



## Al-Qaida recruiting for Afghan jihad

Published: June 18, 2009 at 3:48 PM

Al-Qaida is recruiting foreign fighters to counter the influx of American and international forces headed to Afghanistan to secure the August elections.

Taliban commanders in Helmand province have told the Times of London that Uzbek and other foreign fighters are flocking to the region ahead of an expected U.S.-backed surge.

"We have seen a 40 percent increase in the number of foreign fighters this year in Helmand," said the commander, who requested anonymity. "They are mostly Pakistanis and Arabs, but also Uzbek and Chechen."

The southern Afghan province of Helmand is one of the more volatile areas of insurgent activity in the country, with an average of 10 attacks per day in 2009.

Military officials in Afghanistan report Turkish militants in parts of Farah province with Uzbek fighters increasing their activity in parts of the north.

The Times reports that a Taliban fighter was found dead in Helmand with a tattoo of a British soccer club on his body, with some officials claiming accounts of British-accented Arabic are on the rise.

Observers to the military surge into Afghanistan have worried the immediate focus on Afghanistan and Pakistan may be too narrow to adequately counter a spiraling insurgency.

Jeffrey Mankoff, associate director of international security studies at Yale University, wrote in a recent edition of Foreign Policy that fighters from Uzbekistan and other countries with known militant operations may commit fighters for what could become the next Afghan jihad.

© 2009 United Press International, Inc. All Rights Reserved.