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Afghanistan's 'Safest' Province Faces Growing Insurgency, Says Police Chief

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Afghanistan's central Bamyán province, widely reputed to be the safest in the country, has seen a worrying rise in insurgent activity, according to the provincial police chief.

A group of Pakistani insurgents who go by the name Abdullah Kaltak is causing security problems, primarily in Bamyán's Kohmard district, police chief Juma Guldi Yardem said.

Yardem told TOLONews on Sunday that he is concerned about the small number of security forces in the province which has seen far less insurgent activity than most of the country's other 33 provinces.

Bamyán is located in the heart of Afghanistan and shares its provincial border with eight other provinces. However, Yardem believes the Kaltak group are mainly moving in from Baghlan province - north-east of Bamyán - which has had a more active insurgent network for some time.

"Various Pakistani insurgents are active in Baghlan province, but they are crossing the borders and starting to do more insurgent activity [here]," Yardem said, saying it seemed most of them came through the Tala wa Barfak district of Baghlan.

"A new group of insurgents named Abdullah Kaltak have begun anti-government activity in this province."

The two provinces are divided by a mountainous border which the insurgents are crossing to make it into Bamyan.

Yardem said new security checkpoints have already been created to address the problem, but he fears that the Afghan forces are not sufficiently equipped to deal with the problem if it worsens.

"If the situation changes, we will need more equipment to defend Bamyan province," he said.

Bamyan was one of the first provinces to be transferred to Afghan security forces responsibility in the first phase of the five-tranche security transition.

The New Zealand armed forces based in Bamyan will withdraw from the province next year, a year earlier than the Nato deadline of 2014, the country's officials said earlier this month.

NZ Foreign Affairs Minister Murray McCully confirmed during the Nato summit in Chicago last week that the New Zealand Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Bamyan would be withdrawn in 2013.

McCully said in a statement from his office that he had discussed the new timetable with Isaf leadership, senior Afghan ministers and other partners and they had all have agreed to the PRT winding up its role in late 2013.

"The New Zealand-led PRT has done an excellent job in Bamyan, reflected in the province being selected amongst the first tranche for transition. It is now likely that the Afghan government and Isaf will formally declare that transition to be completed later in 2012," he said.

"Over the coming weeks, a specialist team will visit Bamyan to draw up a detailed plan for the wind down in the province. We are intent on ensuring that the province is well prepared for the next steps and that major development projects are completed," the statement said.