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Dispatch: Battle for Kandahar (Part I)

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Under an early morning sky, a red glow is cast from the lights on an Air Force water drilling rig. A new MATV, or “MRAP All Terrain Vehicle,” is being deployed to Afghanistan to combat homemade bombs, the favorite weapon of the Taliban.



Stryker vehicles of the 1-17th Infantry Battalion, 5/2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team. The trace of light is from an unmanned aircraft.

The 1-17th has lost 22 soldiers on this tour but has inflicted far more on the enemy. It appears that U.S. forces have gained the initiative in the Arghandab River Valley (ARV). The ARV is crucial human and physical terrain for the unfolding Battle of Kandahar.



Moon Shadow at Frontenac. There is relative calm before the spring.

The Battle for Kandahar has begun. The face of this battle is not one of sudden fury but a process, a complex struggle for legitimacy between local Taliban governance and Kabul rule.

A scent of weakness is in the air. The Taliban remain deadly and capable – yet they seem to be losing the initiative. “Shaping Operations” are underway. Special Operations Forces are picking off and collecting key Taliban leaders. With our increase in troops, the Taliban must spend more time on self-defense, deducting from their capacity for offensive operations.

This year, 2010, is particularly crucial for the future of Afghanistan. The fight is on for key physical terrain, political terrain, and information dominance. Before Christmas, we will know who won the Battle for Kandahar. Who wins this Battle likely will win the war.

Michael Yon is a former Green Beret who has been reporting from Iraq and Afghanistan since December 2004. No other reporter has spent as much time with combat troops in these two wars. Michael's dispatches from the frontlines have earned him the reputation as the premier independent combat journalist of his generation.

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