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Al Jazeera

Al-Qaeda fighters swell Taliban ranks

Al Jazeera gains exclusive access to a Taliban group in northern Afghanistan, where more foreign recruits are seen.

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As the US commemorates the anniversary of the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington DC, Al Jazeera has gained exclusive access to a Taliban group in northern Afghanistan where foreign al-Qaeda fighters are bolstering their forces.

The US launched its war in Afghanistan just weeks after the 9/11 attacks, accusing the now-ousted Taliban government of harbouring Osama Bin Laden, al-Qaeda's leader.

But nine years later, Bin Laden remains at large and al-Qaeda and the Taliban continue to wage war against the US and its allies, their ranks swelled by an influx of foreign fighters.

Peace dialogue

Hamid Karzai, the Afghan president, on Friday called for the Taliban to cease fighting his government and enter into dialogue to find an end to the country's conflict.

Karzai also called on his US and Nato allies, which now have 150,000 troops in the country, to focus on Taliban bases over the border in Pakistan rather than fighting in Afghan villages.

A council to pursue peace talks with the Taliban was announced last week, and is supposed to be made up of around 50 representatives of a broad section of Afghan society.

Karzai is expected to announce the membership line-up of the council after the Eid al-Fitr holidays, which marks the end of Ramadan.

The formation of the "High Peace Council" is considered one of the most significant steps Karzai has taken in his oft-stated efforts to open a dialogue with the Taliban leadership.

The Taliban have repeatedly rejected peace efforts, labelling Karzai's government a puppet of the United States and saying they will not talk peace until all foreign forces have left the country.