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Afghans Urge NATO to Expand Peacekeeping

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan, Aug. 10 -- Afghan officials today welcomed the impending NATO takeover of the 5,000-member multinational peacekeeping force and urged that it be expanded beyond Kabul.

NATO is taking over command of the International Security Assistance Force, known as ISAF, in large part to end the arduous task of searching for a new lead nation every six months to run it. Germany and the Netherlands have jointly led the force for the past six months.

A change-of-command ceremony is scheduled for Monday.

"The Afghan government is confident that ISAF's mission effectiveness will be enhanced by NATO's new role at the helm of the peacekeeping force in Kabul," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Largely because of the peacekeepers' presence, Kabul is considered generally safe, while the rest of the country is ruled by rival warlords whose armed factions often turn their guns on each other. A vast area along the southern and eastern border with Pakistan is home to a low-level guerrilla insurgency being waged by Taliban fighters and their allies.

Also today, the United Nations said it had suspended road travel for its workers in a region of southern Afghanistan where five policemen were wounded and Afghan aid workers were tied up and beaten.

The two separate attacks happened last Tuesday in the Maywand district of Kandahar province, a U.N. spokesman said.