

Afghanistan Crisis Watch

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Assessments

1. **29 Nov-09 Dec 2018**
 - International Community continues to praise parliamentary election process which was originally scheduled for 2016 and the final results (even after 2 months) are yet to come. Kabul incident shows that Afghans will wait longer for the election results. IEC estimated voter turnout to be at an “impressive” 45 percent, with women participating at an “historic” fraction of 33 percent of the voters. The only meaningful deduction out of this picture would be the fact that Afghans have a long way to walk towards democracy.
 - Zalmay Khalilzad’s pressure on Afghan Government indicates that credible Afghan voices are needed in order to sell the reconciliation process as an “Afghan-led and an Afghan-owned” one.
 - It seems that status of foreign forces in Afghanistan is one of the diverging issues between the negotiating parties in the reconciliation process. During a press conference prior to NATO FORMIN, the NATO Secretary General said that the cost of leaving is bigger than the cost of staying in Afghanistan. However the NATO statement on Afghanistan has a milder tone. Nonetheless, as long as U.S. stays in Afghanistan, so does the NATO.
2. **19-28 Nov 2018**
 - The U.N. hosted Geneva Conference accelerated the reconciliation process. U.S. is putting pressure on both sides (National Unity Government and Taliban) and shaping both political and military environments towards a so-called Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace. However, finding a common ground on postponement of presidential elections will not be easy. Rivalry between presidential candidates prior to elections - whether the elections will be postponed or not - will further exacerbate the situation for Kabul.
 - Outcomes of the Geneva Conference will be of particular importance for the National Unity Government as they will be a litmus test to see the international support to Kabul.
 - Kabul bombing came in a very delicate time. For the fighting parties, there is no logic in killing civilians participated in a religious event in a time when peace is closer than ever.
3. **07-18 Nov 2018**
 - While U.S. was trying to bring Taliban to the negotiation table, Russia managed to bring together all stakeholders around the table in Moscow. For the first time since 2001, Taliban has been represented at a high level international gathering. Zalmay Khalilzad needs to play his cards right if U.S. really wants to save face after 17 years of war without any tangible results towards peace.
 - Traditionally violence tends to decrease between two fighting seasons (October - March) in Afghanistan. This year, contrary to seasonal normals, Taliban increased its military tempo to align its political efforts with its gains on the ground. On the other hand, despite heavy U.S./NATO assistance down to the tactical level, ANDSF are suffering heavy losses during a very delicate time which limits Kabul’s options on the negotiation table. Attempt to delay presidential elections which was scheduled for April 2019 seems a military necessity rather than a political move. If current situation continues ANDSF - the strongest pillar of the western backed Kabul government - run the risk of disintegrating.
4. **31 Oct - 06 Nov 2018**

- Russian parallel peace process that will be initiated on 9 November at Moscow is a direct move against Zalmay Khalilzad's efforts and will further complicate the reconciliation process.
 - Whether National Unity Government will attend the Moscow talks or not, Afghanistan's neighbours will discuss country's future and they have different set of instruments to compel Afghanistan to implement their decisions. On the other hand, Taliban will attend the talks while it is currently negotiating with U.S. Rivalry between U.S. and Russia provided opportunities for the Afghans, however National Unity Government is approaching at a crossroads so does the Taliban.
 - Despite the eyewash, ANDSF's growing incompetency lays burden on NATO&U.S. forces.
5. **22 - 30 Oct 2018**
- Release of one of the founders of Taliban coincided with sanctions to the Taliban facilitators. This carrot and stick strategy might not work. Taliban increasingly controls population and territory while Afghan Government entered into a turmoil triggered by parliamentary and presidential elections.
 - Afghan government tries to stay out from being yet another stage in "Great Power competition". However, Russia's determination to "solve" Afghan issue will force Afghanistan to make a choice.
 - As expected, parliamentary elections held in an extremely volatile security environment due to strong Taliban insurgency. Elections in important provinces such as Ghazni and Kandahar are yet to be held and IEC will not be able to deliver even the preliminary results within a month. Moreover, country will immediately enter a presidential run-off election period. All these factors might negatively affect counterinsurgency operations and ongoing reconciliation process.
6. **15 - 21 Oct 2018**
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 - High number of casualties and fatalities, insider attack(s) to very high-profile targets and Taliban efficiency not only in the battlefield but also in acting as a regular state indicate that security forces, both national and international are far from their objectives.
 - Foreign fighters held by SDF in Syria will likely be a problem for countries of origin, including Afghanistan.
7. **08 - 17 Oct 2018**
- Russian influence grows in Afghanistan. This may lead to a more resilient Taliban and cause concern for Western-backed National Unity Government.
 - Latest UNAMA report shows that civilian casualties are at record high. Rise in number of victims that belong to Shiite Hazara minority is of particular importance. Iran and Russia may exploit the sensitivities of Shiite population.
 - Zalmay Khalilzad tries to find a common ground between key stakeholders. However, any attempt excluding Iran and Russia may result in a political impasse as seen in Syria.
 - Even though Taliban agrees with U.S. and/or current/future Afghan government and cease fire, ISKP will likely to remain as a growing security concern for the war-torn country.
8. **01 - 07 Oct 2018**
- U.S. administration and Afghan national unity government are striving for peace by trying to bring Taliban to the negotiating table using political and military tools. However, Taliban may have the (mis)perception that it can gain the upper hand through violence.
 - As violence increases so do the civilian casualties. More needs to be done to mitigate

collateral damage.

- It is hard for external actors influencing Afghanistan to find a common ground towards peace and multiple peace processes do harm rather than good. Paradoxically those same actors suffer from instability in Afghanistan to varying degrees. Current stalemate in Afghanistan can only be overcome by the consensus of all stakeholders.
- Even though Taliban agrees with U.S. and/or current/future Afghan government and cease fire, ISKP will likely to remain as a growing security concern for the war-torn country.

9. **24 - 30 Sep 2018**

- While security situation is deteriorating, The Afghan National Unity Government is running out of time, energy and opportunities.
- As violence increases so do the civilian casualties. More needs to be done to mitigate collateral damage.
- It is hard for external actors influencing Afghanistan to find a common ground towards peace and multiple peace processes do harm rather than good. Paradoxically those same actors suffer from instability in Afghanistan to varying degrees. Current stalemate in Afghanistan can only be overcome by the consensus of all stakeholders.

10. **17 - 23 Sep 2018**

- Till the elections date (20 October 2018) of which coincides roughly with the end of 2018 fighting season, Taliban will push ANDSF on the ground and exploit the increase in the numbers of ANDSF losses. By doing so, Taliban aims to consolidate its position at the future negotiation table while hindering free and fair elections from which the government takes its legitimacy.
- Attrition among ANDSF and deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan may force U.S. and NATO to take further measures including an increase in the force or a change in the mandate. Afghanistan is expected to be one of the topics of the upcoming MC Conference and NATO DEFMIN in this respect.
- Russia is trying to establish a parallel peace process (Moscow) as it successfully did in Syria (Astana vs. Geneva). It is in Russia's interest to keep some of its opponents in Syria busy in Afghanistan.

11. **10 - 16 Sep 2018**

- U.S. strategy to force Taliban to a deal by using more military power and a more enthusiastic ANDSF is showing its side effects. Unprecedented CIVCAS reported by UNAMA. On the other side, attrition is observed particularly in ANDSF. Despite huge efforts no real gains achieved on the ground.
- Taliban offensive aims to block upcoming elections. Regions that are either under Taliban rule or under imminent Taliban threat fail to complete tasks such as candidate and/or voter registration that needs to be done prior to parliamentary elections. As experienced in previous elections, lack of country-wide consensus of mainstream political parties and/or low turnout rates will bring into the question of legitimacy no matter who wins the elections.

12. **03 - 09 Sep 2018**

- Afghan Government tries to make a peace deal with Taliban ahead of the elections.
- Changes in the top U.S. administration officials such as Zalmay Khalilzad and General Miller can be seen as an indication of policy change - or better to put - return to Obama administration's policies concerning Afghanistan. There seems a bipartisan public support for winding down America's 'longest war' which the current administration cannot neglect.
- Taliban roughly controls half of the country and manages to survive 17-year-long attrition war. However, it seems that it is being challenged by IS-KP, an ideological replica whose rhetoric is nearly identical.
- Russia and China's presence will further complicate Afghan theatre.

13. **27 Aug - 02 Sep 2018**

- High level officials' resignations indicates that in the run up to Parliamentary and Presidential elections, deal made by John Kerry between Ghani and Abdullah is about to be broken and significant figures backed by different actors are positioning themselves for the upcoming elections.
- Ghani's backfired ceasefire offer(s) jeopardize the reconciliation process. Despite ANA efforts and US enablers Taliban insurgency is gaining ground.
- New COM RSM is expected to re-energize US and NATO efforts in Afghanistan.
- China's presence in eastern Afghanistan and Russian intervention along the Tajik border might be seen as the reflections of ongoing tensions between East and West on the Afghan soil.

Documents

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 - The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security , UN, 07 December 2018
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- Operation Freedom Sentinel's Quarterly Report to the United States Congress , Lead IG, 15 August 2018
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Selected Sources

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- [Afghanistan Ministry of Defence](#) 
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- [Center for Research&Policy Analysis](#)
- [Khaama Press News Agency](#)
- [Afghanistan Independent Election Commission](#)

<html><h4 style="color:blue;">EU</h4></html>

- [EEAS - Afghanistan](#) 

<html><h4 style="color:blue;">Humanitarian Organizations</h4></html>

- [Amnesty International - Afghanistan](#) 
- [Homeland Security Digital Library](#)
- [Human Rights Watch - Afghanistan](#) 
- [Médecins Sans Frontières - Afghanistan](#) 

<html><h4 style="color:blue;">India</h4></html>

<html><h4 style="color:blue;">Iran</h4></html>

<html><h4 style="color:blue;">NATO</h4></html>

- [NATO Resolute Support Mission](#) 

<html><h4 style="color:blue;">Pakistan</h4></html>

- [Daily Pakistan Global](#)

<html><h4 style="color:blue;">Russia</h4></html>

- [Top 10 Russian News Websites To Follow in 2019 \(English\)](#)
- [News Now](#)
- [RAND Russia](#)
- [Stratfor Russia](#)
- [Institute of Modern Russia](#)
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<html><h4 style="color:blue;">UN</h4></html>

- [United Nations Mission in Afghanistan](#) 

<html><h4 style="color:blue;">U.S.</h4></html>

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- U.S. CENTCOM
- U.S. Department of Defence 
- U.S. Department of State 
- U.S. Embassy in Kabul
- SIGAR
- Office of Inspector General

<html><h4 style="color:red;">Misc.</h4></html>

- Afghanistan Live Update Map
- Afghanistan Analysts Network 
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- Crisis Group - Afghanistan 
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- FDD's Long War Journal
- South Asia Terrorism Portal - Afghanistan
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