

## English

English > Current Affairs

### **New NATO offensive in Afghanistan**

By Security and Defence specialist Hans de Vreij\*

18-02-2008

**More than a thousand Afghan, US and Dutch soldiers are taking part in a new offensive against the Taliban in the Afghan province of Uruzgan.**

**The operation is taking place in an area around the town of Deh Rawod in the west of the province that has fallen into Taliban hands in recent months. Since then thousands of Afghans have fled the region.**

It's the NATO stabilisation force ISAF's second large operation in Uruzgan, which together with neighbouring provinces Helmand and Kandahar are the home of the Taliban movement.

Last autumn, Taliban militias were driven out of a strategic valley north of the provincial capital Tarin Kowt during an operation called 'Spin Ghar' (White Mountain).



### **Jihadists**

The latest offensive is called 'Patan Ghar' (Mountain of the Pasthuns) and focuses on the area around the town of Deh Rawod on the Helmand river. Since September the area, covering dozens of square kilometres, has gradually fallen into the hands of the Taliban and foreign jihadis from Chechnya and Uzbekistan. Around ten thousand local people have fled the area seeking temporary refuge in Deh Rawod Bazar, the district's administrative centre.

The Patan Ghar operation started last weekend in deep secrecy with an operation by an airborne unit. They were flown into the area in Chinook helicopters, some of them Dutch. The total number of ISAF troops is believed to be 800, including an estimated 300 Dutch soldiers: units from the Battle Group and the Provincial Reconstruction Team. There are also reports that at least 500 Afghan government troops and police officers are involved in the operation.

### **Permanent peace**

A spokesperson for the Dutch armed forces in The Hague says that in the last few weeks it has been relatively peaceful in the area around Deh Rawod. Lieutenant-Colonel Robin Middel told Radio Netherlands Worldwide on Monday:

*"In recent weeks, it has mainly been the US and Afghan units which have been involved in a number of small skirmishes in the area, as a result peace has returned. We are trying to turn the relative peace into a permanent peace with a huge military presence so that it is possible for the Afghan government to create permanent checkpoints and lookouts."*

According to the defence spokesperson, operation Patan Ghar is not just about driving the Taliban out, it's mainly to do with ensuring long-term stability.

*"The problem in Afghanistan is not so much defeating the Taliban, rather it's maintaining security. And that is what this operation is about."*

### **Welcome**

Reporter Bette Dam from the Afghan capital Kabul says the ISAF troops can depend on sufficient support from the local population:

*"What I've heard from Deh Rawod is that it's not just Talibs who have come into the region recently but it's mainly foreign fighters. These foreigners are not welcomed by the local population. I've heard from Camp Holland that it was also a kind of 'reality check' for the Afghans to see how bad things can get if you allow foreign fighters like the Chechens in. It looks like the Dutch have the support of the local population; now they are trying to drive these fighters out."*

## Symbolic value

The area around Deh Rawod is strategically important. Whoever rules here holds the power over an important north-south route in western Uruzgan and the routes to the neighbouring province of Helmand. In addition, the area has great symbolic value: Taliban leader Mullah Omar spent part of his youth here, as did his right-hand man, Mullah Berader, who was killed last August. When Hamid Karzai returned to Afghanistan at the end of 2001 later to become president, the first place he visited was the region around Deh Rawod.

\* *RNW translation (nc)*

Tags: Afghanistan, Deh Rawod , Dutch, military, NATO, Patan Ghar, Taliban, Uruzgan, US



Send this page to a friend

### Related articles:

- . Afghanistan: four killed in friendly fire incidents
- . Dutch parliament backs Afghanistan extension
- . Dutch troops in Uruzgan till December 2010
- . Dutch troops: two more years in Uruzgan
- . Who volunteers to fight the Taliban?

### External Links:

- . ISAF
- . Dutch Ministry of Defence

### Give your reaction

Name

E-mail

Hide my email address

Show my email address

URL

City

Country

Comments

Please type in the letters/numbers in the image below in order to prevent spam.

u y d c b y r

---

Copyright Radio Netherlands Worldwide 2008 Disclaimer