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The Associated Press

## Foreigners Boost Insurgency in Afghanistan Eastern

By Frozan Rahmani  
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As the spotlight of the Afghan war focuses on the south, insurgent activity is increasing in parts of the east, with Arab and other foreign fighters linked to al-Qaida infiltrating across the rugged mountains with the help of Pakistani militants, Afghan and U.S. officials say.

Security in eastern Afghanistan is critical because the region includes the capital, Kabul, which the insurgents have sought to surround and isolate from the rest of the country. The east also borders Pakistan, where al-Qaida's leaders fled after the 2001 U.S.-led invasion drove the Taliban from power.

Gen. Mohammed Zaman Mahmoodzai, head of Afghanistan's border security force, told The Associated Press that infiltration by al-Qaida-linked militants has been increasing in his area since March.

"One out of three are Arabs," he said, coming mostly from Pakistan's Bajaur and Mohmand tribal areas where the Pakistan military is battling Pakistani Taliban insurgents.

The advent of spring makes it easier to move through mountain passes into Afghanistan,

though Mahmoodzai believes the influx of Arabs has been greater than can be explained by seasonal trends.

A NATO official said he thought Mahmoodzai's estimate of Arab infiltration was high but acknowledged that activity by foreign fighters was running "a little more than average" in the east. He said most of them were believed to be Pakistanis, Chechens and Tajiks although it was difficult to determine their origins.

He spoke on condition of anonymity because the information is sensitive.

In some cases, militants enter the country through legal crossing points such as Torkham, 35 miles east of Jalalabad. Mahmoodzai said the infiltrators carry fake passports and visas provided by Lashkar-e-Taiba, a Pakistan-based group that India blames for the 2008 attacks in the Indian city of Mumbai that left 166 people dead.

"We know it is Lashkar-e-Taiba because we have sources inside the Afghan Taliban," Mahmoodzai said. "They said the Arabs are coming here through Lashkar-e-Taiba."