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Telegraph

## Al-Qaeda 'setting up training centers in Afghanistan'

By Alex Spillius

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**Al-Qaeda terrorists are setting up training centres and bases in northeastern Afghanistan following the withdrawal of US military forces from remote valleys and mountains, according to US and Afghan officials.**

There are growing fears that despite the addition of 30,000 US troops last year, the terror organisation has exploited vacuums in Kunar and Nuristan created by the decision to pull US troops back to more populated areas in both Afghan provinces and concentrate firepower in the south.

With President Barack Obama determined to begin sending American soldiers home in July, some in the US military are concerned al-Qaeda is making a comeback, nearly a decade after it was driven into Pakistan's neighbouring tribal areas by the US invasion.

A Taliban commander told the Wall Street Journal that "in these bases fighters from around the world are training" to be "suicide bombers, guerrillas and experts" in improvised explosive devices.

The training centres are so far however considered too small and too temporary to act as launch pads for attacks on the West in the manner Osama bin Laden used them for preparing the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States.

But al-Qaeda activity in the country's northeast has picked up considerably in the past six to eight months, particularly in the Korengal Valley in Kunar, which US forces abandoned in the summer of 2009.

According to research by the Long War Journal, a blog from the Foundation for the Defence of Democracies, the terror group has a presence in eight of Kunar's 15 districts.

Last autumn two al-Qaeda camps were struck by US jets, killing dozens of foreign fighters, including a number of al-Qaeda figures. Another raid in December captured Abu Ikhlas al-Masri, described as a leading al-Qaeda operative.

Last week, six US soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division and an Afghan soldier were killed and at least 15 others wounded in an ambush by Taliban fighters in Kunar close to the border with Afghanistan.