure 22).

The period following the departure of General Petraeus on 18 July 2011 – while still too short to draw definitive conclusions – has seen a downturn in the overall number of detentions and deaths (Figure 4), number of capture-or-kill raids (Figure 9), the number of those being killed on average in every capture-or-kill raid (Figure 22). The counter-argument (that this reflects a seasonal downturn or the ‘end of the fighting season’) is not reflected in the data for the previous year, when these metrics were all increasing.

Regardless of the reasons for this shift, it would seem that the period during which General Petraeus was ISAF commander was characterised (from a military perspective) by an increase in violent incidents or kinetic operations and capture-or-kill raids.

A comparison of the months of January–September in 2010 and 2011 allows for some observations as to where the ‘surge’ has been felt on the provincial level.

Provinces with large increases in total operations resulting in deaths or detentions include Balkh (from 1 to 36 operations), Laghman (from 2 to 19 operations), Baghlan (from 9 to 60), Kunar (from 11 to 42), Wardak (from 21 to 75) and Uruzgan (from 14 to 41); Faryab also increased from 0 incidents in January–September 2010 to 24 for the same period in 2011. None of these saw more than 75 operations in total from January–September 2011, so these numbers are still relatively small. When we look at how the number of capture-or-kill raids increased from 2010 to 2011 during the same period, the same provinces emerge at the top (except for Kunar, which only saw two capture-or-kill raids from January–August 2011): from Balkh, with an increase in the number of raids from 1 to 32, to Uruzgan (from 6 to 24). Khost saw a noteworthy increase from 89 to 221 capture-or-kill raids; Khost was the only one of the top

<sup>64</sup> The total numbers over the 22 months were as follows: 76 deaths in Kapisa, 115 in Faryab, 140 in Badghis and 93 in Laghman.

<sup>65</sup> The total numbers of raids over the 22 months for those provinces were as follows: 29 in Balkh, 362 in Khost, 137 in Logar, and 98 in Nangarhar.

ten provinces that had already seen significant numbers of raids in 2010.

When we compare the number of deaths during the two periods, Kunar is at the top of the list of those provinces that saw a significant increase in the number of deaths: from 54 to 286. Other provinces that hadn't seen much ISAF activity in 2010 (Balkh, Nimruz and Kunar, for example) all registered significant proportional increases in the number of deaths: 2 to 13, 5 to 27, and 54 to 286 respectively. Deaths in Paktika rose from 38 in 2010 to 116 in 2011 and in Helmand rose from 168 in 2010 to 434 in 2011, although this is to be expected on account of increased military activity in both provinces.

The number of detentions increased in many of the same provinces where deaths had increased. Balkh saw an increase in the number of detentions (from 3 to 87); Laghman and Baghlan had 900 per cent (3 to 27) and 735 per cent (17 to 125) increases, and Takhar (4 to 20), Wardak (42 to 161), Ghazni (51 to 175), Uruzgan (31 to 95), Badghis (10 to 26), Nangarhar (64 to 160), Khost (288 to 677); and Kunduz (71 to 157) all saw detentions rise.

It is difficult to know why these provinces saw increases from 2010 to 2011. Northern Afghanistan received a much greater focus from late 2010 onwards, so this helps explain why Badghis, Balkh, Faryab and Baghlan are mentioned here. Moreover, the full contingent of 'surge' troops was not in place for the whole of January-September 2010, so those months of 2011 were bound to see an increase in incidents since there was presumably more activity going on.

## 5 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This examination of ISAF's press releases focuses purely on the instances of death and detention and is not the sum total of ISAF's presence inside Afghanistan. There were numerous press releases that detailed development assistance or medical aid provided at locations across the country. The data gathered for this report, however, does show that violent and disruptive incidents remain a constant presence in the lives of

many, particularly in provinces or districts with largely rural populations.

ISAF may continue to hold that the capture-or-kill raids are the safest and most effective tool against the insurgency, but this remains to be proven, particularly in the context of the data cited in this report. The somewhat regular provision of data to media outlets is a positive gesture, but, as shown here, there is no way to evaluate the claims made, nor is it issued systematically enough to be able to draw even basic comparisons with previous months. The lack of transparency is particularly apparent in the case of the insurgent 'leaders' that were reportedly being killed and captured; there is no way to properly evaluate these claims, aside from in the manner that this report has attempted.

The data in the press releases indicate that July, August and September 2011 were all months in which the overall number of incidents, capture-or-kill raids, deaths and detentions declined. The reason for this, as noted above, is unclear, although the departure of General Petraeus and the seeming unsustainability of maintaining the operational pace both undoubtedly played a role. Further research is needed on this issue, and the authors hope media outlets and researchers will look into this.

One basic observation not made so far is that the number of operations, deaths and detentions mentioned in the press releases are all highest in the places where there are correspondingly high numbers of foreign troops. Where there aren't many troops, there are far fewer raids. This would seem self-evident but there is no evidence or data to imply causation between the two – or if there is, the authors have not seen it – but it would be interesting to see research done on this point: to what extent is violence in a particular area at least in part a product of the presence of ISAF troops?

The authors suggest that it would be useful for ISAF to release the following standardised data in future briefings to the media:

- the number of capture-or-kill raids, issued once a month and covering the entirety of each month;
- the number of individuals killed or captured during each month, issued once a month and covering the entirety of each month. The press release data strongly indicates that ISAF are already keeping a tally of these numbers. Ideally these numbers would be broken down by province;
- the number of individuals of those captured each month who were subsequently released. These are figures they already have to have and could help form part of the picture as to the effectiveness of the targeting;
- as a means of assessing where the 'intelligence' on capture-or-kill raids is coming from, it would be useful to know what proportion of the raids were initiated by ISAF commanders in the field as opposed to those initiated by ISAF headquarters (or elsewhere);
- the proportion of capture-or-kill operations each month that are not written up in official ISAF press releases. In this way, it will be possible to get a sense of whether the capture-or-kill missions are detaining and/or killing people (as opposed to being conducted without an outcome);

- clear definitions of all the terms used by ISAF in the press releases. Ideally, this will include more than just the usual 'commander', 'leader' and 'facilitator'. The legal standards of evidence required by ISAF to both classify someone as a 'leader', and then to kill them as such, would also be useful as a way of assessing the claims that the various individuals are indeed 'key leaders' and so on.

There is no way to assess the effectiveness of these operations accurately without cross-checking each individual incident. This is work that other researchers may want to engage in, either using open-source media reports, from within ISAF using the raw source data, and/or in the field combining these with interviews in the places specified. Nevertheless, the data collated for this report does allow some minimum baseline figures that will provide a basis for a more focused evaluation of ISAF targeting operations.

If the capture-or-kill raids are to be presented as indicators of military success in Afghanistan, more information must be given to allow for a proper evaluation. At present, unfortunately, the picture offers more confusion than clarity.

## **ABOUT THE AFGHANISTAN ANALYSTS NETWORK (AAN)**

The Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) is a non-profit, independent policy research organisation. It aims to bring together the knowledge and experience of a large number of experts to inform policy and increase the understanding of Afghan realities.

The institutional structure of AAN includes a core team of analysts and a network of regular contributors with expertise in the fields of Afghan politics, governance, rule of law and security. AAN will publish regular in-depth thematic reports, policy briefings and comments.

The main channel for dissemination of the reports is the AAN web site. For further information, please visit [www.aan-afghanistan.org](http://www.aan-afghanistan.org).

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS: ALEX STRICK VAN LINSCHOTEN AND FELIX KUEHN**

Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn are researchers and writers based in Kandahar. They have worked in Afghanistan since 2006, focusing on the Taliban insurgency and the history of southern Afghanistan over the past four decades. Their research extends to other Muslim countries, and they are regular commentators on major western news channels. They are the editors of the acclaimed memoir of Abdul Salam Zaeef, *My Life with the Taliban*, published by Hurst and Columbia University Press in 2010. A book-length study on the relationship between the Taliban and al-Qaeda, *An Enemy We Created: The Myth of the Taliban/Al Qaeda Merger in Afghanistan, 1970-2010*, will be published next month along with a collection of translated Taliban poems (both released by Hurst).