

## Political Developments

### Peace Process

Mullah Hebatullah, the leader of the Taliban, agreed to a one-week ceasefire while signing the peace agreement with the US, said sources close to the Taliban. Taliban seems to start a ceasefire at the same time they start signing the peace agreement. However, the US had announced previously that the ceasefire should start 10 days before signing the agreement ([Ariana](#)).

Following reports of the Taliban's consideration of a one-week ceasefire aimed at moving forward the peace process, two sources in Kabul on Sunday said the group will not agree to a truce before signing the peace deal with the United States – a deal that has been finalized in draft ([Tolo](#)).

### Presidential Elections

The EU and its Member States represented in Kabul welcome the announcement of the preliminary results of the presidential election in Afghanistan. The EU supports the work of the IECC to conduct the crucial task of adjudicating complaints in a professional, independent and timely manner ([EEAS](#)).

Afghanistan’s Electoral Complaints Commission said on Monday the election might go to a second round as it begins reviewing thousands of complaints a day after the preliminary result handed incumbent president Ashraf Ghani a narrow victory. Deen Mohammad Azimi, deputy head of the Electoral Complaints Commission, said there is a “strong possibility” the election would go to the second round. “Looking at the scope of complaints and objections that needs a thorough review, there could be a run-off,” Azimi told Reuters. The review might take around five weeks, Azimi said, adding that thousands of complaints from candidates had already been filed ([Reuters](#)).

### Armed Conflict

The war in Afghanistan continues to take an appalling toll on civilians. Civilian casualties recently surpassed 100,000 in the past 10 years alone, from the time the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) began systematic documentation of civilian casualties in 2009 to the present ([UNAMA](#)).

The Taliban staged a complex attack that killed at least 10 Afghan soldiers in the southern Helmand province. A powerful explosion first hit an army checkpoint late Friday, followed by an hours-long gunbattle. The attack also wounded four soldiers. Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, saying the insurgents also seized weapons and ammunition. The insurgents have a strong presence in Helmand province, especially in Sangin district where the attack took place. The Taliban have increased their attacks in recent days against Afghan army bases and checkpoints across different provinces ([NYT](#)).

Taliban militants ambushed a government checkpoint in Balkh province in Afghanistan's north, killing at least 15 members of the security forces ([NYT](#)).

At least 13 Taliban fighters including a key commander of the group were killed in an airstrike by Afghan forces in Khan Abad district of Kunduz province, said Ministry of Defense (MoD) in a statement ([Ariana](#)).

At least 12 Taliban fighters were killed and 6 others injured in a clash between Taliban insurgents and Afghan Special Forces in central Oruzgan province, Afghan Army said ([Ariana](#)).

At least 17 members of public uprising forces were killed in an attack by the Taliban insurgents in Takhar province on Saturday night, a local official confirmed ([Ariana](#)).

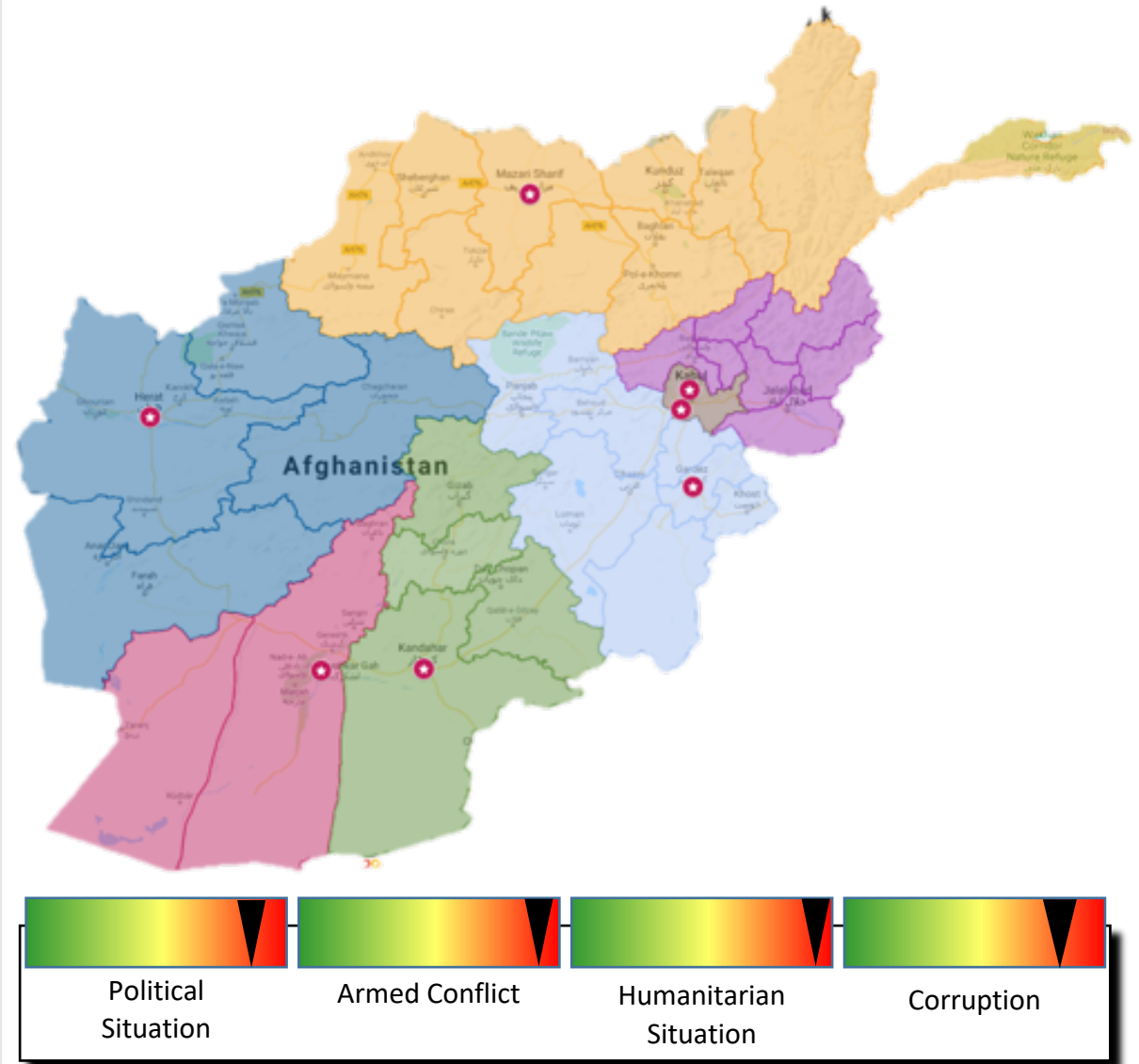
The Taliban released 27 peace activists Thursday, a day after they were abducted in an ambush on their convoy in western Afghanistan, a leader of the activist organization said. Phone lines were down in the region, making communication difficult and the reason for the activists' abduction was still unclear ([NYT](#)).

A number of inhabits in northern Jawzjan province has said that Taliban militants have situated monthly 50 Afs extortion per family in Manjang district of the Jawzjan province. If the residents didn’t pay, the Taliban would not allow them to live there ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

The Ministry of Defense on Friday said that the number of soldiers in the ranks of the Afghan National Army (ANA) is supposed to be around 234,000 officers, however, currently there are about 200,000 soldiers serving in the force ([Tolo](#)).

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

( 23 - 29 Dec 2019)



### ASSESSMENT:

- Despite the unbearable numbers of civilian casualties that urges warring parties to put an end to this decades-long conflict, violence has become business as usual in Afghanistan. Having witnessed to the wasted opportunities, Afghans shouldn’t expect much from a nationwide ceasefire between the Taliban and the Coalition Forces/ANDSF even though it is highly likely in the coming days. A peace agreement between the Taliban and the U.S. might release U.S. Army from Afghanistan but has little to do with solving ‘intra-Afghan’ problems. Ghani and the Taliban do not have much in common and taking into account the fragmented and fragile nature of the young ‘Afghan democracy’ Taliban has no reason to compromise.
- While a second-round is still a possibility, international actors congratulate Ghani and show their explicit support to the Afghan government. This will give some advantage to the government when they sit around the table with the Taliban.

### Humanitarian Situation

Based on the latest report of UNICEF, 149 people died because of natural disasters, and it is expected that 9.4 million people will need humanitarian aid.

- According to the latest report by UNICEF, the following information are to be noticed:
- More than 400,000 people in (the Rumi year) 1398 were internally displaced as a result of the war.
- Almost 300,000 people were negatively affected by the natural disasters out of which, 39,000 lost their houses.
- 149 people lost their lives in natural disasters ([Ariana](#)).

The government of Pakistan has offered 1,000 educational scholarships for the Afghan students for academic year of 2020. At least 100 other scholarships have been allocated for women. It said that over 140 thousand students from all over Afghanistan have applied for these scholarships ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

Findings of the Women and Children Legal Research Foundation (WCLRF), which conducted research in Kabul, Parwan, Balkh, Badakhshan, Nangarhar and Kandahar reveal that 62 percent of Afghan girls leave school between 13 and 15 years of age for various reasons. Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah said that war, poverty, forced marriage, “undesirable culture” and domestic violence are the main causes that girls do not attend school. The research showed that male members of the home decided in 64 percent of the cases that the girls should not attend school, and 36 percent were forced to leave for other reasons. Based on the Education Ministry statistics, 9.5 million children are going to schools now and 39 percent of them are girls. The ministry said that at least 4 million children are deprived access to school ([Tolo](#)).

### Economic Developments

A senior Iranian official said a major railway connecting Iran and neighboring Afghanistan will be ready in March as construction of a key cross-border line is nearing completion. Khatibi said a major part of 191-kilometer railway would be complete in March or in April, 2019, allowing the two neighboring countries to kick off rail transportation. Iran has almost finished its part of the Khaf-Herat railway, which runs 139 kilometers in three sections straddling the border between the two countries. Reports in the Afghan media have suggested that the country is intent on completing the fourth and final section of the project through partnership with an Italian contractor ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

### Corruption

Razaq Ahmadzai, the co-leader of the Green Trend party, is expected to land a top job after the recent Afghan election. According to a Swedish outlet, though, he is still registered in Sweden under a different name, where he receives welfare benefits and payments ([Sputnik](#)).

The US and international contractors who have participated in rebuilding Afghanistan are being accused of paying the Taliban to provide for their own safety, the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reported.

The lawsuit was filed in federal court on Friday by the families of 143 US soldiers and contractors who were killed or wounded in Afghanistan between 2009 and 2017.

Among the companies sued are the two biggest contractors of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) - DAI Global LLC and Louis Berger Group - which were paid about \$1 billion between 2007 and 2009.

According to WSJ, DAI Global LLC and Louis Berger Group have refused to comment on the lawsuits ([Sputnik](#)).

### Opinion

- [America never committed to training Afghan forces. I know because I tried, Jason Dempsey, The Washington Post, 24 December 2019.](#)

### Further Reading

- ☐ [A Turning Point in World History: 40 years ago, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, Thomas Ruttig, Afghanistan Analysts’ Network, 25 December 2019.](#)



## Political Developments

### Peace Process

A former Taliban commander said Saturday that the truce would long for 10 days and would coincide with the peace deal between the US and the insurgents. The Taliban were offered by the US envoy for Afghan peace Zalmay Khalilzad to accept a 10-day long ceasefire, and the militants are consulting with their leadership whether to accept the offer.

Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Idrees Zaman met with the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany in Afghanistan, Mr. Peter Prügel as well as representative of the Berghof Foundation. German side informed Minister Zaman of the country's readiness to hold an intra-Afghan peace dialogue in the near future ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

### Troop Drawdown

U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham said Monday that President Donald Trump may announce an American troop drawdown from Afghanistan before the year's end, which would likely begin next year. Graham, speaking from the Afghan capital of Kabul, said the president could reduce troop numbers to 8,600, down from the current estimated 12,000.

Despite his past reluctance to embrace a troop withdrawal, Graham said he supports Trump's expected drawdown. Graham said America's withdrawal from Afghanistan must be "condition-based" and that the Taliban must keep the promises they've made during talks ([NYT](#)).

### Presidential Elections

Afghanistan's election commission said the president has won a second term, earning 50.64% of a preliminary vote count announced Sunday, but his opponents can still challenge the results. Ashraf Ghani appears to have beaten out his main challenger Abdullah Abdullah, who serves as the country's chief executive in a fragile national unity government. Abdullah's office released a statement saying the results were "not legitimate." If the preliminary results hold and Ghani remains president, it could give him the authority he's been seeking to demand a leading role in peace talks with the Taliban ([NYT](#)).

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) welcomes the announcement of the preliminary results for Afghanistan's presidential election and commends the country's electoral bodies – the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) – for their work leading up to the announcement ([UNAMA](#)).

### Armed Conflict

Elite Afghan forces on Sunday surrounded the compound of Nizamuddin Qaisari, an abusive militia commander, who was resisting arrest with about 150 of his fighters, police officials said. The battle had led to the death of at least eight of Mr. Qaisari's men and the arrest of 30 others. Mr. Qaisari, however, was nowhere to be found, apparently having sneaked to safety ([NYT](#)).

A roadside bomb killed 10 members of one family, including three women and two children, in southeastern Afghanistan on Tuesday, officials said. Some 18 civilians were wounded in a similar incident in northern Balkh province ([NYT](#)).

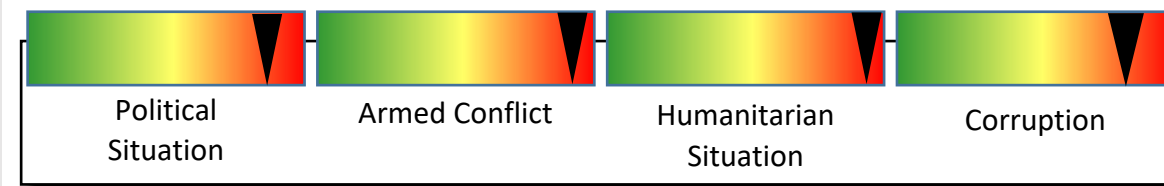
### ISKP

The Afghan government said Saturday it has detained about 700 Islamic State group fighters and family members in eastern Afghanistan over the past six months. The Afghan intelligence service, the National Directorate for Security, said among the 700 are at least 75 women and 159 children. Many of the group are from foreign countries ([NYT](#)).

Iranian and Russian security chiefs have expressed concerns that the Deash terrorist organisation will re-group from their former Middle East strongholds into Afghanistan ([MEMO](#)). Daesh fighters are arriving from Syria and Iraq primarily through Pakistan. Despite recent successful operation carried out by the Afghan forces, during which more than 600 militants were killed or captured, the overall number of IS members in Afghanistan is still between 2,500 and 4,000 ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

( 16 - 22 Dec 2019)



## ASSESSMENT:

- Having declared three months after the elections, preliminary results gave Ghani some sort of legitimacy over his rivals and strengthen his position before intra Afghan talks begin. However, his political opponents might not easily give up and recognize declared results. A power sharing agreement similar to the one brokered in 2014 is possible. But this time, the Taliban would also be a part of the equation. Furthermore, rising tensions between government and northern factions might further exacerbate political situation.
- A nation-wide ceasefire between the Taliban and the Coalition Forces/ANDSF is highly likely in the coming days. This might hopefully pave the way for a broader consensus over a peace agreement.
- American pessimism concerning Afghanistan as seen in "Afghanistan Papers" and reluctance after 18 years of war will probably feed withdrawal expectancy. However, a possible U.S. troop withdrawal with or without a peace deal has grave repercussions for Afghanistan. As General Milley put it, militarily, Afghanistan campaign has been at a state of strategic stalemate, which means that neither the U.S. nor the Afghan Government is able to outweigh the Taliban. Economically, the Afghan Government cannot see the summer without international support.

GEN. MILLEY: I know there's an assertion out there of some sort of coordinated lie over the course of, say, 18 years. I find that a bit of a stretch. More than a bit of a stretch; I find that a mischaracterization, from my own personal experience. You're looking at probably hundreds of general officers, State Department employees, CIA, Department of Defense folks. I just don't think that you can get that level of coordination to do that kind of deception.

As far as military victory, for years we have clearly stated that there is not going to be a rational, reasonable chance of a military victory against the Taliban or the insurgency, something like signing the surrender documents on the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay. President Bush said that early on, before Christmas in 2001, and that remains true today. There's only one way that this is going end, and it's in a negotiated solution with the Taliban, and it's going to have to be an Afghan-to-Afghan solution. That's what we've been saying for years.

Militarily, this has been at a state of strategic stalemate, if you will, where the Taliban cannot defeat militarily the regime, the government of Kabul, so long as the United States and its allies maintain some degree of military support; and the regime is not going to militarily defeat the Taliban or the -- the various other groups over there militarily so long as they have sanctuary in Pakistan, and that they have some small degree of popularity amongst the people, which is rated at about 10 to 15% or so in some of the rural areas.

SEC. ESPER: For 18 years now the media has been over there. You -- many of you have traveled multiple times. The Congress has been there multiple times. I was probably on the first congressional delegation to go there in the fall of 2001, and -- and have traveled there multiple times after that. We've had the -- the SIGAR there. We've had I.G.s there. This has been a very transparent -- it's not like this war was hiding somewhere and now, all of a sudden, that there's been a revelation ([U.S. Department of Defense](#)).

### Afghan Translators

An additional 4,000 Afghan interpreters who helped U.S. troops in Afghanistan could receive Special Immigrant Visas, thanks to a provision included in the National Defense Authorization Act the House passed last week. The legislation, if passed in the Senate, means that a total of 22,500 visas through the Special Immigrant Visa program could be issued to former Afghan interpreters — up from the 18,500 limit previously in place.

### Humanitarian Situation

In the last 5 years, more than 4 million Afghans came back to the country, yet there are more than 6 million of them living in other countries, said minister of the Ministry of Repatriation and Refugees ([Ariana](#)).

Based on the latest report of UNICEF, from 2009 to 2018 nearly 6500 children were killed and 15000 children were wounded in Afghanistan which makes it the most dangerous country for children around the world.

Some of the statistics regarding Afghan children are as follows:

- 3.8 million Children need humanity aids,
- 3.7 million Qualified children do not go to school,
- 600 thousand children under the age of 5 are malnourished,
- 30% of the children are doing physical work.

### Opinion

- [SIGAR Letter over Lessons Learnt Papers](#), SIGAR, 17 December 2019.
- [No, we couldn't win in Afghanistan. But we shouldn't leave without a peace deal](#), Washington Post, Laurel Miller, Washington Post, 17 Dec 2019.
- [Don't expect Afghanistan to have a Western-style government. This explains why](#), Washington Post, Romain Malejacq, Washington Post, 17 Dec 2019.

### Further Reading

- ❑ [AP Photos: Unexploded landmines awful legacy of Afghan wars](#), Associated Press, 17 Dec 2019.
- ❑ [We were Right](#), Washington Post, 17 Dec 2019.



## Political Developments

### Peace Process

U.S. negotiators are taking a "brief pause" from talks with the Taliban after the militants launched a suicide attack on a U.S. base outside Kabul killing two civilians, Zalmay Khalilzad said on Friday. Khalilzad had renewed talks with the Taliban earlier this month on steps that could lead to a ceasefire and a settlement of the 18-year-long war in Afghanistan ([NYT](#)).

Zalmay Khalilzad briefed Pakistani leaders on Friday on last week's first official talks with the Taliban. Khalilzad met with Pakistan's foreign minister, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, who assured the American envoy that Islamabad will continue to press for a durable peace in neighboring Afghanistan. Pakistani state-run media said Khalilzad praised Pakistan's role in facilitating the ongoing peace process ([NYT](#)).

Suhail Shaheen, a spokesman for the Taliban's political office in Qatar said that a Peace Agreement between the group and US would probably be signed in less than two weeks. According to Shaheen, the agreement will be signed in the presence of twenty-three foreign ministers and international organizations in Doha, the capital of Qatar ([Ariana](#)).

Javad Zarif, Iran's foreign minister, on the sidelines of the Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process conference, called on the warring parties in Afghanistan to come together and end the war ([Tolo](#)).

### Troop Drawdown

The Pentagon is considering several options to reduce the number of troops in Afghanistan, including one that would shift to a narrower counterterrorism mission, the top U.S. military officer told Congress on Wednesday. Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, did not disclose any potential troop totals, but he agreed that leaving a minimal U.S. footprint in Afghanistan to battle terrorists is a potential move ([NYT](#)). There are around 12000 American troops in Afghanistan. With this withdrawal, it will reduce to around 7,000 troops. It is said that their main focus will be on fighting terrorism ([Ariana](#)).

### Presidential Elections

Three months after Afghanistan's presidential vote, the entire electoral process is stalled in a dispute that Afghan and Western officials say could pose an even greater threat to stability than the last such crisis, five years ago. Supporters of opposition candidates have besieged half a dozen election offices around the country for weeks, vowing to fight rather than accept another United States-brokered compromise like the one that resolved the 2014 dispute. Security officials worry that one wrong move could tip the protests into bloodshed. In the middle of it all — again — is Abdullah Abdullah, making his third attempt to become president, and for the third time falling into a bitter standoff with election officials.

This one is likely to play out differently. With American diplomacy focused on negotiating an end to the long war with the Taliban, Western officials say the United States has made it clear that it will not be stepping in as it did five years ago. Then, Secretary of State John Kerry negotiated a power-sharing deal between Mr. Abdullah, now Afghanistan's chief executive, and Ashraf Ghani, now the president, that Mr. Kerry said averted a civil war ([NYT](#)).

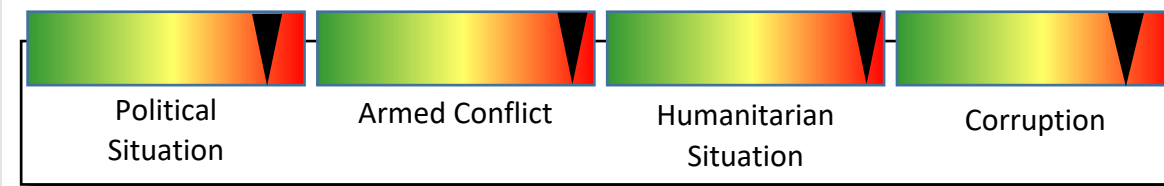
Afghanistan presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah announced that he has agreed to allow a ballot recount in provinces where his supporters had stopped the process for almost a month. The Afghan Election Commission tried to launch a ballot recount in November but Abdullah halted the attempt, saying he wouldn't let his observers participate ([NYT](#)).

### Armed Conflict

At least 23 soldiers were killed while they were sleeping on Saturday in an insider attack in eastern Afghanistan. The Taliban infiltrator, who was on duty at a military base in Ghazni Province, opened fire on his colleagues, wiping out almost the whole unit. The attacker then seized all weapons and equipment in the base and joined the insurgency. The exact number of casualties was unclear. The Afghan Ministry of Defense confirmed the death of nine soldiers, and the Taliban said 32 had been killed ([NYT](#)).

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

( 09 - 15 Dec 2019)



## ASSESSMENT:

- “Afghanistan Papers” that Washington Post published last week reveal the widespread pessimism among U.S. officials about the Afghanistan campaign. This “normally” contradicts with the official rhetoric. No matter how the Washington Post interprets them, such a publication at the eve of a possible U.S. withdrawal will certainly strengthen Trump's hand who constantly blames the previous administration for the things that are not going well in Afghanistan. It also fuels Taliban propaganda which argues that they are about to win the war.
- Some sort of imminent ceasefire at least between the Taliban and the Coalition forces and a linked troop withdrawal is highly likely in the coming days. However, ongoing clashes hinder progress.
- Impasse in presidential elections and U.S. reluctance to tip the balance for another Afghan Unity Government might exacerbate political situation and/or compel current/future Afghan governments to cooperate both with the Taliban and the U.S.

At least 10 civilians were killed and six others were wounded in a mine blast in Ghazni province, provincial media office said in a statement ([Ariana](#)).

### Drug Trafficking

U.S. Ambassador John R. Bass and DEA Acting Administrator Uttam Dhillon presented the DEA Purple Heart Award to the families of nine DEA-trained Afghan officers killed in the line of duty, and six officers were wounded. The DEA's role in Afghanistan is to identify and target Afghan illicit drug trade that funds the insurgency, terrorism, transnational crime and corruption ([U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan](#)).

### SIGAR's Lessons Learnt Papers

The U.S. government across three White House administrations misled the public about failures in the Afghanistan war, often suggesting success where it didn't exist, according to thousands of pages of documents obtained by The Washington Post.

The documents reveal deep frustrations about America's conduct of the Afghanistan war, including the ever-changing U.S. strategy, the struggles to develop an effective Afghan fighting force and persistent failures to defeat the Taliban and combat corruption throughout the government.

The interviews were conducted as part of a “Lessons Learned” project by the SIGAR over the past several years. SIGAR has frequently been vocal about the war's failures in reports going back more than a decade, including extensive questions about vast waste in the nearly \$1 trillion spent on the conflict ([NYT](#)). Afghanistan's former president argued that Washington helped fuel corruption in his nation by spending hundreds of millions of dollars over the past two decades without accountability ([NYT](#)).

The Taliban abducted as many as 45 elderly family members of a late Afghan government employee who were attending his funeral. The Taliban have consistently warned people not to attend the funerals of anyone working with the Kabul government ([NYT](#)).

### Humanitarian Situation

A landslide in a remote, Taliban-controlled district in northeastern Afghanistan killed at least six people, all of them poor villagers mining the hillside for gold ([NYT](#)).

The last census in Afghanistan was in 1979, and much of the city was destroyed in the four decades of war that followed. Based on the 1979 census, the United Nations estimates there are nearly 5 million people in Kabul now. The Afghan population will double in the next 15 years from about 38 million, with half the population living in its cities - compared to about a fourth now, the U.N. forecasts ([Reuters](#)).

### Corruption

Ahmad Yousuf Nooristani, former head of Independent Election Commission (IEC) sentenced up to 10 years in jail and paying up to \$250,000 fine for committing ‘Fraud’ in the United States. Nooristani previously served as Head of Election Commission which in 2016, he surprisingly resigned and moved to the US ([Ariana](#)).

US ambassador to Kabul, John Bass on Sunday expressing frustration over endemic corruption, said that foreign aids have not been spent in the proper ways and the money has ended up for personal interests by a “certain number of Afghans” ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

### Opinion

- [Lots of Lessons From Afghanistan; None Learned](#), The Editorial Board, New York Times, 10 Dec 2019
- [Ending America's Endless War in Afghanistan](#), Joseph Votel, New York Times, 11 Dec 2019
- [At war with the truth](#), Craig Whitlock, The Washington Post, 9 Dec 2019
- [There Was No “Secret War on the Truth” in Afghanistan](#), John Schroden, War on the Rocks, 16 Dec 2019

### Further Reading

- [Report of the Secretary-General: The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security](#), United Nations, 14 Dec 2019.
- [Legal Arguments and War Crimes: the ICC Appeals Hearing on Afghanistan in Five Questions](#), AAN, Ehsan Qaane and Sari Kouvo, 13 Dec 2019.



## Political Developments

### Peace Process

Zalmay Khalilzad departed on December 3 for travel to Kabul and Doha. In Kabul, Special Representative Khalilzad will meet with Afghan government representatives and other Afghan leaders to discuss how best to support accelerated efforts to get all parties to intra-Afghan negotiations. In Doha, Ambassador Khalilzad will rejoin talks with the Taliban to discuss steps that could lead to intra-Afghan negotiations and a peaceful settlement of the war, specifically a reduction in violence that leads to a ceasefire. ([U.S. Department of State](#))

Zalmay Khalilzad on Saturday held the first official talks with Afghanistan's Taliban since President Donald Trump declared a near-certain peace deal with the insurgents dead in September. The talks will initially focus on getting a Taliban promise to reduce violence, with a permanent cease-fire being the eventual goal, said a U.S. statement. ([NYT](#))

Anas Haqqani, a senior member of the Haqqani network has expressed hope for an end to the long war in Afghanistan. Haqqani was released from government detention nearly one month ago in exchange of two professors of American University of Afghanistan and was handed to the Taliban. Haqqani is now at the Taliban’s political office in Qatar. ([Afghanistan Times](#))

### Troop Drawdown

U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper said on Monday that any future troop drawdowns in Afghanistan were "not necessarily" linked to a deal with Taliban insurgents, suggesting some lowering of force levels may happen irrespective of the ongoing peace push. Speaking as he flew to London for a NATO summit, Esper said the Trump administration had been discussing potential reductions in troop levels for some time, both internally and with NATO allies. ([NYT](#))

### Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process

The 8th Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process was held in Istanbul - Turkey on 8-9 December 2019. The Conference was co chaired by Afghanistan and Turkey. Presidents Recep Tayyip Erdogan (Turkey) and Ashraf Ghani (Afghanistan) attended the event ([Afghan MFA](#)). The theme of the conference is Peace, Partnership and Prosperity. The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process was launched in 2011 and its “core objective” is to promote “durable peace and stability in Afghanistan.” ([Tolo](#))

### NATO London Summit

‘We reaffirm our commitment to long-term security and stability in Afghanistan’ ([NATO](#)). Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary-General, said on Wednesday that a political solution is needed in Afghanistan for ending the long-term conflict in the country. ([Ariana](#))

### ICC Trial

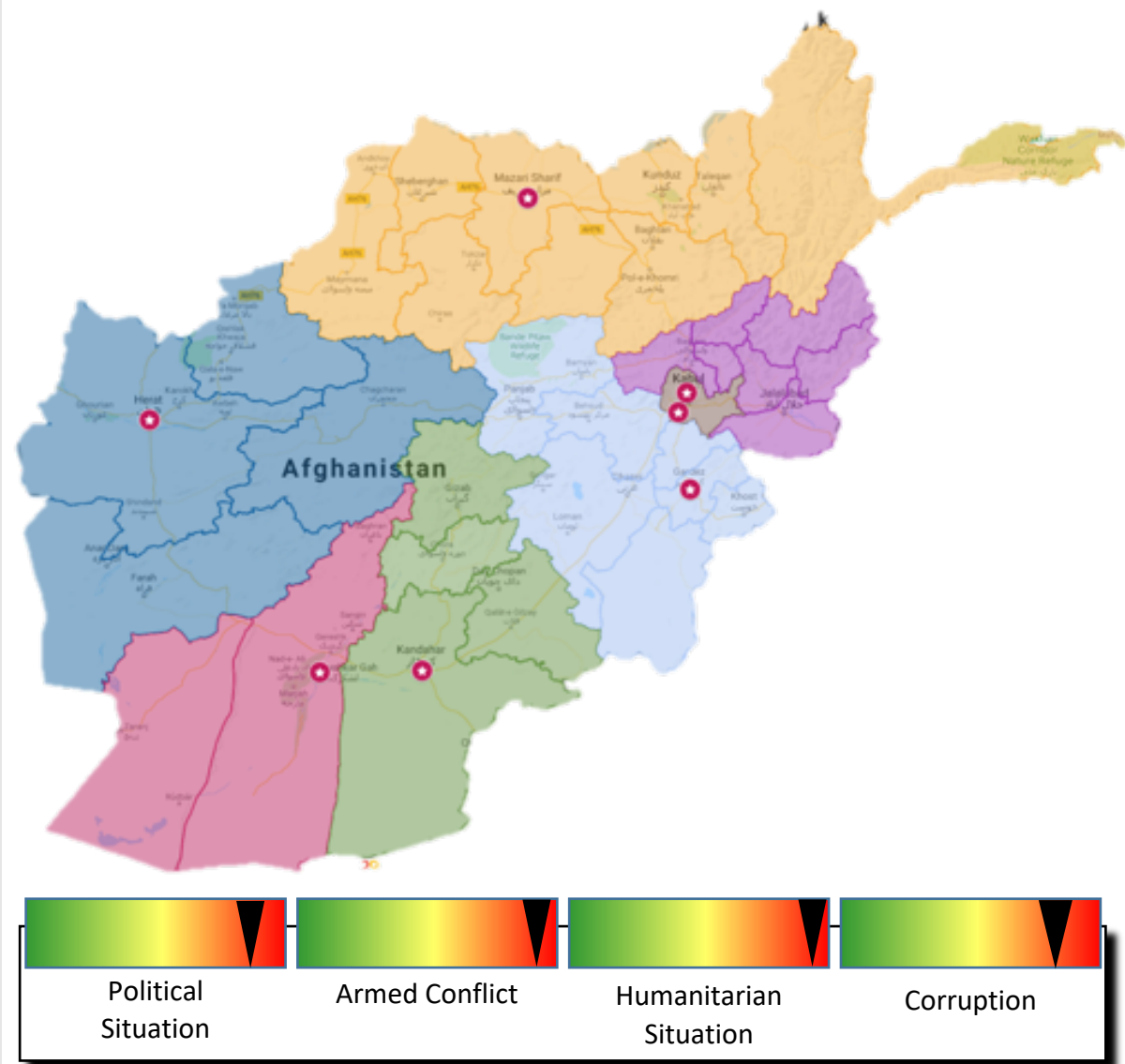
International Criminal Court judges overstepped their powers when they refused to authorize an investigation into allegations of widespread abuses by government forces, the Taliban and U.S. military and intelligence operatives during the Afghanistan conflict. But a lawyer representing Afghanistan at an ICC appeals hearing countered by saying that Afghanistan opposes an international investigation and should be allowed to prosecute war criminals in its own courts. The high-stakes hearing at the Hague-based court is focused on a proposed investigation that could lead the first time ICC indictments against Americans and help end widespread impunity for crimes in Afghanistan. It is extremely unlikely that, even if the investigation were to go ahead and prosecutors indicted Americans, they would ever appear in court. The United States government is not a member of the ICC and refuses to cooperate with it. ([NYT](#))

### German Defence Minister Visit to Afghanistan

The visiting German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer at a news conference in Kabul said she hopes the Afghan election results are announced in the near future, and she hopes results will be accepted by all stakeholders. She also talked about Germany’s readiness to extend the mission of almost 1,000 German troops in Afghanistan. ([Tolo](#))

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

( 02 - 09 Dec 2019)



## ASSESSMENT:

- The U.S. President ‘badly’ needs a breakthrough in Afghanistan these days to change the headlines which are mainly about impeachment hearings. Before 2020 elections we may expect at least a partial withdrawal from the U.S. and its Allies in Afghanistan which may possibly exacerbate the situation on the ground. Other initiatives for peace on the other hand, are far from being promising.
- Anas Haqqani is the second high level Taliban official who has found himself immediately sitting at the negotiation table representing Taliban after being released by the Afghan authorities in exchange for kidnapped university professors. It is even more interesting that an armed terrorist group such as the Taliban authorizes such persons before indoctrinating them.
- Masses that face extreme persecution in China have the potential to sympathize transnational terrorist organizations such as Turkistan Islamic Movement and Afghanistan with its current status provides fertile ground for them.
- General Dostum - COM RSM - Afghan MOD meeting might be an indicator of future intense military activity in the North.

## Armed Conflict

At least 57 pro-government forces and 27 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past week (29 Nov - 5 December). The deadliest attack took place in Kunduz Province, where the Taliban attacked security outposts on the highway connecting Kunduz to Takhar Province, killing 11 soldiers and taking prisoner five others over several hours of fighting. The insurgents also captured a security outpost in the Malarghi village of Kunduz City, the provincial capital. Earlier in the week, an American drone struck a car carrying a woman who had just given birth in Southeastern Afghanistan, leaving five people dead, including the mother, three of her relatives and the driver, according to local officials and family members. ([NYT](#))

Gunmen killed six people, including the head of a Japanese aid agency, on Wednesday in an attack on their vehicle in Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan ([NYT](#)). UN envoy Tadamichi Yamamoto led a delegation to meet with Afghanistan’s security agencies chaired by President Ashraf Ghani concerning last week’s incident in Kabul which resulted in the killing a UN staff member. ([UNAMA](#))

Afghan Acting Defense Minister Assadullah Khalid, and General Scott Miller, the Commander of NATO and U.S. forces in Afghanistan, visited Jawzjan province on Sunday and met with First Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostum. Addressing journalists after the meeting, VP Dostum expressed concern over the delay in the announcement of Presidential Election result and called on Independent Election Commission to come up with a solution. Gen. Miller also said the purpose of his trip was” talking about operations in the north and just making sure we are coordinated across all the security pillars”. ([Ariana](#))

The New York Times, citing a Western official, reported that the number of ISIS militants had dwindled down to roughly 300 from previous estimates that claimed the group was fielding several thousand fighters. A recent UN report said ISIS terrorists in Afghanistan numbered between 2,500 and 4,000 fighters. A 2019 DoD report on Afghanistan estimates the size of the terrorist group to be less than 2,000 fighters. ([Military Times](#))

FDD’s Long War Journal reported on a new video released by the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), an al-Qaeda-affiliated group that is loyal to the Taliban and fights under its umbrella in Afghanistan. The video shows TIP members training and and fighting in Afghanistan. ([FDDs LWJ](#))

## Humanitarian Situation

The Asia Foundation-Afghanistan, with the support of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), launched the 15th annual Survey of the Afghan People (the Survey). Afghans who say the country is moving in the wrong direction point to insecurity or crime rate (74.7%), the economy (41.5%), and the state of governance (31.1%). Lack of infrastructure or services (7.2%), foreign intervention (6.6%), and injustice and human rights concerns (4.6%) are also reasons given. Clearly, Afghans see significant challenges ahead as the country continues efforts toward peace and sustainable development. ([USAID](#))

## Economic Situation

As the U.S. urgently pushes a peace deal with the Taliban to end its costly military presence in Afghanistan, the World Bank has warned that the war-stricken country will still require billions of dollars in international aid over many years after a peace deal to deliver basic services and sustain any potential peace. The country’s \$11 billion in public expenditure each year is a far cry from its modest revenues, which even after recent improvements barely reach \$2.5 billion, officials and analysts say. ([NYT](#))

## Further Reading

- ☐ [Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief](#), Congressional Research Service, December 5, 2019.
- ☐ [Afghanistan in 2019: A Survey of the Afghan People](#), The Asia Foundation.
- ☐ [Analysis: How the US arrived at this critical crossroads in Afghanistan](#), FDD’s Long War Journal, December 9, 2019.



## Political Developments

### Peace Process

The Taliban said on Friday they were ready to restart peace talks with the United States, a day after President Donald Trump visited U.S. troops in Afghanistan and said he believed the radical group would agree to a ceasefire. Trump's surprise Thanksgiving Day visit was his first to Afghanistan since becoming president and came a week after a prisoner swap between Washington and Kabul that raised hopes for a long elusive peace deal to end the 18-year war ([NYT](#)).

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif held talks in Tehran with a Taliban delegation led by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, one of the group's founders, the official IRNA news agency reported on Wednesday. Zarif expressed Iran's willingness to support dialogue between all Afghan parties with the participation of the Afghan government, according to IRNA ([NYT](#)).

The long-awaited intra-Afghan peace conference between the Taliban and prominent politicians including Afghan government which was set to be held in China might be cancelled, a source close to the Taliban insurgent group said on Tuesday. Abdul Salaam Zaeef, a former Taliban official, told Ariana News that Taliban has showed their opposition after President Ghani has removed names of specific figures from the list of participants. Meanwhile, a source close to Taliban told Ariana News that the China meeting will be held after the unofficial U.S.-Taliban talks ended in Qatar. He said Anas Haqqani, a key Taliban member who was released by Afghan government as a part of a prisoner swap deal between the U.S. and Taliban, will also participate in the China talks ([Ariana](#)).

### Presidential Elections

A leading presidential candidate, Abdullah Abdullah, has organized protests over a recount in Afghanistan's elections that have been mired in accusations of fraud. Thousands of Abdullah's supporters rallied on Friday in the capital, Kabul, against what they say is the presence of faked ballots amid a controversial recount that seems set to favor the incumbent, President Ashraf Ghani ([NYT](#)).

## Armed Conflict

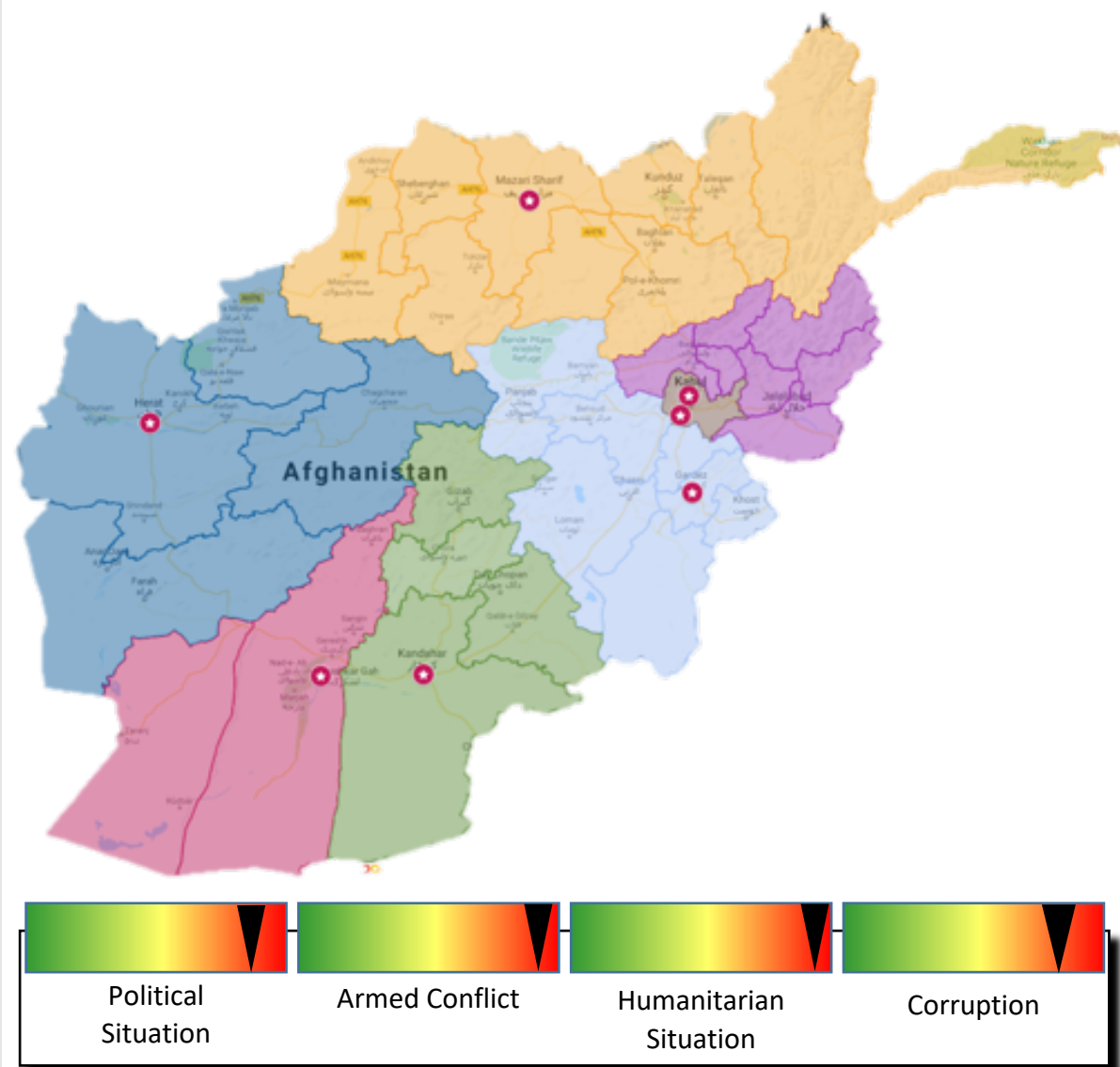
At least 13 people, most of them members of the same family, were killed this week when their car struck a roadside bomb on the way to a wedding party in northern Afghanistan, officials said ([NYT](#)).

President Donald J. Trump highlighted the sacrifices and grit of U.S. service members fighting against extremism by visiting Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, for Thanksgiving. The president said he is looking at plans to draw down the number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan. He said that with new equipment and new tactics U.S. forces in the region actually can do more with fewer forces in the country ([U.S. DoD](#)).

The Afghan government has terminated the two extraction contracts of Badakhshan's gold mines and Sar-e Pul's Balkhab copper mine. In 2012, Turkish and Afghan companies and an English company won bidding for

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

( 25 Nov - 01 Dec 2019)



## ASSESSMENT:

- Successful prisoner swap can spark new round of peace talks, hopefully now between Afghans. Fighting with the U.S. and seeking for peace in Tehran and Beijing doesn't make sense and it seems that Taliban learnt this lesson. Trump's thanksgiving messages were positive and new rounds of peace talks are imminent.
- What is worse than violence against women and girls, sexual abuse cases of school children in entangled Afghanistan is that Afghan national institutions as well as media are trying to cover allegations instead of investigating the case(s) thoroughly and carrying victims' sufferings to the attention of public opinion respectively.
- Presidential election results are yet to be announced. Due to Abdullah's move, announcement might again be delayed which in return might further destabilize political domain.

Badakhshan gold mines and Balkhab's copper mine which the former minister of urban was the main stakeholder. The two companies were supposed to invest \$ 87 million on these projects ([Ariana](#)).

## Humanitarian Situation

Hundreds of Afghans gathered at UN-backed events across the country to decry violence against women and girls, and to strategize on practical steps to put an end to harmful traditional practices in Afghanistan. The events, leading up to the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November and the start of the UN's campaign of 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, drew hundreds of religious leaders, civil society members, human rights activists, legal professionals and government officials ([UNAMA](#)).

The National Directorate of Security (NDS), Afghanistan's intelligence agency, has rejected claims of sexual abuse of boys in Logar schools, saying that seeking asylum was the main reason behind the allegations. In a statement released on Tuesday, NDS said that the claims made by Mohammad Musa Mahmudi, a civil society activist, and his colleagues were not based on evidence, and there were security threats against them. The activities are taken to a safe place and their claims in the report will be investigated by justice organs, the statement added. The statement said that after the inquiry from Mahmudi, it became clear that his findings lacked evidence and made unprofessionally for seeking asylum for his family in a foreign country ([Ariana](#)).

Afghanistan on Wednesday released two civil society activists arrested after exposing alleged sexual abuse of hundreds of school children, following pressure from the United States and international human rights groups. In an NDS video released the same day, Musa was seen saying his research was incomplete and he made a mistake - a confession rejected as "Soviet-style" by U.S. Ambassador John Bass ([NYT](#)).

Russia is calling on Western states, namely the United Kingdom and New Zealand, to stop hiding data on military crimes in Afghanistan, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told reporters on Thursday ([TASS](#)).

The Afghan drug threat is one of the worst problems for Russia's national security, the deputy director of the Russian Foreign Ministry's new challenges and threats department, Alexei Rogov, told TASS on Tuesday. He is taking part in a meeting of the group of experts of the Paris Pact Initiative, being held in cooperation with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. "Afghan drugs are one of the main threats to Russia's national security," Rogov said. "Drugs affect our younger generation. They ruin the lives of hundreds, thousands of people. They nourish international terrorism, which is getting increasingly active in Afghanistan and tends to set eyes on the Central Asian countries." In particular, Rogov pointed to the growing activity in Afghanistan of the terrorist organization Islamic State (outlawed in Russia) ([TASS](#)).



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## Armed Conflict

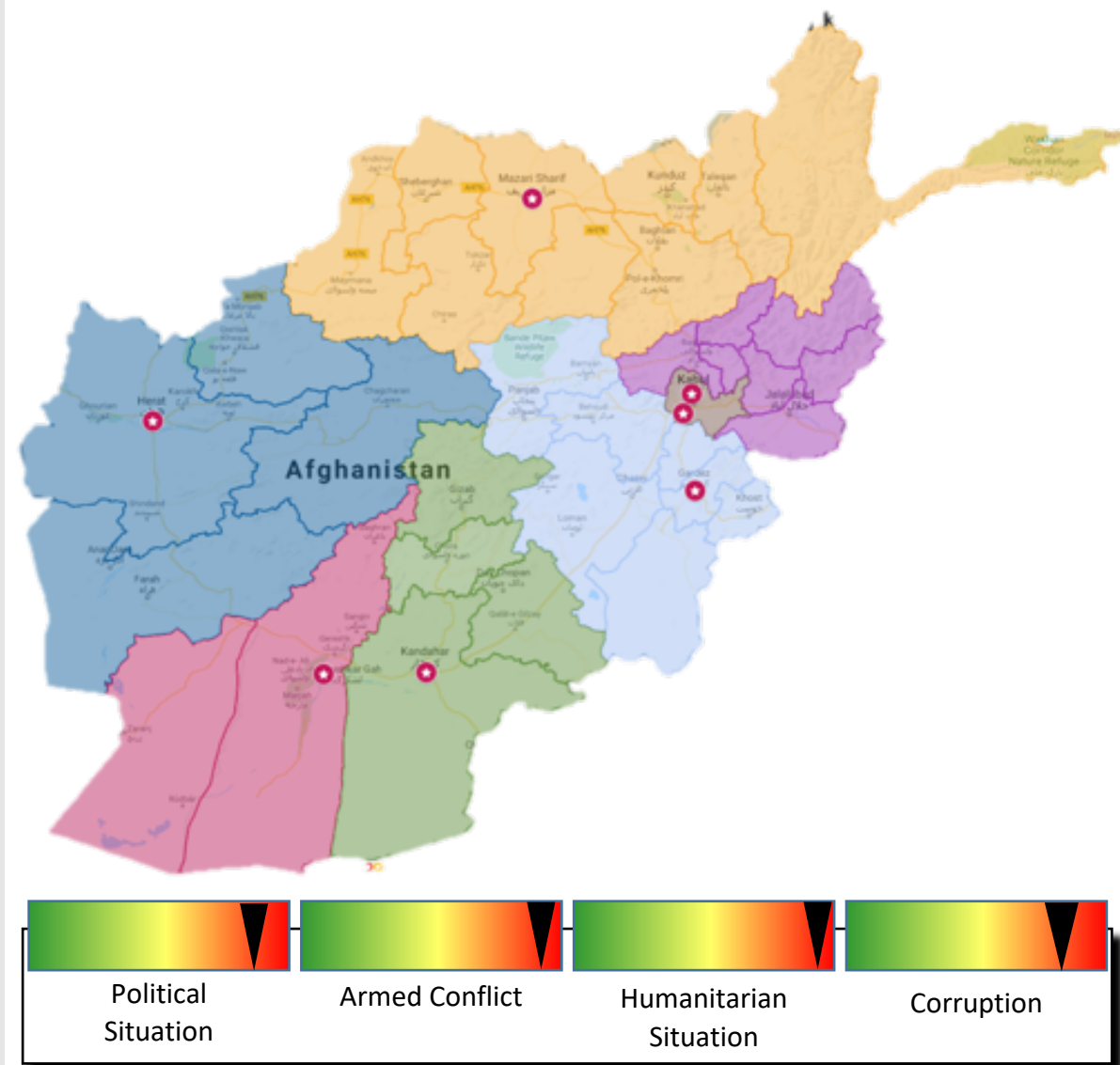
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Political Developments

Peace Process

The U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad has held secret meetings with the Taliban representatives in Qatar, a source close to Taliban said on Saturday ([Ariana](#)).

Two Members of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Thursday introduced a new bipartisan legislation that would provide congressional oversight of the Afghanistan peace process. Based on the statement, The Ensuring a Durable Afghanistan Peace Act of 2019 if enacted would:

- Requires that the administration transmit *the final agreement with the Taliban* to Congress, to include;
  - A description of counterterrorism assurances,
  - U.S. troop withdrawal,
  - The status of direct Afghan negotiations and progress towards reaching a comprehensive ceasefire.
- Requires *an initial verification assessment report*, not later than 60 days after finalizing an agreement with the Taliban, that assesses:
  - The extent to which the Secretary of State can verify that the Taliban are complying with their obligations and commitments under the peace agreement;
  - Whether the Taliban and Haqqani Network have transparently and verifiably broken ties with al-Qaeda;
  - An assessment of the viability of the intra-Afghan governing agreement;
  - An assessment as to whether the terms of ceasefire are being met by all sides in the conflict.
- Requires *a quarterly report* assessing whether the key tenets of the peace deal are being honored, including:
  - Assessment of terrorist activity in Afghanistan, Taliban actions with respect to the counterterrorism guarantees, and threats against the United States homeland;
  - Assessment as to whether the Taliban are in compliance with their commitments under the peace agreement;
  - Updated assessment of the intra-Afghan agreement, and whether the terms of the ceasefire are being met by all parties of the conflict;
  - Description of the status of human rights, including the rights of women and minorities and their access to education, justice and economic opportunities following a peace deal;
  - A description of the rule of law, governance structures, freedoms of press and media, and civil society’s operating space following a peace deal. ([Ariana](#))

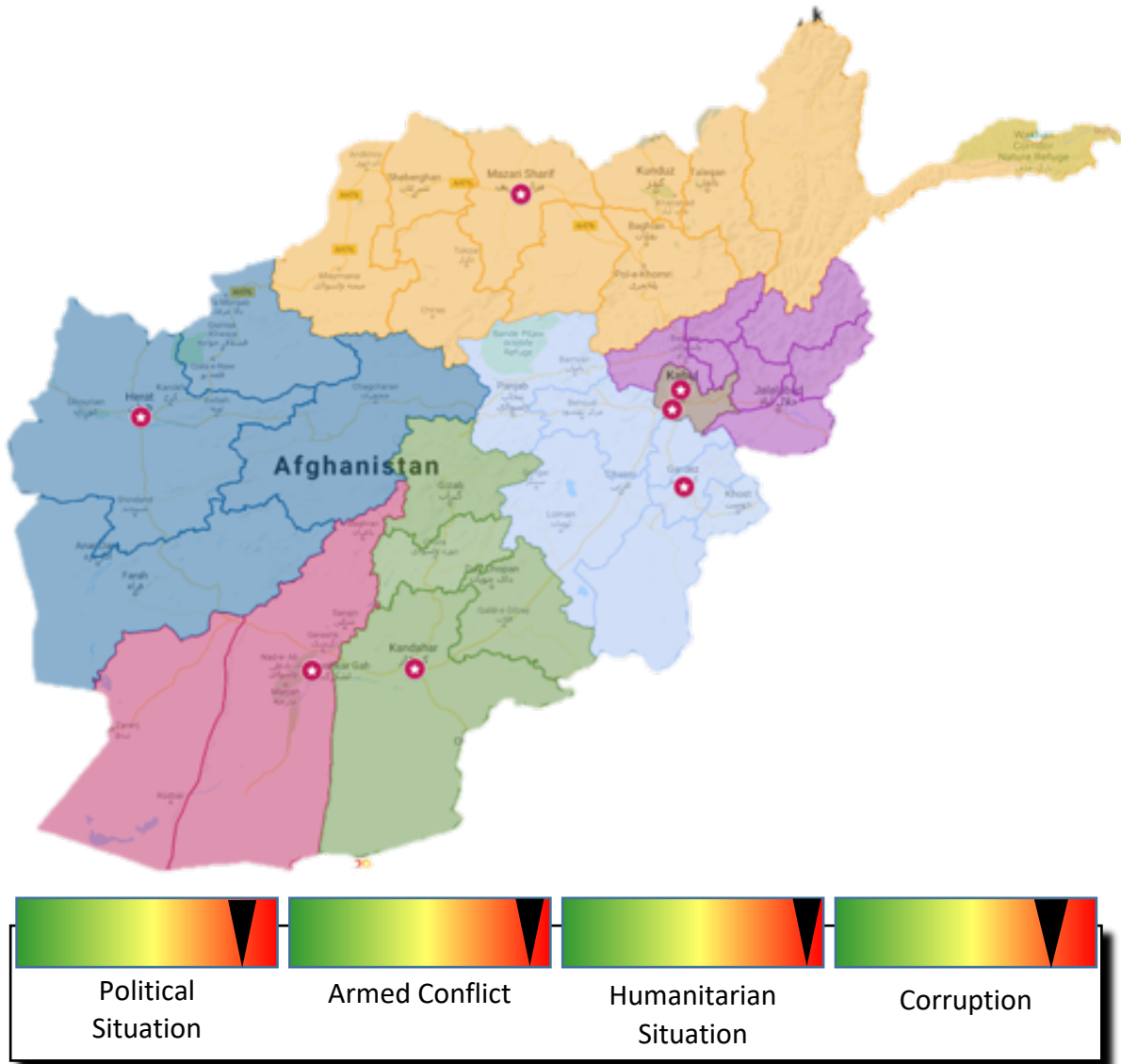
Afghanistan’s Ambassador to Qatar Abdul Hakim Dalili on Saturday asked the World Muslim Ulema Union to play its role in the Afghan peace process ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

Prisoner Swap

Taliban insurgents released two Western hostages - Kevin King from the United States and Timothy Weeks from Australia - on Tuesday in a prisoner exchange deal with the Afghan government. The American and Australian were exchanged with three insurgent leaders, including a key militant figure, Anas Haqqani ([NYT](#)). Ashraf Ghani and Pompeo spoke November 18, to review the steps necessary to implement President Ghani’s decision to release three high-level Taliban detainees ([U.S. Department of State](#)).

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

( 18-24 Nov 2019)



ASSESSMENT:

- As long as parties shed blood, common ground for negotiations to stop violence will never be found. On the other hand, kindness and common sense have immediately paid off, as witnessed in the prisoner swap. Successful prisoner swap can spark new round of peace talks, hopefully now between Afghans.
- Ashraf Ghani’s statements on “obliteration of DAESH” must be approached with prudence. DAESH is trying to rise from its ashes in Syria, still surviving in Iraq and has long ago proved that it is a die hard terrorist organisation. We have little reason to accept that DAESH will easily give up insurgency in such a permissive country.
- U.S. internal politics dynamics are shaping Afghan peace process. The U.S. Congress weighed in the debate by trying to exercise supervising authority over peace process which is currently being implemented by the U.S. administration. This will complicate the issue and definitely lengthen both the negotiations and the promulgation process.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said on Thursday it facilitated the release of 10 Afghan security force members detained by the Taliban and handed them over to Afghan authorities. “The 10 Afghan National Security Forces members were released and handed over to the ICRC in Helmand Province, in the District of Nahr-e Saraj,” Juan Pedro Schaerer, the ICRC’s head of delegation in Afghanistan said in a statement ([NYT](#)).

The European Union Delegation to Afghanistan understands and values the difficulty and courage that President Ghani’s recent decision to release prisoners entailed. The release of 2 professors and 10 Afghan hostages held by the Taliban for 3 Taliban prisoners is a strong gesture of goodwill by both sides. This highly symbolic and humanitarian measure can pave the way for further measures to put the peace process in motion, such as a swift launch of negotiations and work towards a ceasefire. In the meantime, an immediate and significant reduction in violence is needed to accompany the start of inclusive intra-Afghan negotiations ([EEAS](#)).

Armed Conflict

Security forces have "obliterated" Islamic State (IS) militants in Afghanistan, President Ashraf Ghani said on Tuesday, hours after a prisoner swap with Taliban insurgents raised hopes of a lull in violence in the country. More than 600 fighters from IS, locally known as Daesh, have surrendered with their families to the Afghan government in past weeks. Officials say air strikes by Afghan and coalition forces, lack of funds and low morale have forced the group to give up.

However, the Afghan Taliban, which has been battling IS and the government for control of the country, disputed that. Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban's official spokesman, described Ghani's announcement as "absurd". "Kabul admin had 0% role in defeat of Daesh and the proud people of Nangarhar are witnesses," he tweeted ([NYT](#)).

Afghanistan’s First Lady Rula Ghani on Saturday declared that there will be an initiative to form a Military Council of Afghan Women ([Ariana](#)).

Humanitarian Situation

Musa Mahmudi and Ehsanullah Hamidi, both well-known human rights defenders from Logar province, were arbitrarily detained by the National Directorate of Security (NDS) on 21 November 2019 when they were on their way to meet with the European Union ambassador in Kabul. The two human rights defenders began receiving threats, including from local officials in Logar, on Facebook after they gave interviews to The Guardian and Afghanistan’s TOLO News about the existence of a paedophile ring in the area. The human rights defenders uncovered more than 100 videos of the alleged abuse. Some of the victims of abuse have been murdered, according to The Guardian ([Amnesty International](#)).

The Quality of Nationality Index (QNI) has ranked Afghanistan at the bottom of its list, while France tops. The index that ranks the quality of nationalities based on internal and external factors, ranked Afghanistan 158th in 2018, while it was lower in 159th the year before ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

The European Commission has allocated an additional €40 million in emergency assistance to Afghanistan. The aid is meant for those affected by the worsening humanitarian situation in the country, as well as for Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran ([Afghanistan Times](#)).



## Political Developments

### Peace Process

The Council discussed Afghanistan. The High Representative and foreign ministers recalled that direct intra-Afghan talks are the only way to achieve a sustainable solution, while the resumption of US-Taliban talks could, in this context, constitute a first step towards the relaunch of the intra- Afghan negotiations. The Council also highlighted the need to significantly reduce violence and to create an environment that allows for the preservation of the rights and democratic advancements of the country, including with regard to the rights of women, children and minorities. The High Representative and foreign ministers reiterated the EU's readiness to support an inclusive political process. They recalled the significant engagement of the EU in the country and the commitment to its stability and prosperity ([Consilium](#)).

Russia welcomes any real moves of the warring parties in the Afghan conflict towards the launch of a peace process, seeing the release of three commanders from the Taliban-linked Haqqani network as a gesture of good will from the Afghan government, Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told a briefing on Thursday. “We have repeatedly said that we welcome any real moves by the opposing forces in the Afghan conflict aimed at ending the armed confrontation and launching a peace process in Afghanistan,” the spokeswoman said in reply to a question. “Within this context, we consider the release from prisons of three leaders of the Haqqani network connected with the Taliban movement (outlawed in Russia), as a gesture of good will from the Afghan government that will help advance the intra-Afghan peace process,” the diplomat said ([TASS](#)).

### Presidential Elections

An Afghan official says the results of the country’s presidential election held nearly two months ago are being delayed once again. Spokesman for the Independent Election Commission Zabi Sadat didn’t explain the new postponement. The results were supposed to be announced on Thursday in Kabul. There was no new date for the results ([NYT](#)).

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has formally complaint to the leadership of Afghanistan’s Independent Election Commission (IEC) over Commissioner Maulana Abdullah’s threatening behavior towards the Data Manager of the IEC National Tally Center. In a letter to Hawa Alam Nuristani, Chairperson of the IEC, UN says Maulana Abdullah has exercised the behavior at a recent Commission meeting held on 5 November 2019. “During the meeting, UNESP technical advisers and the International Commissioners witnessed direct life-threatening statements being made against Mr. Bashir Ali, Database Manager for the National Tally Center, by Commissioner Maulana Abdullah. Commissioner Abdullah also made derogatory slurs about Mr. Ali’s religion and ethnicity,” the letter reads ([Ariana](#)).

As part of the mandate conferred on it by the UN Security Council and at the request of Afghan authorities, UNAMA provides support to the Afghan electoral authorities and their work to manage credible elections. On 10 November, the head of UNAMA, sent an official letter to the IEC Chair, bringing to her attention the Mission’s concerns about an incident in which an IEC Commissioner’s actions were considered inappropriate and in violation of the Afghan Election Law. The letter invited the Commission to take measures to address the matter. In keeping with its mandate to advise Afghan electoral authorities, the purpose of the letter was to support and safeguard the integrity of the IEC and for the Election law to be respected. It is a matter of concern that the letter was leaked to the media and has been politicized by some to misrepresent its purpose and contents ([UNAMA](#)).

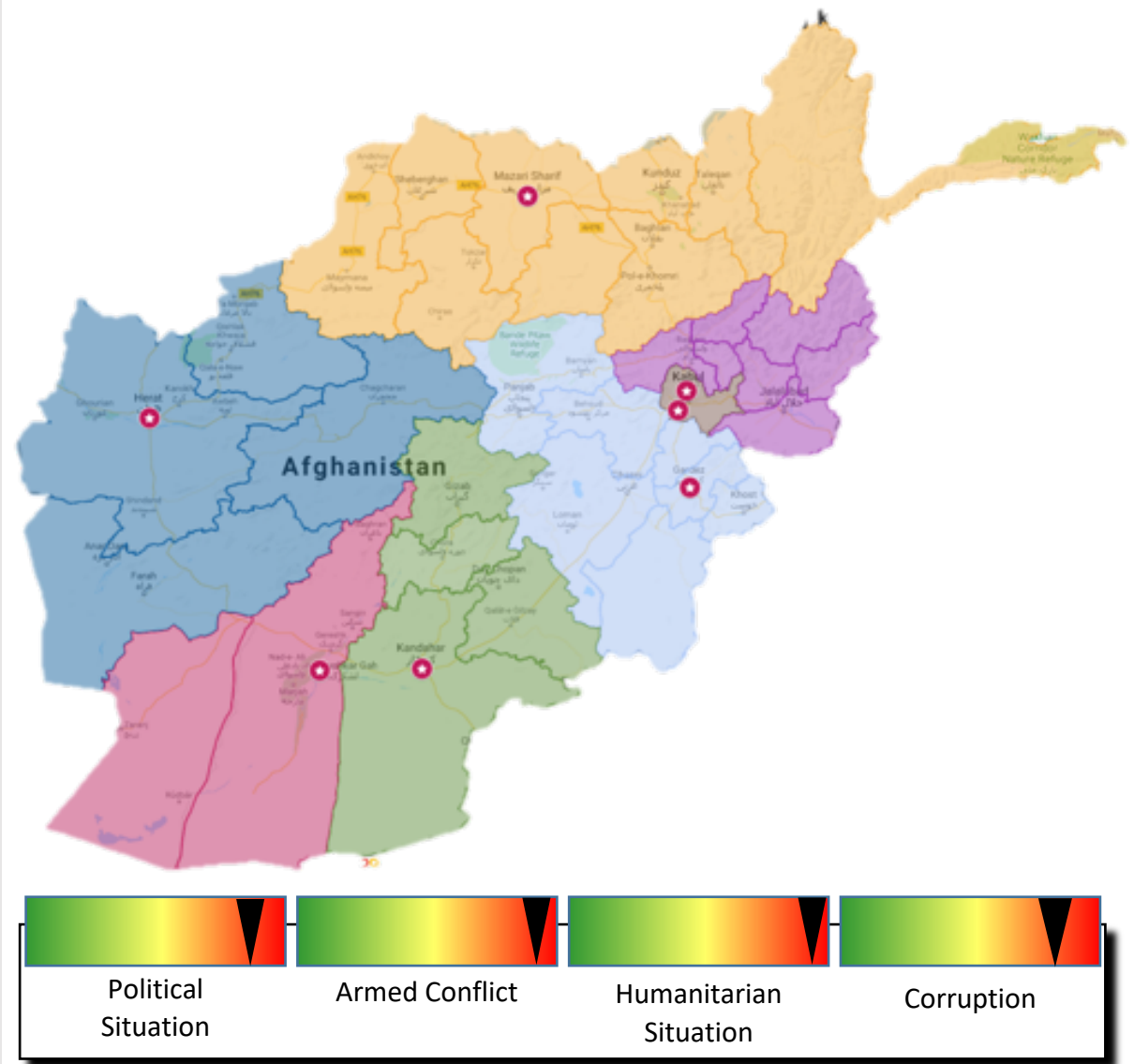
Maulana Abdullah, a Commissioner of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) on Saturday claimed that the two non-voting international members of the Commission are concealing electoral violations that are happening at the IEC ([Ariana](#)).

### Pakistan - Afghanistan Relations

Afghan national security adviser Hamdullah Mohib has met with Gen. Faiz Hameed, the head of Pakistan's intelligence agency, and Suhail Mahmood, Pakistan's foreign secretary ([NYT](#)).

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

( 11-17 Nov 2019)



### ASSESSMENT:

- Post presidential election failures are strong indicators of the fragile governing system that Afghanistan possess. Combined with extremely low turnout rates in elections, heavy conflict and failed peace process, both Afghan government and external powers fail to create options for the country. With the current picture at hand, we can only expect the worst.
- Numbers provided by the government regarding surrendered Daesh members with their families should be approached with prudence.
- Although the fight winds down as winter approaches, the Taliban continues to win and hold ground in the battlefield. Despite unwavering US and NATO support, ANDSF fails to provide security.

### Prisoner Swap

Afghan president Ashraf Ghani said on Tuesday the government would release a leader of the Taliban's Haqqani militant faction and two other commanders in exchange for two university professors, American Kevin King and Australian Timothy Weeks. A plan to swap two Western hostages with three Taliban prisoners has been postponed, an Afghan government official told Reuters on Friday, and Taliban sources said the group had moved the Westerners to a "new and safe place" ([NYT](#)).

Gunmen shot dead two federal prosecutors on Saturday as they were driving to Bagram Airfield north of the capital, Kabul, said Jamshid Rasouli, spokesman for the national Attorney General’s office. Two other prosecutors were wounded, he said, adding that the prosecutors were heading to the prison at Bagram Airfield, which has held top-level Taliban detainees, including Anas Haqqani ([NYT](#)).

The U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, John Bass, said on Sunday that the Taliban prisoner swap process suspended following the recent attacks in Kabul and Logar provinces ([Ariana](#)).

### Afghanistan-China Relations

Some members of Afghanistan’s Ulema Council on Sunday criticized the Afghan government and politicians for “silence” on “injustice” against the Muslim community in China. “Injustice against Muslims in any part of the world should not be ignored,” said Attaullah Ludin, a member of Afghanistan Ulema Council. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not comment on this report despite repeated attempts ([Tolo](#)).

### Armed Conflict

At least seven people were killed and 10 others, including four foreign nationals, wounded in Kabul on Wednesday when a van packed with explosives targeted a vehicle belonging to a foreign security company, Afghan security officials said. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the rush-hour attack, which came a day after the Afghan government agreed on a prisoner exchange with the Taliban insurgents in the hopes of reviving peace talks ([NYT](#)).

Moscow renders substantial assistance to Dushanbe in strengthening the Tajik-Afghan border and specifically delivers military hardware and shares air reconnaissance data, a source in diplomatic circles told TASS on Monday. The diplomatic source thus commented on the attack carried out by gunmen of the Islamic State terrorist group (outlawed in Russia) on a Tajik border post on November 6. “We are rendering direct assistance to Tajikistan on a constant basis and we have an intensive process of providing the army of Tajikistan with modern armament and weapon systems, including special hardware that is capable of monitoring the situation along the border. We know that the Tajik side is using some of this special hardware for strengthening border security,” the diplomatic source noted ([TASS](#)).

Eighteen Daesh members accompanied by 24 women and 31 children surrendered to Afghan forces on Friday in Achin district, Nangarhar province, the Defense Ministry said in a statement on Saturday. The total number of Daesh militants and family members who have surrendered to Afghan forces in the past two weeks is “over 615,” according to the Defense Ministry, which attributes the recent mass surrenders to increased operations against “terrorists” by security forces ([Tolo](#)).

### Misc.

### Pollution

Researchers in the Global Air, an international body working on air condition, call air pollution as the second killer after the long time war in Afghanistan. Some 26,000 people lost their lives due to air pollution diseases in 2017, according to the organization. Around six million people live in Kabul, a city facing air pollution problems like some other capital cities such as Beijing and New Delhi ([Afghanistan Times](#)).



## Political Developments

### Peace Process

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi have discussed a planned meeting in Beijing that would include Afghan figures and Taliban representatives. That meeting — known as "intra-Afghan dialogue" — was to take place last month but has been postponed. No new date has been set. The last time it was held was in July in Qatar ([NYT](#)).

The third intra-Afghan talks is expected to be held on November 21 in China's capital city of Beijing, some politicians who are going to attend the meeting said, the first ever face-to-face meeting between President Ashraf Ghani's government and Taliban who have repeatedly refused requests to sit with it ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

Second Vice President Sarwar Danish, on Friday said that Afghan government is ready to release the Taliban prisoners, provided that the group stops violence and starts direct peace talks with the government. "In accordance to Afghanistan law, we are fully prepared for the release of prisoners but reducing violence, ceasefire and launch of direct talks between Afghan government and Taliban are key actions for trust building," Danish said ([Ariana](#)).

Germany is willing to moderate the peace process between Afghan government and the Taliban group, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said. Speaking at a joint press conference with U.S Secretary of State, Maas added, his country is in close touch with Americans on how to proceed in Afghanistan and should the negotiations with Taliban be taken up again ([Ariana](#)).

### Presidential Elections

The result of the Afghan presidential election may be further delayed, two officials said, after the main challenger to incumbent Ashraf Ghani said on Sunday he would not agree to the addition of hundreds of thousands of what he called suspicious votes to a planned recount. The Afghanistan Independent Election Commission (IEC) said on Saturday that it would recount ballots from more than 8,000 polling stations - almost a third of the total - due to what it called discrepancies in their system. But Abdullah Abdullah, who currently shares power with Ghani in a unity government, said Ghani's side was pushing to include some 300,000 additional votes which did not come through biometric devices used in polling and which must be nullified ([NYT](#)).

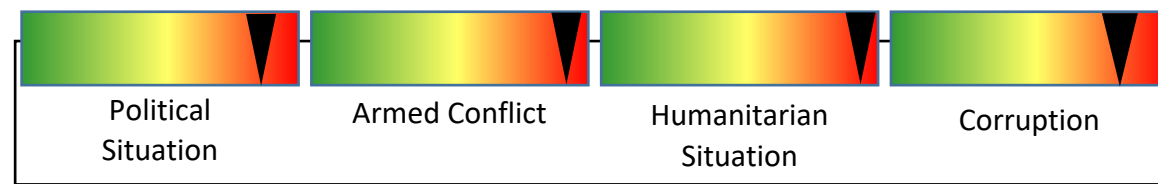
The Independent Election Commission (IEC) on Thursday announced that out 26,000 polling stations, the votes of 8,494 stations will be recounted ([Tolo](#)).

### Pakistan - Afghanistan Relations

Pakistan closed its consular services in Kabul on Monday, citing unspecified security concerns and an Afghan official said the government would investigate the issue, though it was not officially informed of any concerns. Pakistan's Embassy announced the closure in a statement, saying that the consular services would no longer be available until further information.

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

( 04-12 Nov 2019)



### ASSESSMENT:

- Chinese enthusiasm for the peace process might trigger different developments in Afghanistan. The need for coordination of parallel peace efforts is now greater than ever. Paradoxically, current state of events doesn't leave room for an "Afghan-led, Afghan-owned" solution anymore. The future of Afghanistan will be decided in Washington D.C., Moscow and Beijing.
- It is highly unlikely that presidential election results will be declared on time and satisfy any party. Presidential elections will likely exacerbate the political situation in the coming days.
- Although the fight winds down as winter approaches, the Taliban continues to win and hold ground in the battlefield. Despite unwavering US and NATO support, ANDSF fails to provide security.

On Sunday, Pakistan's foreign affairs ministry summoned the Afghan chargé d'affaires to convey concerns about the safety of its diplomats in Kabul. "The Afghan chargé d'affaires was informed that the officers and staff of the Embassy of Pakistan were being harassed over the past two days," it said, adding that they were blocked while on the road and that embassy vehicles were hit by motorcycles while on their way to the diplomatic mission in Kabul ([NYT](#)).

### Prisoner Swap

The Office of Afghanistan's National Security Council (ONSC) said on Monday that the Chief of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Lt General Faiz Hameed and the country's Foreign Secretary Sohail Mahmood have held talks with Afghanistan's National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib in Kabul. There are speculations about the possible release of several Taliban leaders, including Anas Haqqani, a top member of Haqqani Network, in exchange for two foreign professors abducted in Afghanistan in 2016. Anas Haqqani, the brother of Sirajuddin Haqqani who is the leader of the Haqqani network and Deputy Leader of the Taliban insurgent group, Mali Khan Zadran, a brother of the Haqqani Network's Founder, and Hafiz Rashid, the brother of Mullah Nabi Omari, a Guantanamo prisoner who was exchanged along other four men for captured U.S. soldier Bowe Bergdahl in 2014.

### Armed Conflict

At least 29 pro-government forces and 34 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past week (01-07 Nov 2019). The deadliest attack took place **Takhar Province**, where the Taliban attacked the Charsiha security outpost in **Khwaja Bahauddin District**, killing eight soldiers and one police officer during a five-hour clash. In **Baghlan Province**, the Taliban planted a roadside bomb to target security forces in the village of Akakhil in Pul-i-Khumri City, the provincial capital. The bomb hit a vehicle, killing eight civilians, including women and children, and wounding six others. Earlier in the week, in the **Darqad District of Takhar Province**, five children between the ages of 4 and 12 were killed by a roadside bomb placed by members of the Taliban ([NYT](#)).

U.S. Army General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has said that American troops would remain in Afghanistan for several more years ([Ariana](#)).

The Taliban claimed its fighters overran the alternate **Arghandab district** headquarters in the southeastern **province of Zabul** over the weekend, and killed the local chief of police and senior intelligence officer. The administrative center was relocated to another part of the district, as the Taliban controlled the original headquarters ([FDDs LWJ](#)).



## Political Developments

### Peace Process

The Special Representatives of Russia, China, and the United States of America held their fourth consultation on the Afghan peace process in Moscow on October 25, 2019. Russia, China, the United States and Pakistan also held the second round of four-party consultations. They confirmed that a sustainable peace can be achieved only through a negotiated political settlement and committed to work with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, both government leaders and others, and the Taliban to reach a comprehensive and sustainable peace agreement that ends the war for the benefit of all Afghans and that contributes to regional stability and global security. In order to create an environment conducive for negotiations, urged all sides to immediately reduce violence. ([US Department of State](#))

Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad visited Kabul from October 26 to October 28 and from October 29 to November 1. The Special Representative briefed the government on his recent consultations with allies, partners, and other countries in the region. He also met with former officials, members of civil society, and the religious community to brief them and to hear their views on the peace process. ([US Embassy in Afghanistan](#))

The Afghan government said on Tuesday that it would not take part in negotiations with the Taliban unless a cease-fire had first held for at least a month, a demand that is likely to face resistance from the insurgents and complicate the revival of peace efforts that were upended by President Trump. Hamdullah Mohib, the Afghan president’s national security adviser, told a news conference in the capital, Kabul, that the government saw a cease-fire as a test of whether the leaders negotiating on behalf of the Taliban still had the power to order an end to fighting, something that rising levels of violence during the group’s talks with the United States had led it to doubt. ([NYT](#))

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that his country has an interest in including Iran in the Russia-China-U.S. format for Afghan peace talks. ([Ariana](#))

### OPINION - Is a peace deal in Afghanistan possible?

It is interesting to note that peace negotiations today, in certain ways, parallel the situation in the early 1990’s when Afghanistan descended into civil war. The Afghan National Reconciliation Policy (NRP), developed in the 1980’s and 90’s by Mohammad Najibullah’s government, had tried to engage in negotiations with armed groups in an attempt to balance local, national, and international interests. However, the negotiations failed because of the blatant interference of neighbouring countries, the conflicting interests of different stakeholders, dwindling interests of major powers like the United States (US) and the Soviet Union (already on the verge of disintegration), and most importantly, a lack of local, regional, and international consensus.

Khalilzad was smart enough to garner the consensus of the stakeholders involved, particularly regional powers, from the very beginning of the process. From Washington to Europe, Moscow to China, Middle East and South Asia, he has been travelling throughout the region in order to brief and take into confidence all the various parties who are impacted by the situation in Afghanistan.

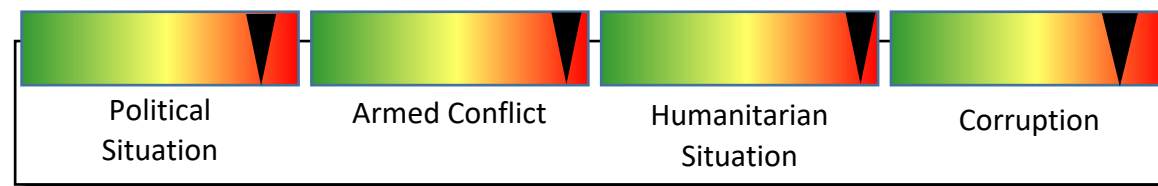
Afghanistan, post-peace settlement, should avoid the mistakes of the 1980’s and 90’s. It must keep in consideration the national, regional and international consensus, and work towards gaining the trust of the major world powers. ([Afghanistan Times](#))

### Armed Conflict

Operations by all the parties to the conflict this quarter led to high combat casualties. According to RS, the NATO command in Afghanistan, from June 1 through August 31, 2019, ANDSF total casualties increased by approximately 5% when compared to the same period last year. Additionally, according to the Department of Defense (DOD), seven American service members were killed in action (KIA) in Afghanistan from July 16 to October 16, bringing the 2019 total to 17 KIA and 124 wounded in action, the highest annual number of U.S. combat casualties in Afghanistan in the last five years.(SIGAR)

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(28 Oct-04 Nov 2019)



### ASSESSMENT:

- Hope for a peace deal is being fed by optimism radiated from trilateral mechanism’s work. It seems that peace talks will commence in the coming days. A consensus on Iran’s inclusion in the peace process (which is possibly a move to counterbalance Pakistan on the table) between the US, Russia and China is highly unlikely though.
- Border conflict between Afghanistan and Pakistan is a destabilizing factor for the region and might deteriorate.
- SIGAR report confirms intense firefight in Afghanistan. It also shows contradicting data provided by different stakeholders. Credibility (bundled with legitimacy) is something which needs to be preserved to remain at the right side of history.
- “Ghost soldiers” phenomenon is once again scrutinized in SIGAR report. Corruption and struggle for more power within the Afghan state are the obstacles that prevents ANDSF from being a credible deterrent.
- Allegations documented in latest HRW are worrying and signals that even a peace deal is stricken, other challenges await Afghanistan.

Nine Afghan children were killed on Saturday when a mine exploded as they walked to school, police said, the latest victims in a growing toll of civilian casualties in the war. The blast happened in the northeastern province of Takhar. Saturday is a school day in Afghanistan. The children, aged nine to 12, included four from what Asir described as a "Taliban family". ([NYT](#))

Afghan security units backed by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) have carried out extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, indiscriminate air strikes and other rights abuses and should be disbanded, HRW said. Human Rights Watch said it investigated 14 cases in which CIA-backed Afghan counterinsurgency forces committed serious abuses in Afghanistan between late 2017 and mid-2019. ([NYT](#))

Washington's peace envoy was in the Afghan capital Kabul on Thursday trying to negotiate a prisoner exchange that would free two Western professors employed by the American University of Afghanistan held by the Taliban since 2016, officials said. ([NYT](#)) The Taliban militant group has given a list of 82 prisoners – to be exchanged – to the U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan Reconciliation. ([Ariana](#))

Afghan and Pakistani forces engaged in cross-border clashes for a second day, hours after Pakistani mortar and rocket fire into Afghanistan killed three women in eastern Kunar province, Afghan officials said. The fighting first broke out Sunday afternoon when Afghan forces and local militiamen tried to stop Pakistani forces from allegedly establishing a military installation along the disputed border. ([NYT](#))

The Russian military has for the first time deployed the S-300 surface-to-air missile system at its military base near Afghanistan, the Defense Ministry has announced. Russia maintains troops at its military base in the ex-Soviet republic of Tajikistan, near the Afghan border, as a bulwark against the threat of Islamist radicals and drug trafficking. ([MT](#))

Afghan security forces have destroyed around 80 residential houses in volatile Sayed Abad district of Wardak province, residents claimed on Sunday. ([Ariana](#))

According to the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), 10 to 60 percent personnel of the Afghan army were not present at work when a personnel accountability audit was conducted in several bases. ([Ariana](#))

### OPINION - Reasons Behind the high rate of insurgency in Afghanistan

There are many reasons behind the surged terror activities in the country but the following are considered to be the key drivers behind the perennial war and terrorism in Afghanistan:

- The strategic location of Afghanistan
- Increased level of unemployment Conflict over water with Pakistan

### OPINION - How the Taliban militants recruit youngsters? Misinterpretation of the Islamic rituals

Leveraging from the low level of literacy the Taliban easily indoctrinated people’s minds with radicalized teachings and dominated the country using religion as a tool. Two key reasons that led people to be misled:

- Lack of Media Platforms
- Low level of literacy. ([Afghanistan Times](#))

### Humanitarian Situation

Some 48 per cent of people in the rural areas do not have access to drinkable water, the ministry of rural rehabilitation and development says.Rubina Shahbi, spokeswoman for the national statistics authority, said that 23 out of 32.2 million population that make 71.4 per cent of the population, live in rural areas. ([Afghanistan Times](#))

### Economic Developments

The German State Secretary for Economic Cooperation and Development, Martin Jaeger has announced an amount of 72 million Euros aid to Afghanistan. The donation makes the total commitment of Afghan-German Cooperation projects to 211 million EU this year ([Afghanistan Times](#)).



## Political Developments

### Peace Process

Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad and an interagency team departed on travel to Brussels, Paris, and Moscow on October 20. In Brussels and Paris, Ambassador Khalilzad met with like minded partners including the EU, NATO, and UN to review how best to support accelerated efforts to reach peace in Afghanistan. In Moscow, Ambassador Khalilzad will meet with Russian and Chinese counterparts to discuss shared interests in seeing the war in Afghanistan come to an end ([US Department of State](#)).

Special Envoys and Special Representatives of the European Union, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, the United Kingdom, the United Nations and the United States of America met at EU Headquarters in Brussels on 22 October 2019. Respectful of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, participants exchanged views on the current status of the Afghan peace process and discussed ways to support the Afghan people’s desire for a lasting peace ([EEAS](#)).

Representatives of Russia, China, the United States and Pakistan have agreed that negotiation is the only road to peace in Afghanistan, including an early resumption of direct U.S. talks with the Taliban. The day-long talks in Moscow on Friday came ahead of an intra-Afghan dialogue to be hosted by China. The Beijing talks, which initially were to be held next week, have been postponed, according to officials familiar with the talks. Speaking on condition they not be identified because they were not authorized to talk about the subject, they said the postponement would be brief but no new date was given ([NYT](#)).

An Afghan politician confirms that U.S. peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad is in Afghanistan's capital for his first visit since talks between the U.S. and Taliban collapsed last month. Khalilzad's visit to Kabul follows a meeting in Moscow he held with representatives of China, Russia and Pakistan, over restarting peace talks ([NYT](#)).

“The NATO alliance remains fully committed to the Resolute Support mission, along with US objective and -- of ensuring terrorists are never again able to attack our homelands from Afghanistan. We all agree that the best way to achieve this outcome is through an enduring political settlement. As we adapt to changing conditions in Afghanistan, we are looking for ways to better optimize our force structure. Our goal is to maintain a sustainable force that meets the requirements of the mission. We will continue to consult with our allies, along with the Afghan government, to refine the way ahead in Afghanistan.” ([US Secretary of Defence](#))

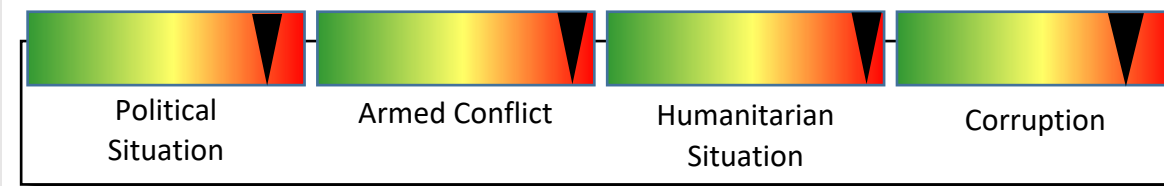
A negotiated political agreement among Afghans is the best path to a peaceful government in their country, Defense Secretary Dr. Mark T. Esper said during a visit to Afghanistan's capital of Kabul. Until that agreement is reached, "we will continue to pursue an aggressive military campaign against the Taliban and terrorist groups that continue to conduct violence against the people of Afghanistan," the secretary said ([US Department of Defence](#)).

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that the alliance supports the resumption of Afghan peace talks between the U.S. and Taliban representatives. However, he reiterated that the Taliban had to show real willingness to make real compromises. Speaking with reporters ahead of the meetings of NATO Defence Ministers in Brussels, Stoltenberg said the Taliban should agree on a credible peace deal. He explained that a credible peace will preserve the gains made in Afghanistan for Afghans, for women, for journalists, for everyone who believes in a democratic, and free Afghanistan ([Ariana](#)).

A number of politicians claimed that there are serious disagreements between the government and political parties over selecting members of peace negotiators. This comes after the European Union and the United States called on Afghan leaders to focus immediately on preparing the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for formal Intra-Afghan Negotiations with the Taliban, including the naming of an inclusive national negotiating team. In addition, the representatives have urged all sides to observe a ceasefire for the duration of Intra-Afghan Negotiations to enable participants to reach agreement on a political road-map of Afghanistan’s future ([Ariana](#)).

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(21-27 Oct 2019)



## ASSESSMENT:

- U.S. and Taliban intention to resume talks is a positive indicator. Apparently, Russia, China, Pakistan, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, the United Kingdom, NATO and the EU support the reinvigoration of peace talks. U.S. contingency planning for a rapid withdrawal is yet another indicator for the things that are to be negotiated. New round of peace talks will likely begin prior to the end of the fighting season which is another positive indicator. There will be more room for talks during cessation of fighting.
- Preliminary results of presidential elections will hopefully be announced within three weeks. However, it is highly unlikely that a candidate will gather more than half of the votes in the first round. Therefore, the country will likely call a second round of elections between two frontrunners in the coming days.
- At NATO defence ministerial Allies showed solidarity with Afghanistan and voiced their strong support to the Ghani government. NATO also urged Taliban to compromise. Taliban has to go through the new calculus when it is still has the upper hand. Otherwise it can lose all.

### Esper’s Afghanistan Visit

Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper met with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, Minister of Defense Asadullah Khalid, Minister of Interior Massoud Andarabi and Acting Director General of the National Directorate of Security Ahmad Zia Saraj Oct. 20-21 in Kabul. The leaders discussed mutual security concerns, including the importance of countering terrorism in the region and sustaining progress of the Afghan security forces ([US Department of Defence](#)).

### Pelosi Visits Afghanistan

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi make a surprise stop in Afghanistan on Sunday, visiting with U.S. military personnel and Afghan government officials as part of a bipartisan congressional delegation monitoring progress there. The move comes amid uncertainty surrounding U.S. troop combat deployments — particularly in the Middle East, where special forces service members were pulled back from positions in Syria — and conflicting plans from White House and congressional leaders on how to draw down military presence overseas ([Military Times](#)).

### Rabbani Resigns

Afghanistan's acting foreign minister, Salahuddin Rabbani, has resigned his post. In a resignation letter to President Ashraf Ghani on Wednesday, Rabbani said the Foreign Ministry has been sidelined and is being treated as a non-governmental organization ([NYT](#)).

### Presidential Elections

Afghan officials have set a new date for announcing the result of last month's presidential election, after several delays. Hawa Alam Nuristani, head of the Independent Election Commission, said Sunday preliminary results will be announced on Nov. 14 ([NYT](#)).

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) says the culprits of breaching its data center, were introduced to the attorney general office for investigation ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

### Troop Drawdown

The United States has been quietly reducing its troop strength in Afghanistan despite the lack of a peace deal with the Taliban, weakening its hand in any future negotiations with the insurgents. The top American commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Austin S. Miller, said Monday that the size of the force in the country had dropped by 2,000 over the last year, down to somewhere between 13,000 and 12,000 ([NYT](#)).

The Pentagon recently began drawing up plans for an abrupt withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Afghanistan in case President Donald Trump surprises military leaders by ordering an immediate drawdown as he did in Syria, three current and former defense officials said. The contingency planning is ongoing, the officials said, and includes the possibility that Trump orders all U.S. troops out of Afghanistan within weeks ([NBC](#)).

### Dostum Visits Turkey

The first vice president, Abdul Rashid Dostum who is visiting Turkey, met with the country’s president Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Ankara, discussing peace process and presidential election in Afghanistan ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

### Armed Conflict

The Taliban stormed a checkpoint in northern Afghanistan, killing at least 15 policemen in the latest attack by insurgents. The multi-pronged attack on a checkpoint in the Ali Abad district of northern Kunduz province began late on Monday night and set off an hours-long gunbattle. Along with the 15 policemen were killed, two other officers were wounded in the assault, he said ([NYT](#)).

Addressing a ceremony organized to commemorate the first death anniversary of General Abdul Razeq, the Interior Minister, Massoud Andarabi on Monday has said the Taliban leaders have no control over their fighters as the group’s leadership have been scattered in Qatar and Quetta ([Afghanistan Times](#)).



## Political Developments

### Peace Process

U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper arrived in Afghanistan on Sunday in a bid to bring talks with the Taliban back on track after President Donald Trump abruptly broke off negotiations last month seeking to end the United States' longest war. Esper's trip to Kabul comes amid questions about the United States' commitments to allies after a sudden withdrawal of U.S. troops from northeastern Syria and Trump's long-time desire to get out of foreign engagements. "The aim is to still get a peace agreement at some point, a political agreement. That is the best way forward," Esper told reporters traveling with him to Afghanistan. He is due to meet President Ashraf Ghani and U.S. troops while in Afghanistan ([NYT](#)).

The US peace envoy, Zalmay Khalilzad, referring to a meeting with Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that a political settlement in Afghanistan will help reduce the burden of war and protect the gains made in Afghanistan ([Tolo](#)).

The EU Envoy to Afghanistan Roland Kobia on Sunday emphasized the need for the resumption of peace negotiation talks between the US and the Taliban. Kobia said that the resumption of talks between the US and the Taliban should lead to a ceasefire and the start of intra-Afghan talks. If the government was like the Islamic Emirate where these rights would be not protected, it would be a very difficult for Europeans to help the reconstruction, to provide development aid, to give access to the first world market ([Tolo](#)).

Russia, China and the US may hold their trilateral consultations on Afghanistan by the end of October, Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs said. He maintained that the exact data of the meeting remained uncertain ([ANI](#)).

Speaking with CNN-News18, an Indian English-language news television network, the Taliban's political spokesman Suhail Shaheen said there is no military solution to the issue of Afghanistan.

Shaheen further said that the group was ready to talk to all Afghan sides including the Afghan government after signing a peace deal with the United States ([Ariana](#)).

### Presidential Elections

An Afghan official says the planned announcement of preliminary results of last month's presidential election has been delayed. Aziz Ibrahim, spokesman for the Independent Election Commission, says Saturday that reasons for the delay include problems with the transparency of the process, delays in transferring ballot papers and delays in transferring data from a biometric system into the main server ([NYT](#)).

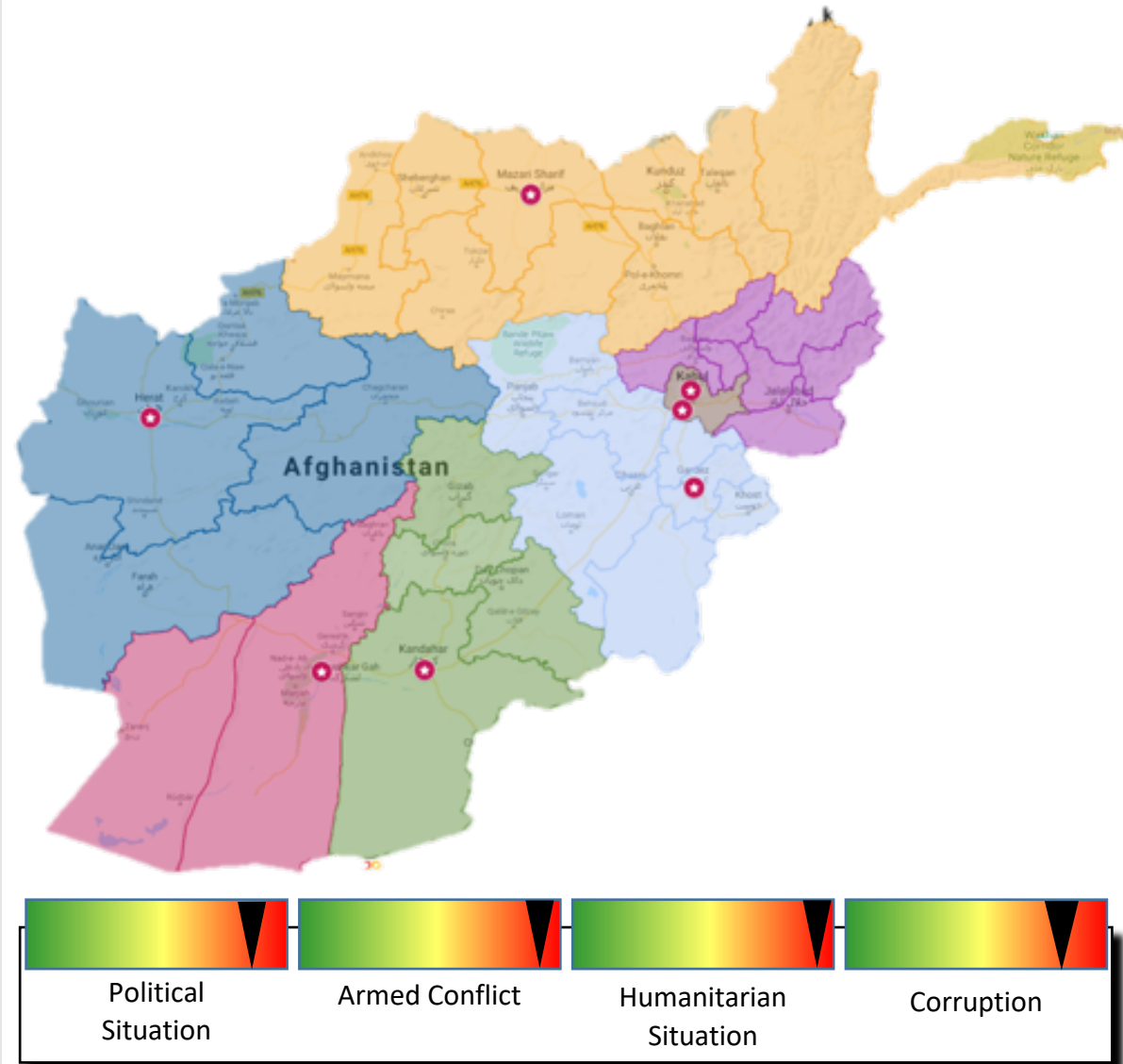
Afghanistan's Election Commission is struggling to meet its own deadline to announce preliminary results of last month's presidential poll. The government blames Taliban attacks and threats for a low voter turnout of an roughly 26 percent of the more than nine million registered voters.

Officials say biometric data machines supposed to prevent fraud have complicated and delayed the process.

And that has left many people saying they will not be able to trust the official results ([Al Jazeera](#)).

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(14-20 Oct 2019)



### ASSESSMENT:

- U.S. and Taliban intention to resume talks is a positive indicator. However, intense fight on the ground and record high civilian casualties cast doubt on their sincerity.
- Preliminary results of presidential elections are yet to be announced. It is highly likely that behind closed doors parties are searching venues for political power sharing-agreements. Low turnout rate (29%) in the elections is important in showing Taliban succeeded in intimidating population and damaging new president's legitimacy.
- Parties need to find an immediate solution to civilian casualties and related suffering should a lasting peace is aimed.

## Armed Conflict

In the first nine months of 2019, UNAMA documented 8,239 civilian casualties (2,563 killed and 5,676 injured) – similar high levels of harm experienced by Afghanistan's civilian population in the corresponding nine-month period from 2014 to the present. And in the latest quarter, UNAMA documented an unprecedented number of civilian casualties.

Verified civilian casualties from 1 July to 30 September increased by 42 per cent in comparison to the same period in 2018. Moreover, in July, UNAMA documented the highest number of civilian casualties ever recorded in a single month since the United Nations began its systematic documentation of civilian casualties in Afghanistan in 2009 ([UNAMA](#)).

A special report released by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) describes the severe impact of election-related violence on civilians, mainly coming from the Taliban's deliberate campaign of violence and intimidation to disrupt Afghanistan's presidential election. UNAMA's findings indicate that attacks targeting the electoral process caused 458 civilian casualties (85 killed and 373 injured), including 277 civilian casualties (28 killed and 249 injured) on 28 September, polling day, when more than one-third of civilian casualties were children. The report not only documents the harm to civilians caused by the Taliban's violent offensive to disrupt the election – leading to more than 80 per cent of the election-related civilian casualties documented in the report – but also highlights a pattern of abductions, threats, intimidation and harassment carried out by the Taliban against civilians leading up to and during the elections ([UNAMA](#)).

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) condemns the attack that took place Friday at a mosque in Nangarhar's Deh Balah district, killing and injuring more than 100 civilians, among them many children. On 18 October, explosives during Friday prayers caused scores of civilian casualties and the destruction of the village mosque of Deh Balah's Jawdara village. Initial findings of UNAMA's Human Rights team indicate that at least 63 civilians were killed and 46 civilians sustained injuries. Among them were many children who were killed and injured ([UNAMA](#)).

Officials say an Afghan army helicopter has crashed in northern Balkh Province, leaving at least seven army personnel, including the crew members, dead ([NYT](#)).

At least 80 Afghan security forces are under Taliban siege in southern Urozgan province of Afghanistan since several days, the provincial governor told Ariana News. Approximately, Taliban controls 20 percent of the province and militants of the group are usually conducting attacks against Afghan forces in the remaining areas ([Ariana](#)).

India delivered two more Mi-35 attack helicopters to the Afghanistan Air Force on Tuesday, the Defense Ministry said. The country had gifted four Mi 24d gunship choppers in December 2015 and two Mi-35 attack helicopters in May 2019 ([Ariana](#)).

## Economic Developments

On 10 October 2019 Afghanistan achieved another milestone in its efforts to use global markets to drive growth and job creation when the cabinet chaired by President Ashraf Ghani endorsed the country's first national trade policy, which sets out a five-year agenda for overcoming challenges that Afghan businesses face in tapping into international value chains ([EEAS](#)).

An agreement on a project aimed at improving the quality of the Accelerated Non-formal Education Programme (ANEP) was signed between Japan and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on Wednesday at the Embassy of Japan in Kabul. The project will be implemented jointly by the Ministry of Education and UNESCO within a period of three years (2019-2022) and will focus on establishing literacy courses, pilot accelerated learning centres and professionalization of 70 Adult Literacy Schools throughout Afghanistan ([Ariana](#)).



## Political Developments

### Peace Process

A Taliban delegation met U.S. special representative for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad for more than an hour on Thursday, two sources told Reuters, the first known contact between the sides since U.S. President Donald Trump called off talks last month ([Tolo](#)).

### Presidential Elections

Despite pulling off a safer presidential election than expected, Afghanistan looks headed for a prolonged period of political uncertainty, with the two front-runners claiming victory before ballots are tallied and signalling they would not accept defeat.

The situation echoes 2014, when candidates Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah alleged massive fraud by each other, forcing the United States to broker an awkward power-sharing arrangement that made Ghani president. Both men, front-runners again, say they would not accept a similar arrangement this time.

At the same time, Taliban insurgents rule more of the country than at any time since they were ousted from power nearly two decades ago, and have refused to accept the legitimacy of what they call a puppet U.S.-backed government ([NYT](#)).

A foreign diplomat has alleged that the low turnout in the September 28th presidential election would undermine the legitimacy of the Afghan government.

Bhadra Kumar, a former Indian ambassador to Turkey, on Sunday warned that the results of election would cause severe political and security problems in Afghanistan ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

All Afghan authorities and actors – including the Independent Election Commission (IEC), the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC), political parties, the government, candidates and their supporters – must demonstrate their commitment to safeguard and complete the election, and to protect the integrity of the process, especially with regard to tabulating and announcing the results. ([UNAMA](#)).

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) says that its computer system that is linked to the biometric has been inactive for the past one week.

A German computer company responsible for technical issues of the election commission’s computer system, has sent experts for the solution, but an official of the election commission said Friday that they have not managed to solve the problem completely.

Habib Rahman Nang, head of the commission’s secretariat, said they would announce the preliminary results of the September 28th presidential election if the biometric system problem was solved by Friday ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) says experts from the German company of DERMALOG have been called to come to Kabul for resolving of problems affected its computer system that was hacked earlier.

According to reports, Indian hackers broke the commission’s computers benefiting a certain presidential candidate that New Delhi backs.

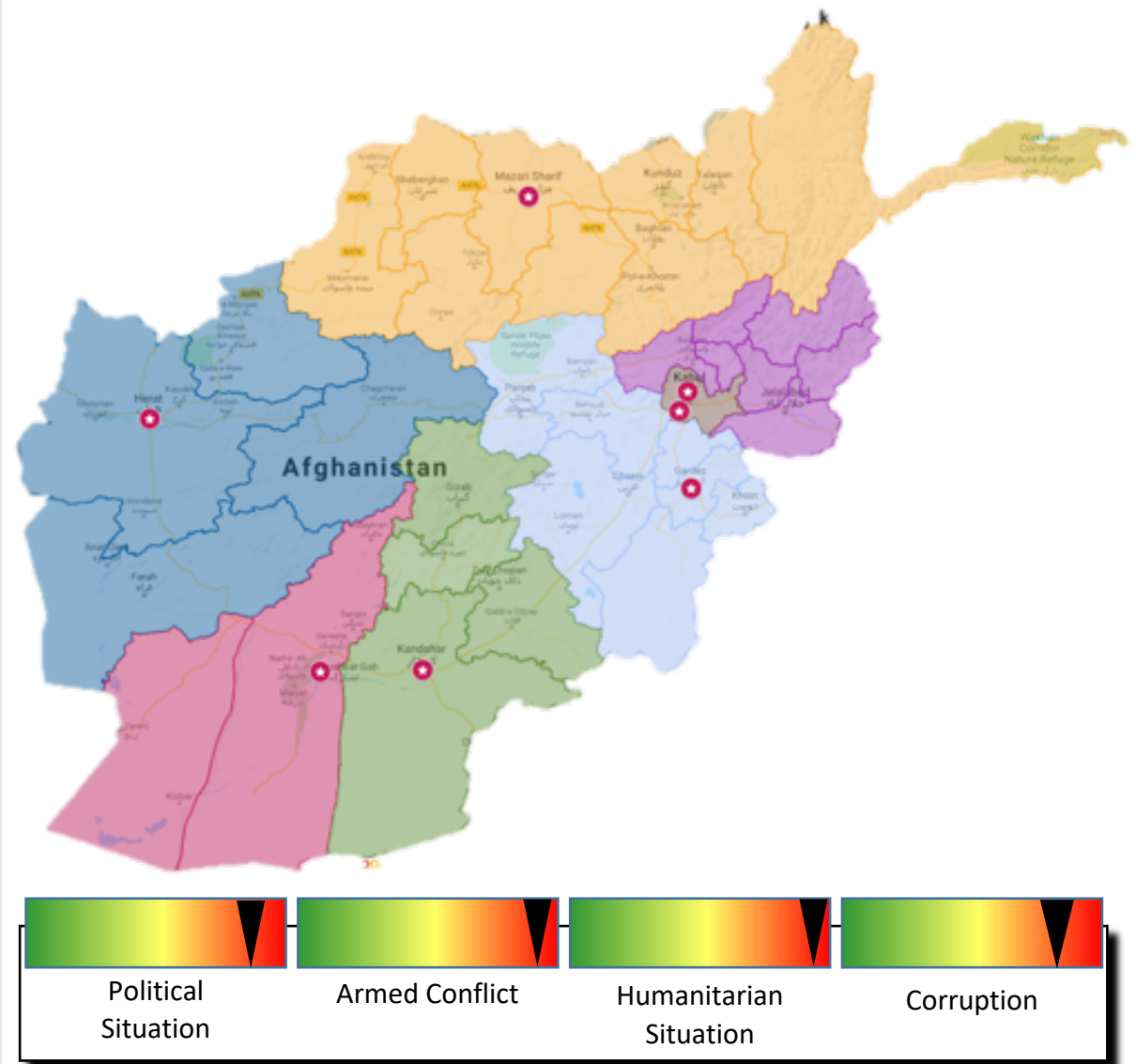
The UN representative in Afghanistan, Tadamichi Yamamoto asked foreign ministry on Tuesday to urgently grant visa to the German experts for resolving of computers ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

### Opinion - Death Penalty

Afghanistan has not carried out any executions since February 2018 and it can now take the next step. We call on the Government to observe a de facto moratorium on executions prior to the final abolishment of the death penalty. This would demonstrate a firm commitment to promoting human rights. Neither the prevailing climate of violence, nor cultural or practical justifications, can possibly legitimate the death penalty. ([EEAS](#))

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(07-14 Oct 2019)



## ASSESSMENT:

- It is in every stakeholder’s interest to resume peace talks to put an end to the ongoing war in Afghanistan. In this regard, Pakistan might have a role to play. Any negotiation led by Pakistan will be perceived in the Taliban's favour, at least by Afghan government. Thus, it is less likely to achieve a tangible result from reinvigorated peace process, particularly the one that Pakistan initiates.
- Post election debate will likely to gain impetus and dominate the news until the Independent Electoral Complaint Commission (IECC) announces election results which will take 50 days.
- IOs, most notably the UN must be more active in preventing civilian deaths, at least caused by its members.

## Armed Conflict

A United Nations special report, which examines the impact on civilians of the United States’ airstrikes on alleged drug-processing facilities on 5 May 2019 in Afghanistan, determines that the operation caused a large number of civilian casualties. The report also examines the legal framework applicable to this incident.

The UN verified 39 civilian casualties, among them 14 children and one woman, from multiple airstrikes on more than 60 sites that the United States Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) identified as drug-production facilities in Bakwa district and in parts of the neighbouring Delaram district of Nimroz province.

According to international humanitarian law, including international customary law, facilities that contribute economically or financially to the war effort of a party to a conflict are considered civilian objectives.

The report, jointly produced by UNAMA and the UN Human Rights Office, concludes that drug facilities and associated workers may not be lawfully made the target of attack and should be protected ([UNAMA](#)).

Afghanistan's intelligence service said that a top al Qaeda militant commander was among those killed during an operation last month in Helmand province that also caused civilian deaths at a wedding party.

Asim Omar, a Pakistani national, and the leader of al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), was killed in the Musa Qala district of Helmand on Sept. 23, the Afghan National Directorate of Security, (NDS) the country's intelligence agency said on Twitter on Tuesday.

At least 40 people, including 12 children, were killed during the joint U.S.-Afghan operation, which occurred days after a U.S. drone strike aimed at militants hiding among farmers killed 32 pine nut harvesters ([NYT](#)).

A suicide bomb targeted a minibus of recruits for the Afghan security forces in the eastern city of Jalalabad on Monday, killing at least 10 people and injuring 27, local government sources said. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack but Islamic State militants have carried a string of suicide bombings and attacks on government offices, schools, and aid groups in recent years in Jalalabad, Nangarhar's main city ([NYT](#)).

The Taliban has released three kidnapped engineers from India in exchange for the 11 members of the militant group who were held in an Afghan prison, a senior Afghan government source said on Monday. The Indian engineers were among seven, along with an Afghan national, who were kidnapped in May 2018 while working at a power plant in northern Baghlan province of Afghanistan. No group had previously claimed responsibility ([NYT](#)).

The Afghan Ambassador to Pakistan, Shukrullah Atif Mashal, says Pakistani police have repeatedly attacked the Afghan market in Peshawar and taken down the Afghan national flag, and in response the Afghan Embassy in Islamabad has closed the Afghan Consulate in Peshawar. The Afghan government stated on Friday that such actions are “irresponsible and insulting.” ([Tolo](#))

The Ministry of Interior reported issuing weapons licenses to 160 members of the House of Representatives, however, the Mol claims to not know how the remaining 90 members of the parliament managed to get weapons. Based on Afghan law, a member of parliament is allowed to keep four security guards. Allah Gul Mujahid, an MP from Kabul, admits that he keeps six body guards with heavy weapons at his home ([Tolo](#)).

## Economic Development

The World Bank Group has approved a \$98.8m financing package for two gas-to-power energy projects in Afghanistan. The package will support Sheberghan and Mazar-e-Sharif Gas-to-Power Projects. Currently, Afghanistan is importing its needed energy from neighboring Tajikistan and Uzbekistan countries ([Ariana](#)).

## Political Developments

### Failed Peace Process

The meeting in recent days in Pakistan’s capital, Islamabad, between Taliban officials and the American diplomat Zalmay Khalilzad, comes on the heels of Afghanistan’s presidential election last week. The discussions between the two sides were informal, the Taliban members said, and did not indicate the beginning of a new round of peace discussions, only that they may take place in the future ([NYT](#)).

Senior Afghan Taliban leaders and Pakistani officials on Thursday called for the resumption of talks on a peaceful resolution to the war in Afghanistan. The appeal, made during a rare Taliban visit to Islamabad, comes after months-long U.S.-Taliban negotiations collapsed in September and President Donald Trump announced the talks with the insurgents were "dead." ([NYT](#)).

Zamir Kabulov, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s Special Representative for Afghanistan does not rule out fundamentalist elements joining Daesh/ISIS/ISKP, but adds some of this talk is from those trying to sabotage the peace process ([SNI](#)).

### Presidential Elections

The members of the United Nations Security Council called on the Afghan electoral institutions, including the Independent Election Commission and the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission, to ensure that the votes of Afghans are accurately counted and that results are determined in a fair, inclusive and transparent manner ([UNAMA](#)).

The European Union remains committed to supporting the Afghan constitutional order and the electoral process as a way to ensure institutional continuity and legitimacy of Afghanistan's political institutions. The European Union will continue to work with all Afghan stakeholders, along with our international partners, for democracy, peace, stability and development in Afghanistan, for the sake of the Afghans, of the region and of the whole world ([EEAS](#)).

At many polling stations, including some in the capital, Kabul, only the occasional voter had shown up. To allow for a bigger turnout, voting was extended by two hours. The worry about low turnout has now turned into suspicion of artificially high turnout. Ballot boxes from several areas that had exceptionally high turnout in the Saturday election, surprising observers, have arrived at the Independent Election Commission’s tabulation centers brimming with votes. Some places of sparse voting reported turnout rates as high as 90 percent ([NYT](#)).

There are several reasons Afghan officials are struggling to determine how people voted in the presidential election last week — possible fraud, misplaced biometric data and the country’s vast geography. But there is one factor that has complicated the effort more than any other: the Taliban’s tactic of destroying cell phone towers. Destruction of the towers prevented voting officials from communicating with election workers in the country, while instigating fear and intimidation in the affected areas ([NYT](#)).

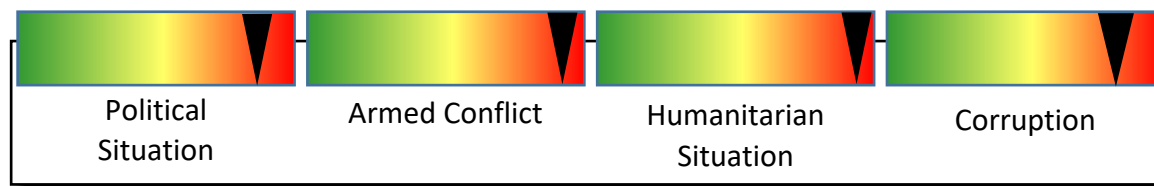
Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, while addressing parliament members in Tehran on Sunday, said “we do not accept a peace in the foreigners’ favor in Afghanistan,” Fars news reported ([Tolo](#)).

The Independent Electoral Complaint Commission (IECC), rejected President Ghani’s predicts over the date of election results, saying the results announcement would take 50 days. President Ghani had earlier said that the swearing-in ceremony of the new president would take place in three weeks after the final results of the election are announced ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

Taliban officials said that several of the armed group's members have been freed from Afghan jails, including former shadow governors. ([Al Jazeera](#))

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(30 Sep - 07 Oct 2019)



### ASSESSMENT:

- As indicators have long been observed, Pakistan began playing its role in Afghan peace process. Whether it will bring peace to the war torn country or not remains unclear for the time being. Any negotiation led by Pakistan will be perceived in the Taliban's favour, at least by Afghan government. Thus, it is less likely to achieve a tangible result from reinvigorated peace process, particularly the one that Pakistan initiates.
- Post election debate will likely to gain impetus and dominate the news until the Independent Electoral Complaint Commission (IECC) announces election results which will take 50 days.
- Intense US/Coalition air support is yet another indicator that things are not going well on the ground after international forces handed over security responsibilities to ANDSF in 2015. ANDSF capability gaps are being - partially - covered by foreign air support, for now. Since peace process collapsed and no credible alternative exists and the US administration is reluctant to stay in Afghanistan, ANDSF will bear more burden in the battlefield in the coming days.
- Another aspect of intense air power use in Afghanistan is increasing civilian casualties that are attributable to Afghan/US/Coalition airstrikes. Airstrikes conducted in urban areas are violating distinction principle of Law of War. On the other hand, Taliban uses civilians as shelters in conflict.

## Armed Conflict

At least 154 pro-government forces and 27 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past week (27 Sep-03 Oct). On Saturday, the day of the Afghan elections, nearly 200 attacks were carried out by the Taliban across the country. At least 30 people were killed and more than 200 people were wounded. The deadliest incident took place in Takhar Province, where the Taliban attacked the center of Khwaja Ghar District. Reinforcements and military aircraft were sent to the area to repel the attack. At least 30 security forces — including police officers, local police and pro-government militia members — were killed in the battle ([NYT](#)).

Deteriorating security across Afghanistan in the past four years led to over 14,000 “grave violations” against children, including nearly 3,500 youngsters killed and over 9,000 injured, according to a U.N. report circulated Thursday.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned “the alarming level” of grave violations committed by all parties and the fact that children “continue to bear the brunt of the armed conflict.”

Of serious concern, he said, is that the nearly 12,600 children verified to have been killed or injured in 2015-2018 represented almost a third of all civilian casualties. That was “an increase of 82 percent in child casualties compared with the previous four years,” he wrote ([NYT](#)).

Increasing civilian deaths in stepped-up U.S. airstrikes and operations by Afghan forces highlight the conundrum the U.S. military and its Afghan allies face. Complaints have also grown over abuses and killings by a CIA-trained Afghan special intelligence force known as Unit 02. In the same province, Nangarhar, members of the Unit killed four brothers during a raid on their home. The brothers' hands were bound and they were shot in the head. Some 16,000 civilians have been killed since 2009 in the war, according to the U.N. Overall, civilian deaths are down so far this year, on track to the lowest number since 2012 ([NYT](#)).

A recent UN report said ISIS terrorists in Afghanistan numbered between 2,500 and 4,000 fighters. A 2019 DoD report on Afghanistan estimates the size of the terrorist group to be less than 2,000 fighters. ISIS’ staying power marches on in the mountainous region of eastern Afghanistan despite major territorial losses in 2018, and immense pressure from sustained operations by Afghan and U.S. forces ([Military Times](#)).

The Taliban has launched an attack on Taluqan, the provincial capital of Takhar, and has been battling Afghan forces there and in several outlying districts over the past several days ([FDDs LWJ](#)).

U.S. aircraft dropped more bombs in Afghanistan in the month of August than during the past six years for that month as peace negotiations between the Taliban and U.S. entered into the final stages. According to an airstrike roll up provided by U.S. Air Forces Central Command, U.S. aircraft dropped 783 munitions in August. As of August, U.S. aircraft have dropped 4,483 munitions in Afghanistan (in 2019). In 2010 and 2011 — the height of America’s involvement in Afghanistan — aircraft dropped 5,100 and 5,411 bombs respectively. U.S. aircraft dropped 7,362 bombs in Afghanistan in 2018 — meaning the last two years of U.S. aerial operations in Afghanistan are shaping up to be the most intense air campaign in the country since the surge under then-President Barack Obama.

For the U.S. to pull out of the conflict, the Afghan air force must be capable of launching real time close-air support for maneuvering ground forces. Afghan aircraft must also be able to resupply remote outposts across the country. ([Military Times](#))

## Economic Development

The 2019 “Passage to Prosperity: India – Afghanistan International Trade and Investment Show,” supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), saw Afghan firms sign deals and pre-contract agreements valued at over \$55 million. In particular, the exhibition yielded benefits for the agricultural sector, which generated \$46 million in new business. Non-agricultural sectors signed more than 30 pre-contract agreements valued at approximately \$9.8 million ([USAID](#)).



## Political Developments

### Failed Peace Process

The Taliban reiterated that its prime objectives in negotiations with the US is to get Coalition forces to withdrawal from Afghanistan and the “establishment of an Islamic government,” a thinly veiled reference to the return of the Taliban’s Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The Taliban also said that it was “religiously” obligated to continue fighting until the US leaves the country ([FDDs LWJ](#)).

### Presidential Elections

Secretary Michael R. Pompeo spoke with Afghanistan’s President Ghani today to underscore the United States’ expectation that the conduct of candidates and government institutions holding the Afghanistan election should be beyond reproach to ensure the legitimacy of the outcome. The United States reiterated its condemnation of the Taliban, ISIS, and other terrorist groups that have threatened violence in order to deprive citizens of their right to vote ([U.S. Department of State](#)).

In a meeting with the Taliban representatives in Qatar, the United Nations Special Envoy for Afghanistan Tadamichi Yamamoto has called on the Taliban insurgent group to “desist from any activity that would interfere with the elections” ([Ariana](#)).

The Taliban ignored a plea by the U.S. State Department to respect the Afghan election process, and instead threatened to attack polling centers and security forces that protect the sites. The Taliban views elections as “a sham and foreign processes,” and says it is its religious duty to oppose them ([FDDs LWJ](#)).

At a time when there is fighting in nearly two dozen of the country’s 34 provinces on any given day, it was feared the election would be marred by widespread bloodshed. While there were dozens of smaller attacks on Saturday, the security forces appeared to have prevented any mass-casualty assaults. The Taliban aren’t the only danger posed by this election: There are worries that, as the vote tallying begins, the results could paralyze the government, lead to a prolonged political crisis and complicate efforts to reach a peace deal to end the war. Results are not expected for weeks, and a runoff is likely ([NYT](#)).

Polls have closed at 05:00 PM in Afghanistan's presidential election amid widespread complaints of irregularities and pockets of violence from Taliban insurgents, mostly in the south and north of the country. Voters complained that voters' lists were incomplete or missing and biometric identification machines intended to reduce fraud were not working properly or people were not adequately trained on how to use them. Preliminary results are not expected before Oct. 17 and final results not until Nov. 7. If no candidate gets 51 percent of the vote, a second round will be held between the two leading candidates ([NYT](#)).

Over 260 security incidents were reported during Saturday’s presidential election, security sources said, saying that 90 of the incidents directly targeted the polling centers. These sources told TOLONews that over 20 police officers and nine civilians were killed as a result of these incidents, while 37 police officers and 70 civilians were wounded.

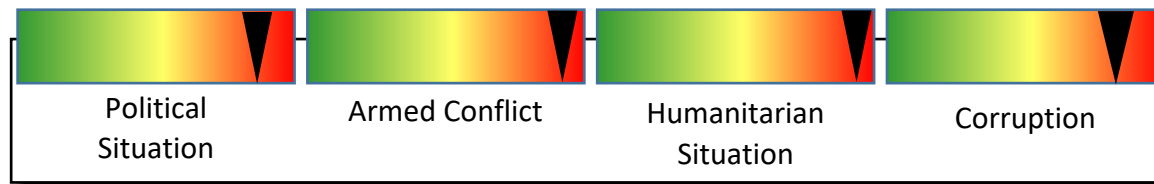
The Afghan government had deployed over 72,000 security force members to provide security for the election process ([Tolo](#)).

The Independent Election Commission has given its first rough estimation of turnout in Afghanistan’s 2019 Presidential Elections. It was low, with fewer than two million voters out of 9.66 million registered, about a quarter, coming out to vote. The Taleban only managed to conduct one large-scale attack, in Kandahar city, but committed 400 other, mainly smaller-scale acts of violence against the poll in 29 provinces. However, turnout appears to have been dampened not just by Taleban threats, but also voter disinterest. The day also saw a number of technical shortcomings, from biometric devices not working to IEC personnel not finding voters’ names on the voter lists to election material sent to the wrong provinces ([AAN](#)).

IECC has announced that it has received 2,275 poll-related complaints since voting day across the country ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(23 - 29 Sep 2019)



## ASSESSMENT:

- Presidential elections seem set the agenda in the coming weeks, if not months, in Afghanistan. It is highly unlikely that any presidential candidate will be elected in the first round. Second round of presidential elections will be among two forerunners. We will witness power sharing attempts among these parties.
- Lavrov’s speech at UNSC is a clear message to all stakeholders in Afghanistan. CSTO and SCO is ready and willing to act, if ongoing attempts fail in Afghanistan.
- Due to intense fight in the country civilian casualties are record high which leads to despair among Afghan people. Neither elections nor a peace deal can easily fix the wounds of Afghan society.

### Afghans Suffer Most

A new survey by US analytics and advisory company Gallup reports that a record number of Afghans -- including nearly half of the Afghan women -- would rather be someplace else, leaving their war-torn country permanently if they could.

The survey shows that life in Afghanistan in 2018 was, on many levels, worse than at any point in the past decade. Afghans felt less safe, struggled to find work and afford the basics, and rated their lives worse than anyone else on the planet.

The survey reveals that Afghans who say they would like to move to another country are most likely to name Germany (19%) and Turkey (19%), the two countries where Afghan refugees make up the second-largest refugee populations after Syrians, as their preferred destination ([Tolo](#)).

### Armed Conflict

An Afghan official says that at least 40 civilians have been killed during an Afghan special forces raids and airstrikes conducted against Taliban in southern Helmand province. Akhund said that 12 other civilians were wounded and are in the hospital in Lashkar Gah, the capital of the province ([NYT](#)).

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) voices its continuing deep concerns about the high number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan and reiterates that all parties to the conflict must do their utmost to protect civilians from harm ([UNAMA](#)).

On 17 September, the Taliban claimed responsibility for a suicide attack in Parwan at the site of an election rally. Thirty civilians were killed in the attack and 51 were injured.

On 19 September, 25 civilians were killed and 93 injured in a Taliban-claimed attack in Zabul. The disproportionate and indiscriminate truck bomb caused extensive damage to a nearby hospital with terrible harm to health workers and patients inside.

Multiple credible reports indicate high numbers of civilians were killed and injured when the United States military carried out airstrikes on 19 September in Nangarhar and on 22 September in Helmand.

In Nangarhar, UNAMA’s preliminary findings indicate that the airstrikes killed at least 16 civilians and injured 12 others ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on Wednesday in his address to the United Nations Security Council that the north of Afghanistan risks becoming a new springboard for Daesh and other international terrorist organizations, the Russian TASS news agency reported. Both the Collective Security Treaty Organization--a military bloc of post-Soviet republics (CSTO)-- and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) have focused their attention on the threats coming from Afghanistan, Lavrov said ([Tolo](#)).

### Corruption

Ghani has criticized the USAID mission and called it as one of the useless cooperation organizations in the country. In reaction to Ghani’s remarks, US ambassador to Kabul, John Bass said that Washington has been disappointed about Ghani’s overlooked one the “excellent work” of USAID and enduring partnership. President Ghani said that he has repeatedly asked US President, Donald Trump to send an imperial delegation from the US congress and civilian organization to Afghanistan to investigate the USAIDworks in the country ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

### Economic Development

John R. Bass joined representatives of the Indian and Afghan governments and the private sector in launching the third annual Passage to Prosperity: India-Afghanistan International Trade and Investment Show. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) sponsors the annual exhibition of premier Afghan products to stimulate India-Afghanistan trade and facilitate economic development in Afghanistan. The 2018 Passage to Prosperity event, held in Mumbai, yielded more than USD \$71 million in signed contracts between Indian buyers and Afghan vendors ([USAID](#)).



Political Developments

Failed Peace Process

The United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad on Thursday briefed the U.S. Congress behind closed doors about the failure of U.S.-Taliban negotiations in Qatar ([Ariana](#)).

Russia expects to hold a new round of consultations on Afghanistan later this month with China and the U.S. plus Pakistan on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, Russia’s Special Envoy for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov told. At the prospective meeting, Russia hopes to help the U.S. and Taliban overcome the impasse in the wake of U.S. President Donald Trump canceling talks at Camp David with the Taliban and the Afghan government earlier this month, apparently on the verge of an agreement ([AA](#)).

On September 14, a Taliban delegation traveled to Moscow to discuss a revival of peace negotiations with the United States. Taliban’s political office in Qatar has claimed that Russia supports Taliban’s stance regarding the peace deal and withdrawal of the foreign forces from Afghanistan as per the peace agreement ([Khaama](#)).

A delegation of the group led by Mullah Baradar the head of Taliban’s political office in Qatar is in China for talks ([Ariana](#)).

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said on Wednesday that his government would try to revive Afghanistan peace talks that recently broke down between the United States and the Taliban militant group ([NYT](#)).

Iran held talks with a delegation from Afghanistan's Taliban, the Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday, a week after peace talks between the United States and the Islamist insurgents collapsed ([NYT](#)).

Presidential Elections

The Taliban militants have closed dozens of schools which were supposed to be used as polling centers on the upcoming presidential elections. The insurgent group has shut down the doors of 62 schools in Mohammad Agha district of **Logar province**. Meanwhile, the insurgent have closed 29 schools in **Takhar province** and 22 others in **Kunduz province**. At the same time, nearly 60 schools are under high-security threats in these two provinces ([Ariana](#)).

A number of members of parliament foresee that half of the 4,942 voting centers would likely be closed on the day of election, arguing the security situation. The allegations come as government forces have launched offensive operations against Taliban fighters since last week all over the country to ensure election security ([Tolo](#)).

UN Mandate Renewed

The U.N. Security Council unanimously adopted a compromise resolution Tuesday extending the U.N. political mission in Afghanistan that drops a Chinese demand to include a reference to China's \$1 trillion "belt and road" initiative but stresses the need for regional connectivity ([NYT](#)).

Torkham Border Crossing

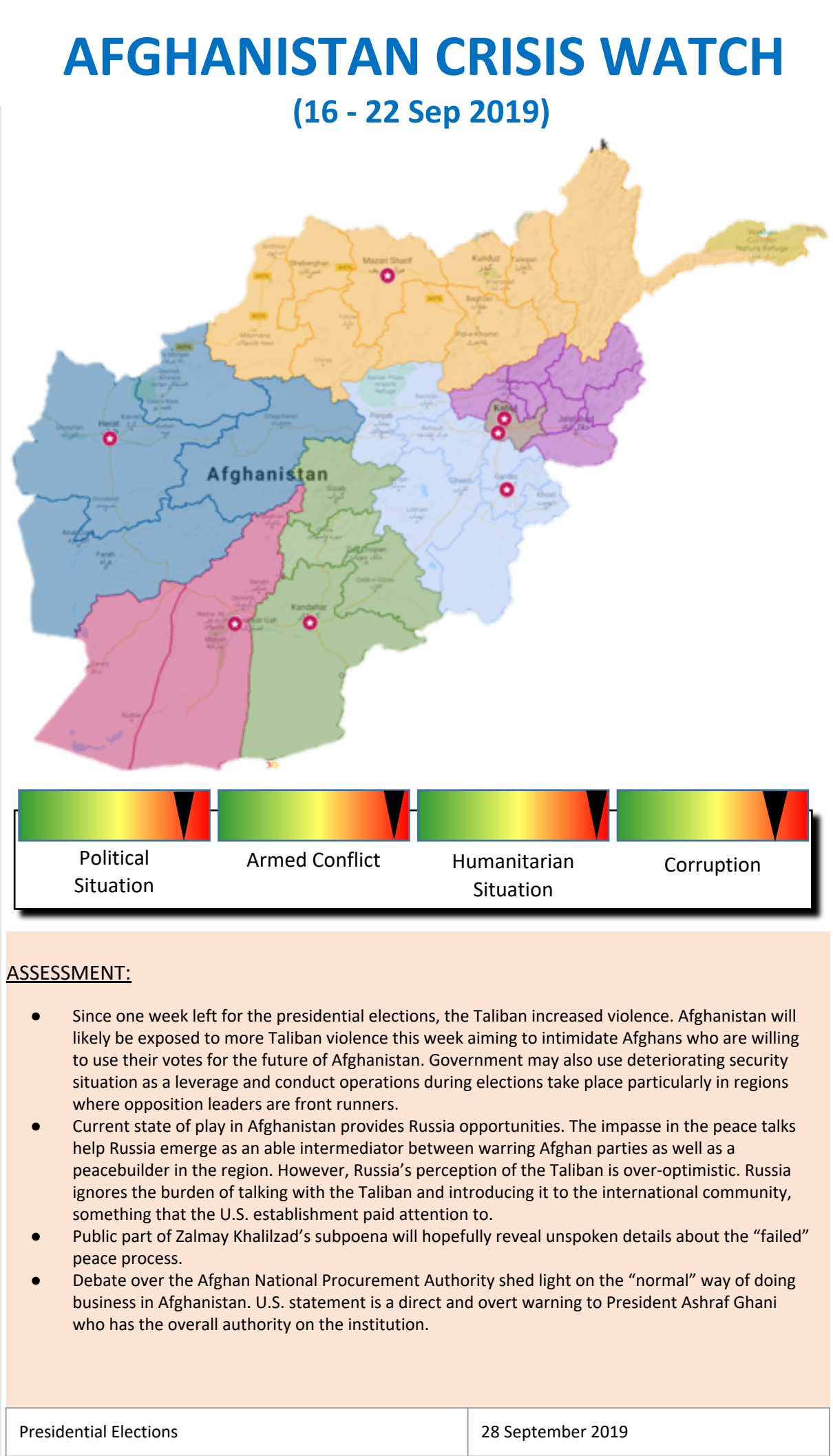
Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday officially inaugurated the opening of the Torkham border crossing ([Tolo](#)).

Afghans Suffer Most

As the country is moving towards the presidential election – the third in Afghanistan’s history after 2001-- a new survey by US analytics and advisory company Gallup shows high levels of (85%) suffering among Afghans who “remain hopeless” about their future ([Tolo](#)).

ICC Appeal

The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court was granted permission on Tuesday to appeal a ruling by judges that blocked an investigation into alleged war crimes in Afghanistan, a case that has put the court on a collision course with the Trump administration ([NYT](#)).



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Armed Conflict

At least 30 people were killed and 28 wounded in the drone attack in **Nangarhar Province**, according to local government officials, who blamed United States aircraft. They said some of the victims had gathered to harvest pine nuts at the time of the attack. Separately, at least 22 people were killed and 90 wounded in a suicide truck bombing claimed by the Taliban at a hospital in **Zabul Province**, officials said ([NYT](#)).

Stressing that further violence must be stopped, the members of the Security Council also expressed their strong condemnation for the heinous and cowardly terrorist attacks in **Kabul** and against an election campaign rally in Charikar, **Parwan Province**, on 17 September, which resulted in at least 38 civilians killed and more than 80 civilians injured. The Taliban have also claimed responsibility for these dastard attacks ([UNAMA](#)).

“If ex-combatants are not accepted by their communities or are unable to find a new livelihood, they may be vulnerable to recruitment by criminal groups or terrorist organizations like the Islamic State Khorasan, the local branch of the Islamic State active in eastern Afghanistan,” SIGAR says. This is just one of multiple issues plaguing reintegration efforts of approximately 60,000 full-time Taliban fighters and 90,000 seasonal fighters in Afghanistan — efforts that have proven ineffective in the past ([Military Times](#)).

Corruption

Statement on Accountability and Anti-Corruption in Afghanistan

Afghan government institutions and leaders must be transparent and accountable to the Afghan people. The U.S. stands against those who exploit their positions of power and influence to deprive the Afghan people of the benefits of foreign assistance and a more prosperous future.

The U.S. expects the assistance funds it provides to Afghanistan to serve the interests of all Afghan citizens. Due to identified Afghan Government corruption and financial mismanagement, the U.S. Government is returning approximately \$100 million to the U.S. Treasury that was intended for a large energy infrastructure project. The US will use a “off-budget” mechanism given the Afghan government’s inability to transparently manage U.S. Government resources.

Lack of transparency surrounding procurement decisions by the National Procurement Authority is also great cause for concern. The U.S. will be withholding \$60 million in planned assistance due to the government’s failure to meet benchmarks for transparency and accountability in public financial management.

The U.S. also has concluded that the Afghan government’s Monitoring and Evaluation Committee is incapable of being a partner in the international effort to build a better future for the Afghan people. The U.S. will cease funding to this entity at the end of this calendar year. The U.S expect the Afghan government to demonstrate a clear commitment to fight corruption, to serve the Afghan people, and to maintain their trust. Afghan leaders who fail to meet this standard should be held accountable ([U.S. Department of State](#)).

Contracts must go through the NPA for approval, and Ghani, among others, has the authority to review and then either approve or deny---these contracts. However, the Minister of Economy Mustafa Mastoor claimed on Saturday that the withholding of contracts is part of a system whereby ministries cannot spend their budgets, so at the end of the year the remaining funds get allocated to an emergency fund, whose use has little or no accountability. A number of officials in Afghanistan’s parliament have declared that the NPA is “the heart of corruption” in the government ([Tolo](#)).

The National Procurement Authority (NPA) responded to the US State Department’s claims of corruption by insisting that “all decisions on projects are made in the presence of national and international observers, as well as in the presence of the president and the Chief Executive.” The National Procurement Authority is led by President Ashraf Ghani, and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah ([Tolo](#)).



Political Developments

Failed Peace Process

President Trump declared on Monday that peace talks with the Taliban were “dead,” but signaled that he would still withdraw United States troops from America’s longest war, following the collapse this weekend of a monthslong effort to ease violence in Afghanistan ([NYT](#)).

The Afghan government will only consider making a "legitimate" peace with insurgents after national elections are held this month, an official told reporters, despite the atmosphere of political uncertainty following the sudden halt in U.S.-Taliban peace talks ([NYT](#)).

The Taliban have sent a delegation to Russia to discuss prospects for a withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan following the collapse of talks with the United States this month, officials from the insurgent group said. The move, days after U.S. President Donald Trump canceled a planned meeting with Taliban leaders at his Camp David retreat, came as the movement looks to bolster regional support, with visits also planned for China, Iran and Central Asian states ([NYT](#)).

According to Taliban officials familiar with the discussions, the shura opposed the trip to Camp David and chastised the negotiators who were eager to attend. “What’s striking is how the Taliban mobilized at the highest levels to support negotiations with the U.S.,” said Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Program at the Washington-based Wilson Center. “Senior Taliban officials didn’t only endorse the talks; they helped lead them.” ([Military Times](#))

The U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee said it will subpoena President Donald Trump's special Afghanistan envoy, Zalmay Khalilzad, to testify on Sept. 19, after the abrupt cancellation of talks with the country's Taliban militia ([NYT](#)).

A withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan could see the country falling back under the strict Islamic rule of the Taliban, German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer said on Saturday ([NYT](#)).

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the Leader of Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan and a presidential candidate on Saturday claimed that the National Unity Government is the main hurdle in the way of peace. The leader of HIG also called on the Taliban insurgent group to express their readiness for an intra-Afghan negotiation as their negotiation with the Americans have failed ([Ariana](#)).

US President Donald Trump’s decision to cancel a meeting with the Taliban leaders and suspend peaceful consultations is a negative signal, Russian special presidential envoy for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov said ([RT](#)).

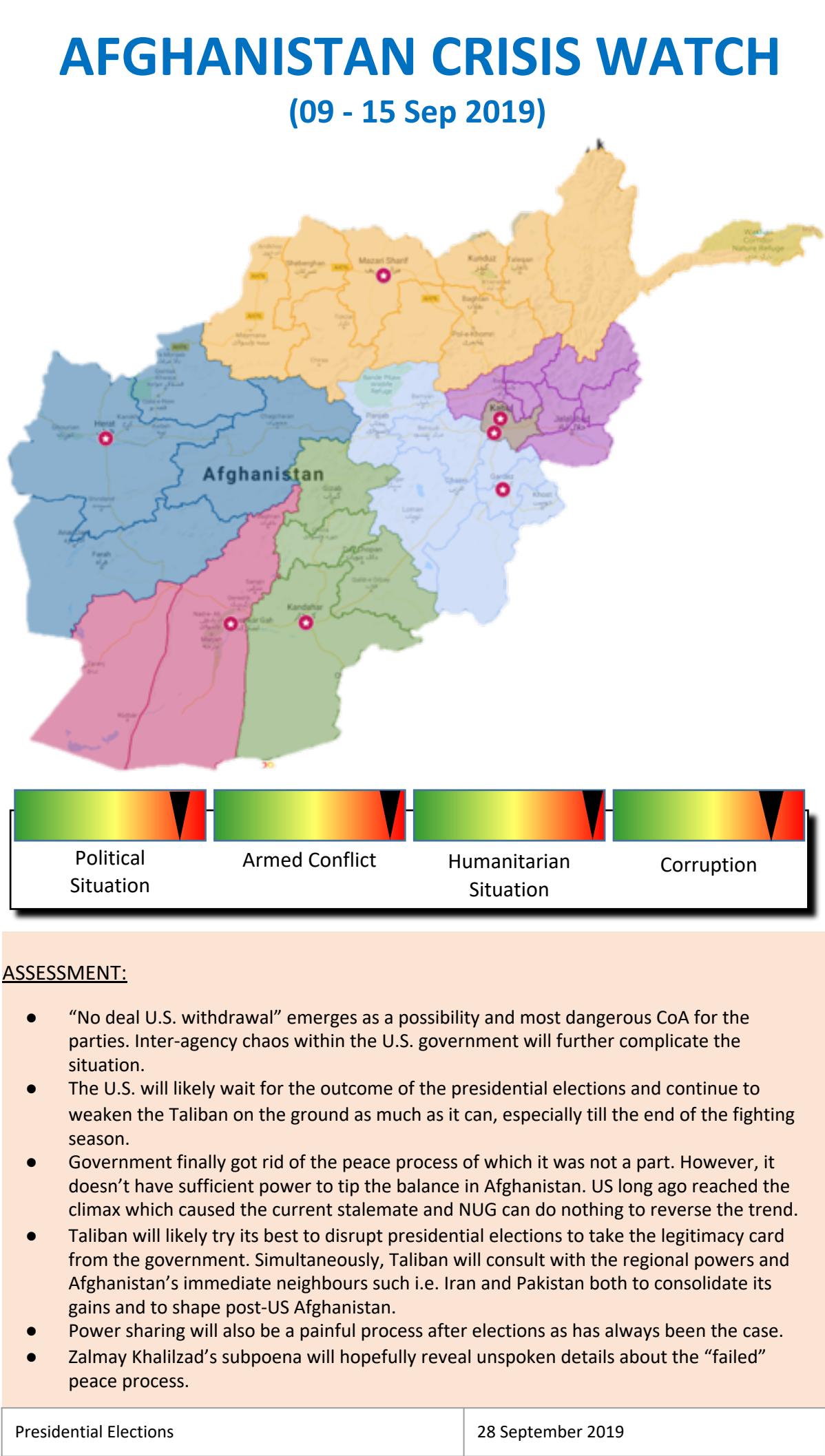
The UN Special Representative for Afghanistan Tadamichi Yamamoto said that the conflict of Afghanistan can only be resolved by direct talks between Afghan people. The UN envoy told the Council that despite preparations there are concerns over security, fraud and voter turnout ([Ariana](#)).

A Gallup poll published on Sept. 11 found that 52 percent of Americans believe the war in Afghanistan was not a mistake, in contrast to 43 percent who responded it was ([Military Times](#)).

Presidential Elections

President Donald Trump's sudden halt to U.S.-Taliban talks looks like a gift to the beleaguered Afghan president, who has insisted on holding a key election in less than three weeks' time despite widespread expectations that a peace deal would push it aside. Now, with an agreement to end America's longest war on hold, Afghanistan suddenly faces a presidential vote amid warnings that it's not ready — and the threat of even more violence. The Taliban, who control or hold sway over roughly half the country, have told Afghans to boycott the vote and warned that rallies and polling stations would be targets ([NYT](#)).

More than 430 polling centers will remain closed due to security threats in the upcoming presidential election, officials said on Sunday. According to the official figures, there are a total of 5,373 polling centers across the country ([Ariana](#)).



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Armed Conflict

At least 33 pro-government forces and nine civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past week (September 6-12, 2019), as peace talks collapsed between the Taliban and the United States. In **Kabul**, just days after President Donald Trump called off negotiations, the Taliban claimed responsibility for a car-bomb attack on the Army Special Operations Corp that killed four soldiers. Three days earlier, the Taliban captured the Qala-e-Zal District of **Kunduz**, killing four soldiers, one police officer and one pro-government militia member. In the same province, four civilians were killed and 43 were wounded when the Taliban clashed with government forces in Dasht-e-Archi District ([NYT](#)).

Fighting has picked up in several areas of northern Afghanistan, officials said, days after the collapse of talks between the United States and the Taliban aimed at agreeing the withdrawal of thousands of U.S. troops. Officials said there was fighting in at least 10 provinces, with the heaviest clashes in the northern regions of **Takhar, Baghlan, Kunduz** and **Badakhshan**, where the Taliban have been pressing security forces for weeks ([NYT](#)).

The high-stakes game of horse trading ground control has continued in Afghanistan while the 18th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks tolls in the US. The Taliban has overrun at least six districts in the northern Afghan provinces of **Kunduz, Farah, and Baghlan** over the last two weeks, while the Afghan government claimed to have retaken three districts in Badakhshan, two of which were under Taliban control for four years. Meanwhile, the Taliban has said it would “continue [its] Jihad” after President Donald Trump torpedoed a peace deal with the group ([FDDs LWJ](#)).

The U.S. war in Afghanistan has led to the deaths of about 2,400 American service members, including 16 in combat action this year. Some 20,000 more have been wounded, many grievously. But there’s another set of revealing numbers about the war that exposes its sprawling nature. Data provided by the Pentagon shows that more than 775,000 U.S. service members have deployed to Afghanistan at least once ([WP](#)).

The First Vice President Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum says he has proposed a 6-month plan to government, U.S. and NATO for the defeat of the Taliban in North of Afghanistan. Furthermore, Gen. Dostum said his plan will not need the deployment of infantry forces of the United States and other facilities to defeat the Taliban group. In other parts of his speech, Gen. Dostum said the purpose of his plan is not to decompose the North of Afghanistan from the other parts of the country but he wants to help the U.S. in a similar way he did in 2001 and that he wants the U.S. to withdraw from the country leaving behind a legacy of victory ([Khaama](#)).

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres says the Islamic State extremist group remains resilient in Afghanistan despite “a high pace” of operations against it by government and international forces — and is urging all armed groups not to interfere in the upcoming presidential election. The U.N. chief said in a report to the Security Council circulated Monday that between mid-June and early September 183 incidents were attributed to Islamic State fighters — nearly double the 93 incidents during the same period in 2018 ([Time](#)).

Prominent politicians, former Jihadi leaders and government officials on Monday commemorated Martyrs Week and the 18th anniversary of National Hero Ahmad Shah Massoud’s assassination by laying a wreath at the Minaret of Resistance in Massoud Square in **Kabul**. Massoud was assassinated by two suicide bombers posing as journalists 17 years ago ([Tolo](#)).

Humanitarian Situation

The United Nations says that 927 children were killed during clashes in 2018 across Afghanistan ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

The Taliban revoked their ban on the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Afghanistan and gave a guarantee of security for its staff doing humanitarian work in areas under their control. The Taliban did not refer to the WHO in his statement ([NYT](#)).



Political Developments

Peace Process

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani told the U.S envoy for Afghanistan to share details of a draft deal between the U.S. and Taliban with all Afghan leaders. The U.S.-backed government will need to "study and assess" details of the draft deal, the spokesman told reporters. Khalilzad has met with Ghani twice in the last two days [\(NYT\)](#).

Afghanistan's president has postponed a planned visit to Washington early next week where he was to discuss the U.S.-Taliban talks on ending America's longest war [\(NYT\)](#).

Nine former U.S. ambassadors on Tuesday warned that Afghanistan could collapse in a "total civil war" if President Donald Trump withdraws all U.S. forces before the Kabul government and the Taliban conclude a peace settlement. The nine, including five former ambassadors to Kabul, a former special envoy to Afghanistan and a former deputy secretary of State, issued their warning a day after U.S. chief negotiator Zalmay Khalilzad announced a draft accord with the Taliban for an initial drawdown of nearly 5,000 U.S. troops [\(NYT\)](#) [\(Atlantic Council\)](#).

The Afghan government is pushing back against American diplomats on the eve of a troop withdrawal deal with the Taliban, concerned that the proposed agreement lacks assurances that the insurgents will honor their promises once American troops leave [\(NYT\)](#).

In a surprise move, U.S. President Donald Trump tweeted on Sunday that has “called off” the peace negotiations with the Taliban leaders after the group carried out an attack in Kabul on Thursday, killing a U.S. service member and 11 others. Trump said he had been planning secret meetings with President Ashraf Ghani and senior Taliban leaders at Camp David on Sunday [\(Ariana\)](#).

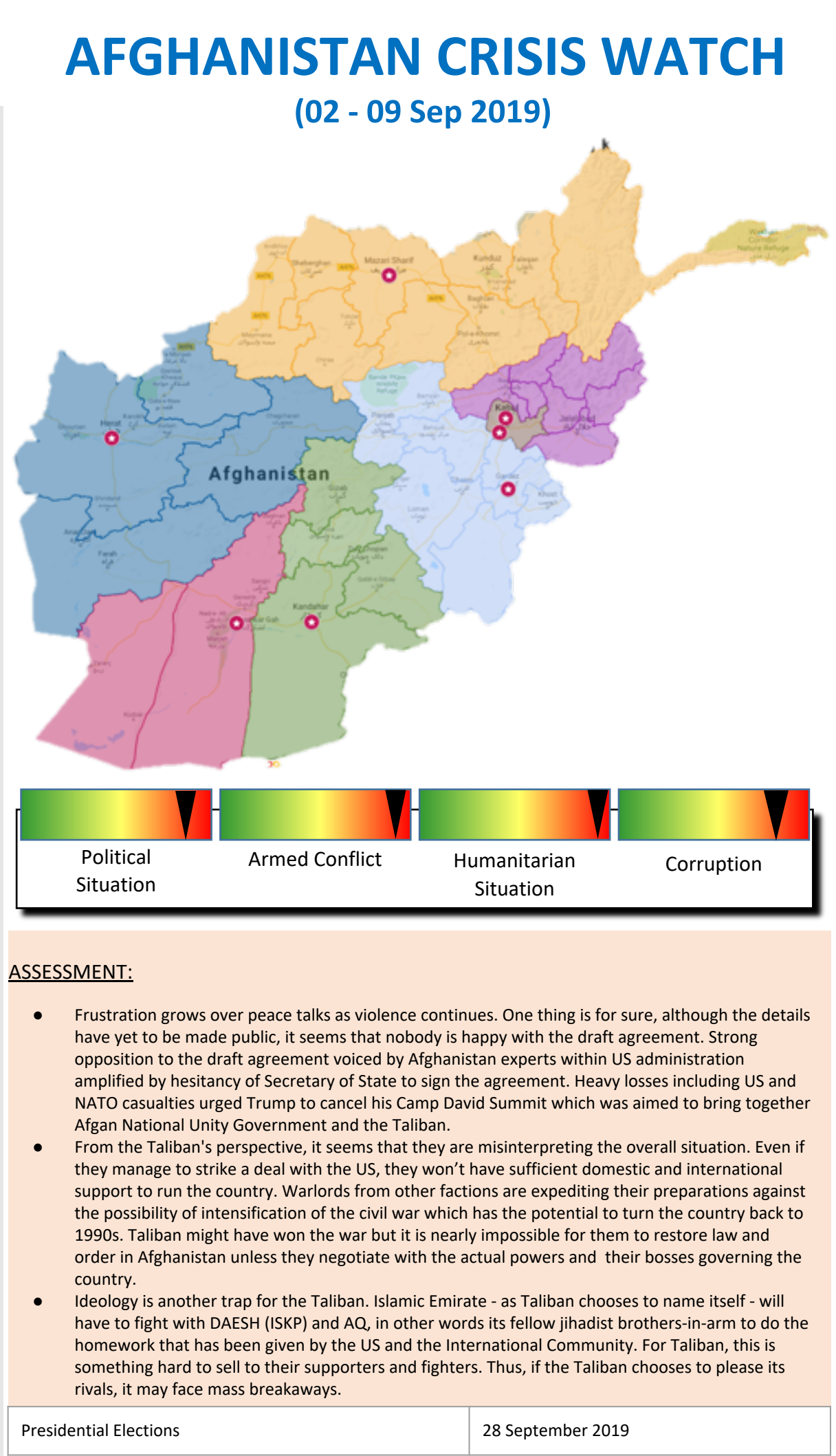
Reacting to the cancellation of U.S.-Taliban peace deal by Washington, the Taliban insurgent group in a statement on Sunday said that the group was seeking a political settlement two-decades ago and are still insisting on their stance. The Taliban statement said that the United States will finally return to the negotiation table and will accept their demands. “We finalized a peace deal with the United States,” the statement reads,” We wanted to hold intra-Afghan talks on September 23.” [\(Ariana\)](#) The Taliban warned that more American lives would be lost if President Donald Trump canceled peace talks with them [\(Stars and Stripes\)](#).

The Afghan government announced its official stance to the U.S. President Donald Trump’s cancellation of peace negotiations with the Taliban. In a statement released on Sunday, the Presidential Palace said “Taliban’s obstinacy to increase violence against Afghans” is the main obstacle to the peace negotiations. Meanwhile, the statement stressed on a timely holding of the upcoming presidential elections [\(Ariana\)](#).

U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper said on Saturday that while it was seeking a political agreement with the Taliban, Washington would not accept just any deal after a wave of violence cast a shadow over its talks with the insurgent group [\(NYT\)](#).

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is declining to sign the peace deal, according to senior U.S., Afghan and European officials. The deal doesn’t ensure several crucial things, those familiar with the discussions tell TIME. It doesn’t guarantee the continued presence of U.S. counterterrorism forces to battle al Qaeda, the survival of the pro-U.S. government in Kabul, or even an end to the fighting in Afghanistan. The Taliban asked for Pompeo to sign an agreement with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the official name of the government founded by the Taliban in Afghanistan in 1996. Having the Secretary of State sign such a document would amount to de facto recognition of the Taliban as a legitimate political entity, and he declined to do so, the Afghan officials say.

As it stands, the agreement would set the stage for the withdrawal of most American forces by the end of November 2020 if the Taliban do three things: open negotiations with the U.S.-backed Afghan government; reduce violence near areas U.S. forces control; and keep foreign militants out of the areas they control. For Afghan officials, or at least the government of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, it’s a final insult and a dark turning point in relations with Washington [\(Time\)](#).



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NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg said that they welcome the talks which are going on and they welcome the efforts by the United States to reach an agreement with the Taliban. He said “the Taliban have to understand that they will never win on the battlefield.” [\(Afghanistan Times\)](#)

Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Vassily Nebenzia, has said that Moscow wants to study the draft agreement between the United States and the Taliban. He said Moscow will welcome the agreement if the document suits Afghanistan’s interests [\(Tolo\)](#).

India and Russia on September 4 supported all efforts for inclusive peace and reconciliation in war-torn Afghanistan. Addressing a joint press meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, “India wants to see an Afghanistan which is safe, stable, peaceful, independent, undivided and democratic.” He also underlined that both the countries are against “outside influence” in the internal matters of any nation [\(BNA\)](#).

The Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said on Monday that he is not optimistic about talks between the United States and the Taliban insurgent group. The top Iranian diplomat emphasized that Tehran is concerned regarding the “huge presence of Daesh in Afghanistan” and the U.S. misuse of Afghanistan for short-term political gains [\(Ariana\)](#).

**Troop Drawdown**

The United States would withdraw almost 5,000 troops from Afghanistan and close five bases within 135 days under a draft peace accord agreed with the Taliban, the chief U.S. negotiator, Zalmay Khalilzad said. The deal, reached after months of negotiations with representatives from the insurgent movement, must still be approved by U.S. President Donald Trump before it can be signed, Khalilzad said in an interview with Tolo News television. He declined to say how long the rest of the roughly 14,000 U.S. troops would remain in Afghanistan after the first stage of the withdrawal, although Taliban officials previously insisted that all foreign forces must leave [\(NYT\)](#).

**Afghanistan - China - Pakistan Trilateral Talks**

Pakistan hosted a third round of trilateral talks with China and Afghanistan on Saturday covering trade, counterterrorism and an end to Afghanistan's 18-year war. Wang Yi, China's foreign minister, said the people of Afghanistan should determine their country's future and that Beijing would contribute to Afghanistan's reconciliation and reconstruction [\(NYT\)](#).

**Armed Conflict**

At least 179 pro-government forces and 110 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past week. The deadliest attack took place in the Green Village, a fortified compound of foreign nationals in Kabul, where a bomb exploded, killing up to 30 people and wounding at least 100 more. Elsewhere, 35 Afghan security forces, were killed in the Zarih District of Balkh Province after the Taliban stormed the area. The insurgents, however, were unable to capture the district. Earlier in the week, another 20 Afghan security forces were killed in Kunduz City for the third time in four years [\(NYT\)](#).

At least 32 Taliban militants including a senior commander of the group were killed in airstrikes conducted by Afghan air and ground forces in Ghazni province of Afghanistan. The statement added that the airstrikes killed 26 militants including Mullah Haibatullah, a key commander of the Taliban in Ghazni [\(Ariana\)](#).

Taliban fighters launched fresh assaults in the western Afghan province of Farah on Friday, government officials said. The insurgents now control more territory than at any time since 2001 [\(NYT\)](#).

Political Developments

Peace Process

The ninth round of peace talks between the U.S. and Taliban representatives began on August 22nd in Doha and ended on August 31, without any announcement of a final agreement. Sources familiar with the talks said that the presence of the U.S. intelligence in Afghanistan, the release of Taliban prisoners and the level of officials signing the peace agreement were among the major issues discussed.

This comes as Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani said on the same night that partial withdrawal of U.S forces will not impact Afghanistan and that 2019 Presidential Election would be held under any circumstances ([Ariana](#)).

The US and the Taliban negotiators have made progress on establishing safe zones once the American forces started leaving Afghanistan, sources familiar with the ninth round of the talks in Doha said. The sources said that based on the safe zone strategy, there will be a ceasefire announced in every province from where US forces would leave while nationwide ceasefire will be implemented after the complete withdrawal of American forces ([Tolo](#)).

The US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad and the Taliban Qatar’s Office Spokesperson Suhail Shaheen have rejected as unfounded the news that disclosed the sides had agreed on the formation of an interim government in Afghanistan ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

U.S. negotiators have been pressing the Taliban to agree to peace talks with the Kabul government and to a ceasefire, but a senior Taliban official said that would not happen ([NYT](#)).

The U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan’s Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad rejected reports that the U.S. will cease support of the Afghan forces as a part of an agreement with the Taliban insurgent group. He further said that no one should be intimidated or fooled by propaganda ([Ariana](#)).

If the United States does not pull out all of its military forces, including its intelligence from Afghanistan, the Afghan peace talks will ruin, says the Taliban’s political office in Qatar. Meanwhile, the government describes presence of the foreigner forces in the country essential in terms of fighting against terrorism ([Ariana](#)).

A senior security official in Kabul said the Taliban and U.S. officials had agreed on a timeline of about 14 to 24 months for the withdrawal of the U.S. forces. Details would be shared with the Afghan government before they were made public, the official said ([NYT](#)).

Presidential spokesman that the Afghan government has no plan at all for the unconditional release of Taliban’s prisoners and it will not happen ([Ariana](#)).

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said “it’s possible” Moscow could serve as “a guarantor in the agreement” if it “received such requests from parties to the negotiations.” ([Newsweek](#))

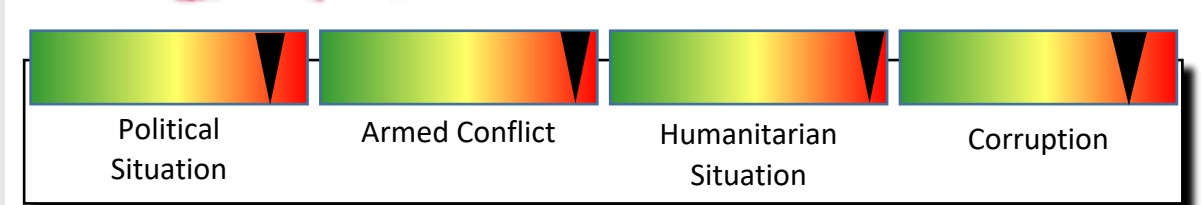
US Senator Lindsey Graham has once again warned that American pulling troops out of Afghanistan would lead to “another 9/11”, saying that America cannot “outsource” its national security to the Taliban ([Tolo](#)).

The Russian Ambassador to Kabul, Alexander Mantetsky said that the Afghan war may not end after a peace agreement ([Ariana](#)).

India and France, in a joint statement issued in Paris on 22 August 2019, called for the timely holding of presidential elections in Afghanistan. In addition, the two countries called for the cessation of terrorist violence, and end to terrorist safe havens and sanctuaries for enduring and sustainable peace, security and stability in Afghanistan. The statement further said that the two countries support an inclusive peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan which is Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled ([Ariana](#)).

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(19 Aug - 01 Sep 2019)



ASSESSMENT:

- Peace can only be based on a delicate balance between warring parties as well as the concerned countries. Taliban offensive indicates that they seek for more in the negotiations. Likewise, Russian doubts on an everlasting peace can be interpreted as a sign of frustration stemming from latest talks. Meanwhile, dependent on foreign aid and foreign forces, Ashraf Ghani’s push for presidential elections is an attempt for remaining legitimate and trusted interlocutor of the International Community which is being challenged by the Taliban on the ground. Tired of fighting for 18 years, US public opinion is closer than ever to the idea of leaving Afghanistan on the eve of US Presidential elections. Taking into account all these factors, no matter on what Zalmay Khalilzad and Talibs agree, peace will be fragile.
- Due date set by the United States Secretary of State is exceeded without a tangible result. United Nations General Assembly (high level political forum to be held at 24 September 2019) might be another de-facto deadline for the peace deal.
- Taliban’s rhetoric implying the U.S. will cease to support Afghan Government in its fight against insurgency is unrealistic and an absolute show stopper. Such a deal would even fail to de-escalate the situation between International Forces and the Taliban.

Presidential Elections	28 September 2019
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Presidential Elections

As the presidential elections are just around the corner, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced that at least 2,000 vote centers will remain closed on polling day. The IEC proposed 7,378 voting centers to security organs but they said they could only ensure security of 5,373 of them ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs convened a meeting to brief embassies and international organizations on the security measures during elections ([MFA Afghanistan](#)).

On 29 August, the EU Delegation signed a grant contract with Salam Afghanistan Media Organization (SAMO) for One Million Euros. The objective of the project is to increase public awareness through transparent reporting on election matters, and increase election credibility through critical and accurate reporting ([EEAS](#)).

Troop Drawdown

President Donald Trump said on Thursday that U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan were being reduced to 8,600 but that American forces would remain in the country even if Washington reaches an agreement with the Taliban to end the 18-year war ([NYT](#)).

Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said that it’s too early to talk about a full withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. According to the Military Times, Dunford has told that any U.S. deal with the Taliban will be based on security conditions on the ground and the Afghan forces aren’t yet able to secure their country without help ([Military Times](#)).

Armed Conflict

At least 49 pro-government forces and 21 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past week (23-29 August 2019). In Jowzjan Province, the Taliban attacked a highly populated security outpost in the Kokardash Village of Faizabad District, killing 10 pro-government militia members and wounding 11 others. Baz Mohammad, a retired former colonel and the commander of the outpost, was killed during the attack by his son, who defected to the Taliban two years ago ([NYT](#)).

Just before the top American negotiator, Zalmay Khalilzad, said the two sides were on “the threshold of an agreement,” the Taliban attacked poorly defended provincial capitals. The Taliban attack on Sunday targeted Pul-i-Kumri, the capital of Baghlan Province in northern Afghanistan, about 145 miles north of Kabul. On Saturday, the militants launched an offensive against a neighboring provincial capital, Kunduz, killing the top police spokesman and wounding the police chief, local officials said ([NYT](#)).

The U.S. President Donald Trump has said certain regional countries including India and Russia will have to fight the terrorists at certain point amid U.S. fight against the terrorists in Afghanistan. In his interaction with the reporters in White House, Trump said “At a certain point, Russia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, they are going to have to fight their battles too.” ([KP](#))

Ministry of Interior (MoI) said that the death toll from the Kabul wedding party attack increased to 80 ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

“...some Western colleagues have double standards in relation to this terrorist organisation banned by the UN Security Council and try to use them to accomplish their unilateral geopolitical tasks in Afghanistan,” Lavrov told a press conference Sputnik reported ([Farsnews](#)).

Corruption

The Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (MEC) said that the logistics directorate of the Ministry of Interior Affairs of Afghanistan has the lowest level of progress in the fight against corruption ([Ariana](#)).

Humanitarian Aid

The United States announces an additional amount of nearly \$125 million in humanitarian assistance to meet the needs of vulnerable Afghans inside Afghanistan, including internally displaced persons, conflict and flood-affected communities, and Afghan returnees ([U.S. Embassy Kabul](#)).



Political Developments

Peace Process

Talks on a pact that would allow the United States to end its longest war and withdraw troops from Afghanistan ended on Monday without agreement and both sides saying they would consult their leaders on the next steps. The United States is pushing for Taliban agreement on two other, more far-reaching elements: power-sharing talks with Afghanistan's U.S.-backed government and a ceasefire (NYT). A deal between the Taliban and the United States for U.S. forces to withdraw from their longest-ever war in Afghanistan could drive some diehard Taliban fighters into the arms of the Islamic State militant group, Afghan officials and militants say (NYT).

While a final agreement has yet to be reached between Washington and Taliban negotiators, Newsweek has learned from senior Pentagon officials that U.S. personnel have been ordered to limit nearly all offensive combat operations against the Taliban and cease advising the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces as the Trump administration proposes cutting U.S. troop strength in Afghanistan by nearly half to 6,000 as a means of finalizing "technical" details among Taliban leadership. The top American commander in Afghanistan sought to reassure Afghan forces that they still had the full backing of the United States, after a report that the support was being dialed back in preparation for an imminent peace deal with the Taliban. The fighting in Afghanistan has intensified as United States diplomats and the insurgents have worked through eight rounds of negotiations in Qatar. Afghan forces and the Taliban have both sought to increase their political leverage through violence, with both sides suffering heavy casualties and civilians bearing the brunt of the attacks (NYT).

The National Unity Government (NUG) says that the United States will sign a new agreement with the Afghan government concurrently with the US-Taliban peace agreement. Familiar sources with the US-Taliban peace agreement’s content say that total withdrawal of foreigner forces from Afghanistan, termination of all contracts of U.S. with the Afghanistan, release of 35,000 prisoners of the Taliban, and termination of all the foreigner forces bases in Afghanistan are the core articles of the agreement (Ariana).

The Russian Special Presidential Envoy for Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov on Wednesday announced that Russia was invited to the signing ceremony of a likely future peace agreement between the Taliban and the US (Afghanistan Times).

President Ghani’s Second Vice President, Sarwar Danish said Tuesday that the direct talks between the Afghan government and Taliban group would be kicked off after September Presidential polls (Afghanistan Times).

Pakistan’s ambassador to the United States raised the possibility Monday that his country might redeploy troops from the Afghanistan border to the Kashmir frontier, a shift that could complicate American peace talks with the Taliban. Such a possibility, coming just as Pakistan’s long standing Kashmir crisis with India has escalated, could add a new element to the peace negotiations, which are said to be in the final stages and would end nearly two decades of American military entanglement in Afghanistan (NYT).

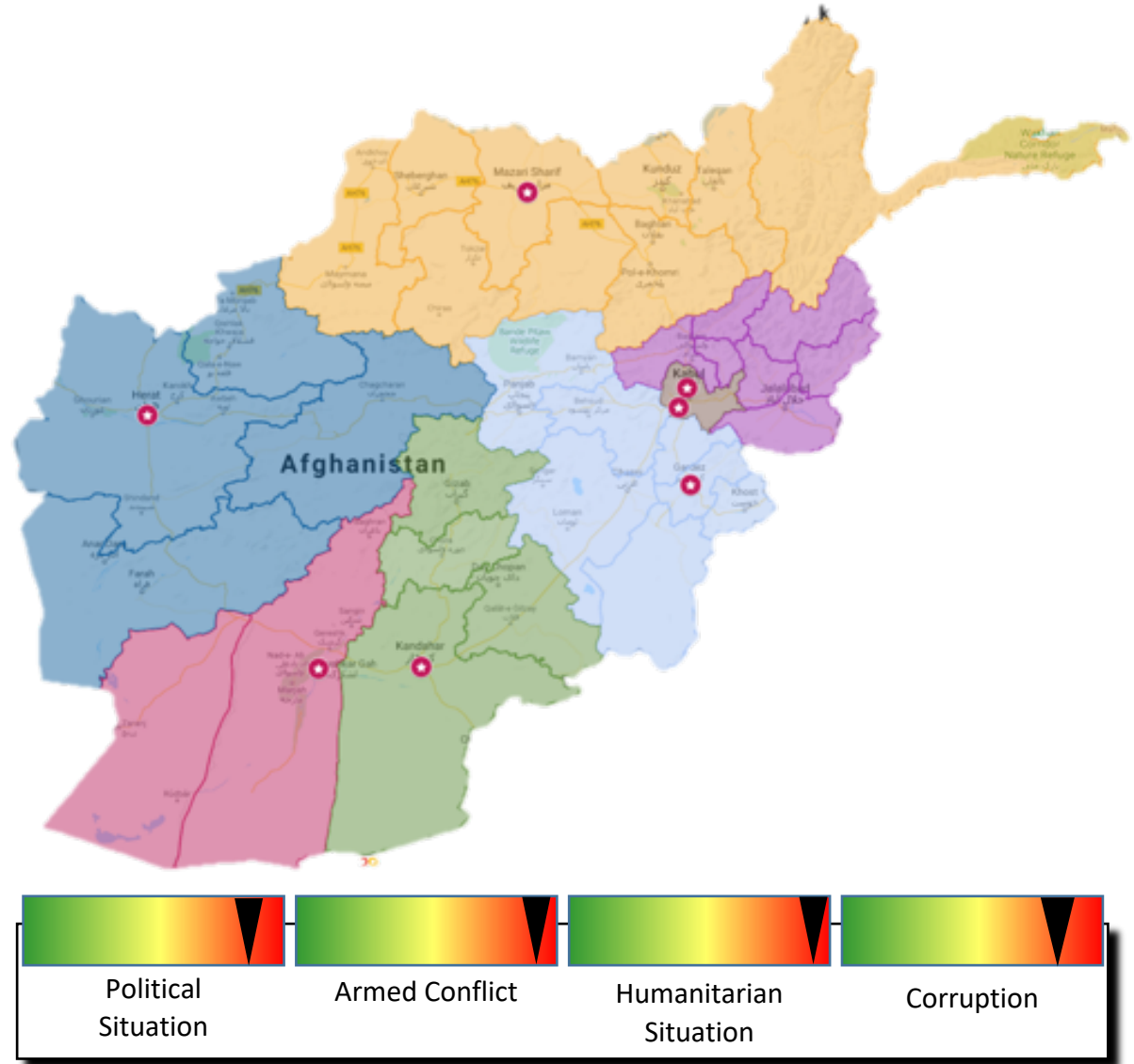
Western intermediaries are trying to persuade arch foes Iran and the United States to cooperate on bolstering security in Afghanistan as U.S. President Donald Trump seeks to extract America from its longest war, according to three sources familiar with the efforts. The intermediaries, the sources say, secretly have been relaying messages between Washington and Tehran for months in hopes of getting the sides talking at a time of heightened hostility on a range of issues (NYT).

Presidential Elections

The Afghan presidential election is an internal affair of the country’s citizens, Russia does not support any particular candidate, the Russian Foreign Ministry stated in a commentary published on Thursday. The ministry mentioned the recent reports on Russia’s alleged support of former national security adviser Hanif Atmar in the presidential election set for September 28. The reports claimed that Russia had allocated about \$60 mln for the election campaign (TASS).

AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(12 - 18 Aug 2019)



ASSESSMENT:

- As the due date set by the Secretary of State approaches a peace deal between the U.S. and the Taliban seems imminent. Details of the draft peace deal leaked to the media envisages a power sharing agreement between the Taliban and the National Unity Government, something not so easy to achieve. Similarly, a potential U.S. troop drawdown, no matter how orderly and conditions-based it will be, poses an existential threat to the current regime.
- By coupling security concerns stemming from Afghanistan with Kashmir issue, Pakistan is probably trying to influence Afghan peace process while containing India.
- Civilian casualties reached record high figures as the conflict intensified during the peace talks. Increase in NUG caused civilian casualties adds additional burden the U.S. and NATO as they train, advice and assist ANDSF. Blaming Afghan ground controllers is another way of saying that “we have failed.”

Peace Agreement Deadline	01 September 2019
Presidential Elections	28 September 2019

Troop Drawdown

The President of the United States of America convened a meeting with his national security team including Vice President Pence, Secretary of State Pompeo, Secretary of Defense Esper, National Security Advisor Bolton, Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Khalilzad, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Dunford and CIA Director Haspel to discuss the status of negotiations for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan (U.S. Department of State).

Soon after reports surfaced that US President Donald Trump was set to meet with his national security team Friday afternoon to discuss a pending peace agreement with the Taliban, US Senator Lindsey Graham, a vocal opposition to Trump, warned him against withdrawing troops from Afghanistan in a deal with the Taliban. As a peace deal with the Taliban seems just around the corner, the possibility of a US troop pullout has raised deep concerns within the US military and among some lawmakers that the situation in Afghanistan could quickly deteriorate and plunge the country into a new civil war, helping to turn it into a sanctuary for Al-Qaeda and other extremists (Afghanistan Times).

Armed Conflict

At least nine pro-government forces and 11 civilians were killed in Afghanistan over the last week of fighting (9-15 August), during which only four attacks were carried out on government forces. The 20 verified deaths marked the lowest count in a single week since September 2018, when The Times started tracking casualties of pro-government forces and civilians. The Taliban implemented an unannounced cease-fire to observe three days of Eid al-Adha. The deadliest attack of the week took place in Paktia Province, in the Kolalgo area of Zurmat District, where 11 civilians were killed in a night raid carried out by the special forces of the National Directorate of Security, Afghanistan’s intelligence agency. Most of those killed were students or government employees who were visiting relatives. One was an employee of the Education Ministry and a second had recently gotten engaged to a third-year medical student in Kabul (NYT).

The Islamic State (IS) militant group claimed responsibility on Sunday for a suicide blast at a wedding reception in Afghanistan that killed 63 people, underlining the dangers the country faces even if the Taliban agrees a pact with the United States (NYT).

The brother of Afghan Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhundzada was among at least four people were killed in a blast on Friday at a mosque in southwest Pakistan, according to two Taliban sources (NYT). Afghan Taliban officials said on Saturday the killing of the brother of their leader in a bomb attack would not derail talks with the United States aimed at securing the withdrawal of U.S. troops after 18 years of war (NYT).

President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani has set free 35 Taliban inmates from the prison of the National Directorate of Security (NDS) on the occasion of Eid Ul Adha (Ariana).

A new report by the Pentagon’s Office of Inspector General has found that the Afghan ground controllers trained by the US and NATO cannot appropriately direct airdrops and lack the ability to properly coordinate attack missions by the Afghan Air Force (AAF) and the issue has increased the risk of civilian casualties and fratricide (Tolo).

A popular young ISIS recruiter from Tajikistan is leading hundreds of fighters in Afghanistan as part of an effort to draw more foreigners to the terrorist group's banner. Sayvaly Shafiev, also known as Mauaviya, and his group of about 200 fighters operate out of Nangarhar, a province in eastern Afghanistan located along the Pakistani border. At only 31 years old, he has become a key figure in ISIS-Khorasan Province, the jihadist group's affiliate in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The rise of ISIS in 2014 inspired Shafiev, who is believed to have traveled to Turkey to work on behalf of the group. He made his way back to Afghanistan sometime later and began recruiting. He has had some success: Six of eight Tajik nationals arrested by Afghan authorities in January reported Shafiev had recruited them to join ISIS (Washington Examiner).

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(05 - 11 Aug 2019)

## Political Developments

### Peace Process

The United States and the Taliban have resolved differences in peace talks over the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan and guarantees from the insurgents that they will cut ties with other extremist groups, a Taliban official said Tuesday. The U.S. side did not immediately provide details about the latest round of talks held in Qatar, where the Taliban maintain a political office. But Zalmay Khalilzad, the American envoy who has been leading the talks since they began late last year, tweeted that they had made "excellent progress." ([NYT](#))

The eighth round US-Taliban talks in Doha continued behind closed doors with no result. Familiar sources with the talks say that the United States' stress on keeping part of its intelligence agency in Afghanistan is the reason behind the delay in signing of the peace agreement ([Ariana](#)).

The United States and Taliban are expected to finalize their peace deal within eight days, Pakistani Ambassador to Kabul, Zahid Nasrullah Khan says, if true, a big victory for the two sides, while the government of Afghanistan still remains in sidelines. The eighth round of negotiations between the US peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and Taliban negotiators got a break on Monday when Khalilzad announced an "urgent" visit to New Delhi for talks with Indian officials. The negotiations are said to be resumed this week in the Qatari capital city of Doha ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

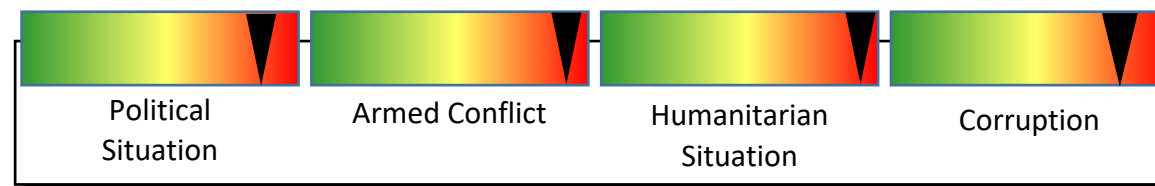
NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said on Tuesday that there was a real chance for peace in Afghanistan as U.S.-Taliban peace talks continue in Qatar ([Reuters](#)).

### Presidential Elections

Afghanistan faces a presidential election next month but few believe the vote will take place as the United States and the Taliban inch closer to a deal that could end the nearly 18-year war but bring uncertainty about almost everything else. Speculation is high that a U.S.-Taliban peace agreement might delay the Sept. 28 election, especially as Khalilzad has suggested that the vote could hinder peace efforts. Analysts have said his Sept. 1 target date for a peace deal could be linked to Ghani's insistence on holding the vote next month ([NYT](#)).

The Taliban group on Tuesday called presidential elections, slated for 28 September, as misleading and illegitimate, and warned to disrupt the process, calling on Afghan masses to stay away from gatherings of electoral campaigns and rallies. In a statement, the Taliban said fighters should "stand against this theatrical and sham of a process to their full capabilities" — a clear instruction to conduct attacks ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

The United Nations expressed deep concern at the Taliban's stated threat to target civilians participating in the 28 September presidential election process and urged the Taliban to respect and protect civilians and not to threaten them or carry out violence should they engage in their constitutional right to participate in elections ([UNAMA](#)).



## ASSESSMENT:

- Positive atmosphere created by the eighth round of peace talks is shadowed by the Taliban violence which will allegedly continue during the Eid and beyond. The U.S. rhetoric about the Taliban's potential as a counter-terrorism apparatus lose its meaning as the terrorist organisation continue to kill innocent people. It is also worth considering how easily Taliban exploits religion and use it to spread terror. Muslims embraced month of Zilhicce, in which fighting is prohibited by the Qur'an (if it is respected by other warring parties). However, for some practical reasons, the rulers of so-called "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" who blames anyone else with blasphemy continue to shed blood.
- Violence will likely escalate as Afghanistan approaches presidential elections.
- Brain-drain caused by 40 years of war, violence and poverty is way more harmful than any other factor for the future of Afghanistan. Human capital of Afghanistan needs to be preserved and to be invested in order to get rid of "league of failed states".

Peace Agreement Deadline	01 September 2019
Presidential Elections	28 September 2019

## Armed Conflict

At least 97 pro-government forces and 35 civilians were killed over the last week of fighting in Afghanistan. The deadliest attack took place on Wednesday in Kabul, the Afghan capital, where a car bomb targeted two government buildings, killing 14 people. Elsewhere, in Jowzjan Province, 11 security forces were killed when the Taliban attacked and captured a military base in the Khanaqa District. Ten pro-government militia members and one police officer were killed, and insurgents escaped the area after seizing all the weapons and equipment inside of the base ([NYT](#)).

In his yearly Eid-al-Adha message to his followers, Taliban emir Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada dashed all hopes for a holiday ceasefire and urged his jihadists to continue the fight ([FDDs LWJ](#)). However, a number of tribal elders and religious scholars in the southeastern Paktia province on Tuesday urged the Taliban group to announce an armistice before Eid-ul-Adha and take concrete steps towards a lasting peace in the country.

### Taliban Internal Fight

At least 40 Taliban fighters have been killed and another six injured in western Herat province in what local officials on Tuesday labeled it an 'internal fight' between rival factions. However, the Taliban group claims attacking a base of 'pro-government uprising' ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

### Missing Diplomats

A Kabul-based monitoring organization which has assessed the appointments in Afghanistan's diplomatic offices and in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs finds that at least 200 Afghan diplomats are missing who have been assigned in different abroad missions over the past decade. The report says that from 1,060 employees of Foreign Affairs Ministry, 164 have undergraduate certificates which are unrelated to the jobs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The report shows that the Ministry of Higher Education has issued temporary certificates to a number of employees. Based on the report, from the figure, 400 of them were hired illegally with eight percent of them lacked legal employment criteria and were unfamiliar with the diplomacy and unable to speak a foreign language ([Tolo](#)).

### Working Children

The Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) on Tuesday announced that almost two million Afghan children worked in hazardous conditions, which rendered them mentally and physically unwell ([Afghanistan Times](#)).



Political Developments

Peace Process

A fresh round of U.S.-Taliban peace talks began in Qatar's capital Doha on Saturday, officials said, describing it as the "most crucial" phase of negotiations to end the 18-year war in Afghanistan.

Senior officials privy to the talks said a peace agreement could be expected at the end of the eighth round of talks, possibly before Aug. 13, and would enable foreign forces to be withdrawn from the war-torn country.

"A peace agreement that enables withdrawal. Our (U.S.) presence in Afghanistan is conditions-based, and any withdrawal will be conditions-based," Khalilzad said, adding the Taliban are signaling they would conclude an agreement ([NYT](#)).

The eighth round of the talks between the United States and the Taliban continued on the second day behind closed doors in Doha, the capital city of Qatar. A member of the Taliban’s delegation says that if both sides reached an agreement, all the foreigner forces including their advisors and contractual staff will leave Afghanistan based on a timeline ([Ariana](#)).

The Afghan government named a team on Wednesday to negotiate directly with the Taliban, in the expectation that Washington was on the cusp of agreeing to withdraw troops after 18 years of war, meeting the insurgents' precondition for talks with Kabul ([NYT](#)).

The United States peace envoy to Afghanistan met with Pakistan's prime minister and other top officials ahead of his flight to Qatar for a crucial round of peace talks with the Taliban ([NYT](#)).

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters on Friday that he strongly supports and welcomes the talks which are now taking place between the United States and the Taliban. He also welcomed that close coordination between the United States and other NATO allies on this issue ([Tolo](#)).

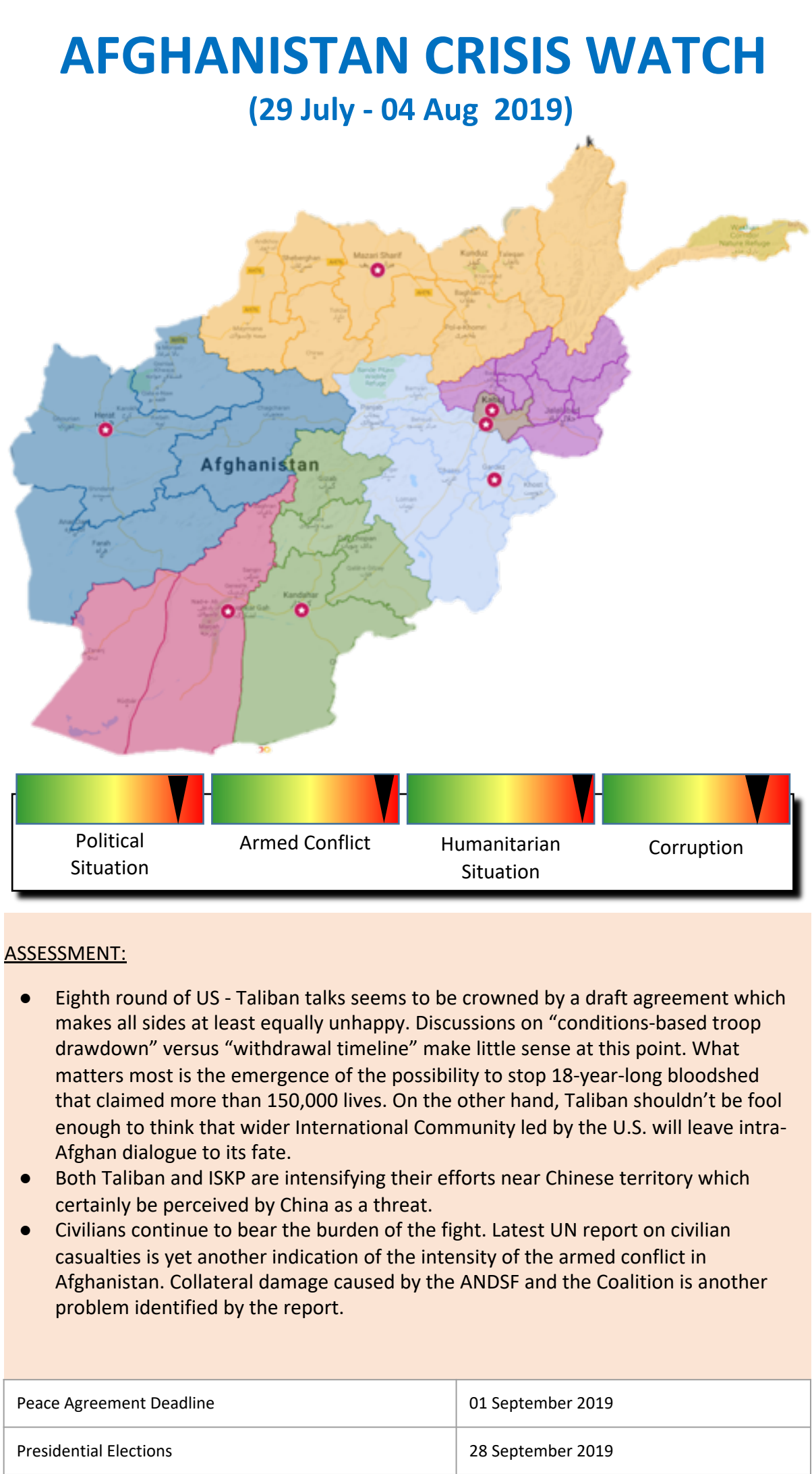
Troop Drawdown

U.S. President Donald Trump wants combat forces reduced in Afghanistan by the next U.S. presidential election, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Monday, in comments that underlined the growing pressure from Washington to cut troop numbers there ([NYT](#)).

Armed Conflict

According to the Afghan MOD 880 insurgents killed previous week (29 Jul - 04 Aug). According to independent sources, at least 112 pro-government forces and 69 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past week (25 Jul - 01 Aug). The deadliest attacks took place in Farah Province, where a passenger bus traveling from was hit by a roadside bomb in Balaboluk District, killing at least 35 civilians, women and children among them, and wounding more than a dozen others. Elsewhere, a Taliban attack in the Belcheragh District of Faryab Province resulted in the deaths of eight commandos and 14 members of the territorial army. In Kandahar Province, two American soldiers were killed in an insider attack. The attacker was arrested and is currently in the custody of the United States forces in Afghanistan. Earlier this week, the United Nations announced in a report that nearly 1,400 civilians in Afghanistan have died in the first six months of 2019, attributing 52% of those deaths to Afghan forces and their allies, whose reliance on aerial operations has had particularly lethal effects on civilians ([NYT](#)).

The conflict in Afghanistan continues to have a devastating impact on civilians, with the latest UN update released today documenting 3,812 civilian casualties (1,366 deaths and 2,446 injured) in the first half of 2019. While the number of civilians killed and injured is 27 percent down from the same period in 2018 –the year that saw record high numbers of recorded civilian casualties– the UN notes with concern disturbing patterns such as the 27 percent increase in civilian deaths in the second quarter of 2019 compared with the first. July saw the highest number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan in a single month since 2017 ([UNAMA](#)).



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The members of the Security Council condemned in the strongest terms the heinous and cowardly terrorist attack on a bus full of civilians traveling along the Kandahar-Herat Highway in Western Afghanistan on 31 July 2019, which resulted in at least 34 people were killed and more than a dozen injured ([UNAMA](#)). This atrocity, in which at least 34 people, including women and children, lost their lives, is yet another aggression against the Afghan people and their long-held desire for peace. The European Union stands by the Afghan people in their desire for peace and conveys its sincere condolences to all those affected ([EEAS](#)).

The Taliban targeted a police checkpoint in Afghanistan's central province of Day Kundi on Friday, killing at least 10 policemen and wounding 15 other, provincial officials said as the U.S. envoy for talks with the insurgents pressed ahead with meetings with key players in the conflict ([NYT](#)).

The Taliban overran Mizan district in the southern province of Zabul. The district was under siege for more than one year before it fell, according to the Taliban. Security in Zabul province, which is a known haven for al Qaeda and straddles the border with Pakistan, has deteriorated over the past five years. Al Qaeda operated a base in Mizan as recently as Sept. 2016 ([FDDs LWJ](#)).

Afghan security forces scrambled to defend the relatively peaceful and secure province of Panjshir this week after the Taliban seized a district in neighboring Badakhshan. The narrative stemming from US military and diplomatic officials is that the Taliban has sought control of districts to boost its negotiating position in so-called peace talks ([FDDs LWJ](#)).

ISKP

Senior United States military and intelligence officials are sharply divided over how much of a threat the Islamic State in Afghanistan poses to the West, a critical point in the Trump administration’s debate over whether American troops stay or withdraw after nearly 18 years of war. American military commanders in Afghanistan have described the Islamic State affiliate there as a growing problem that is capable of inspiring and directing attacks in Western countries, including the United States. But intelligence officials in Washington disagree, arguing the group is mostly incapable of exporting terrorism worldwide. The officials believe that the Islamic State in Afghanistan, known as Islamic State Khorasan, remains a regional problem and is more of a threat to the Taliban than to the West ([NYT](#)).

The Islamic State’s central leadership replaced their top man in Afghanistan after a meeting earlier this year, according to a recent report submitted to the United Nations Security Council. Mawlawi Zia ul-Haq, also known as Abu Omar al-Khorasani, led the Islamic State’s Khorasan province until April. He was then “dismissed and replaced by Mawlawi Abdullah, also known as Mawlawi Aslam Farooqi,” who “was previously in charge of operations in the Khyber Agency ([FDDs LWJ](#)).

ANDSF Drawdown

There has been a sharp drop in the size of Afghanistan's National Defense Security Forces in the past few months due to changes in the way troops are counted and an effort to reduce the number of so-called "ghost" soldiers. The Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) said in a report that ANDSF personnel size had gone down by nearly 10 percentage points in the most recent quarter compared to the previous trimester. The number of ANDSF troops fell by nearly 42,000 compared to roughly the same period, between April and the end of June last year, the report said ([NYT](#)).

Political Developments

Peace Process

Secretary Pompeo assured President Ghani that there has been no change to President Trump’s South Asia strategy, including U.S. commitment to a conditions-based drawdown. President Ghani confirmed Afghanistan’s commitment to working side-by-side with the United States to achieve a stable, peaceful, democratic Afghanistan that is not a center for terrorism ([U.S. Department of State](#)).

Secretary Michael R. Pompeo met with Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan. Secretary Pompeo emphasized the continued importance of the United States and Pakistan working together to advance shared priorities, including Pakistan’s significant role in supporting the Afghan peace process and counterterrorism ([U.S. Department of State](#)).

Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad will travel to Afghanistan and Qatar from July 22 – August 1, as part of an overall effort to facilitate a peace process that ends the conflict in Afghanistan. In Doha, he will resume talks with the Taliban ([U.S. Department of State](#)).

Zalmay Khalilzad said Sunday that the direct negotiation between Afghan delegates and the Taliban will happen after the U.S. “concludes its own agreements” with the Taliban ([Ariana](#)). Afghanistan's state minister for peace affairs said that a 15-member government delegation will meet with the Taliban in Europe within two weeks, without elaborating ([NYT](#)). Meanwhile, a spokesman for the Taliban said that the intra-Afghan talks will be held among all political parties and that the Afghan government will attend as a participant, not as the other side of the negotiation ([Ariana](#)). Ghani said that only the Afghan government has the authority to negotiate with the Taliban and reach an agreement with the group ([Tolo](#)).

Jamila Afghani, leader of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Afghanistan urged the international community to ensure that the rights of women are not compromised to reach a political deal with the Taliban ([NYT](#)).

General Dunford said on Friday he was cautiously optimistic about efforts to reach a negotiated end to the nearly 18-year-old war in Afghanistan, in remarks that followed talks in Kabul with Afghanistan's president and the top U.S. negotiator ([NYT](#)).

China stresses on the support of the peace process by the international community and preparations for the upcoming presidential election ([Ariana](#)).

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan on Tuesday said he would try to meet with the Taliban in an effort to persuade the group to meet with the Afghan government. Khan said a Taliban delegation had wanted to meet him a few months back but he did not because of opposition from the Afghan government ([NYT](#)).

Mohammad Reza Bahrami, the Ambassador of Iran in Afghanistan, in an exclusive interview with Ariana News says that the absence of the Afghan government representatives in the peace between the countries is questionable ([Ariana](#)).

A Taliban delegation, led by Abdul Ghani Baradar, have left Qatar for Indonesia on Friday morning ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

Presidential Elections

Presidential candidates began their electoral campaign on Sunday. The electoral campaigns will be continued for the next two months ([Ariana](#)).


The upcoming presidential elections in Afghanistan on September 28 will become a powerful consolidating factor for the whole country, Russia's Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vladimir Safronkov told a UN Security Council session on Afghanistan ([TASS](#)).

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) has limited the electoral campaign expenditure for the presidential candidates to 44,783,555 Afghanis (around 560,144 USD) ([Ariana](#)).

IEC says that 400,000 ghost voters are removed from the voters’ list by the commission. Meanwhile, some of the electoral observer organizations claim that there are nearly 5 Million ghost voters in the list ([Ariana](#)).

AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(22 - 28 July 2019)



Political Situation

Armed Conflict

Humanitarian Situation

Corruption

ASSESSMENT:

- The nuance between “drawdown” and “withdrawal” - two similar terms used in peace proc
- ess debate by the U.S. and The Taliban, respectively - is noteworthy. It reflects the negotiation positions of two sides. The U.S. side cleverly adds “conditions-based” before the term “drawdown”. However, anticipated peace has many more dimensions, such as national harmony after the return of Taliban to the Afghan political arena, ensuring national and regional security, fighting with terrorism, dealing with social and economic hurdles and so on, not just drawdown or withdrawal. Playing with the words might have room in diplomacy but reality on the ground remains dire.
- Khalilzad’s next tour of talks with the Taliban might open the door for formal intra-Afghan dialogue.
- Iran might play a disruptive role in peace process as it excluded from extended trilateral mechanism.
- Trump’s populist words about ending the war in Afghanistan within a week sounds like a warning from the White House to all sides of the debate rather than a slip of his tongue.

Peace Agreement Deadline	01 September 2019
Presidential Elections	28 September 2019

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Armed Conflict

According to Afghan MoD 386 insurgents killed last week (22-29 July 2019). At least 55 pro-government forces and 54 civilians were killed over the last week of fighting in Afghanistan (19-25 July 2019). The deadliest of the attacks took place in **Takhar Province**, where the Taliban attacked and captured two security bases in **Ishkamish District**, killing 24 soldiers and 13 police officers. Six police officers were also wounded. Both bases were later recaptured by reinforcements, which arrived for backup belatedly. In **Logar Province**, nine civilians were killed in an American airstrike on the Khaki Dag area of the **Baraki Barak District**, where a community of Kuchi nomads lived. The United Nations confirmed the casualties ([NYT](#)).

Three bombs rocked the Afghan capital of Kabul on Thursday, killing at least 11 people and wounding 45, officials said, as the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff met Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and NATO officials in the city ([NYT](#)). The death toll has climbed to 20 (as of Monday) in a complex attack on former interior minister and vice-presidential candidate Amrullah Saleh’s political office in Kabul ([Tolo](#)).

Ghost Soldiers

The police chief of Zabul, Sayed Meraj Sadat, says that at least 500 ghost soldiers have been identified in the province in recent months as part of a campaign to bring reforms to the structure of Afghan National Police ([Tolo](#)).

Trump don’t want to kill 10 million Afghans

Afghanistan demanded a clarification on Tuesday of President Trump’s comments a day earlier that he could have had the country “wiped off the face of the earth” but did not “want to kill 10 million people.” In a sharply worded statement, the government of President Ashraf Ghani noted that Afghanistan expected its relationship with the United States to be “grounded on common interests and mutual respect.” ([NYT](#)) The lower house of parliament describes the recent remarks of Trump as an insult to the people of Afghanistan and says that the unaccountable remarks have hurt the peace process ([Ariana](#)).

District in Badakhshan Falls to Taliban

Officials in the northeastern province of Badakhshan confirmed Monday that the Taliban fighters took control of the district of Keran Wa Monjan after intensive clashes with government forces ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

Humanitarian Situation

EU, USAID Empowers Afghan Women

The European Union (EU) provides a €2 million grant towards a UNDP programme that will enable Afghan women to graduate from universities in neighbouring Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Between now and 2025, 50 students will attend bachelor’s, master’s and technical degrees in agriculture, applied statistics and mining at academic establishments across Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan ([UNDP](#)).

132 women completed USAID’s Afghan Civil Service training program. This program equips women with the knowledge and skills to successfully serve the Afghan people in the civil service and begin a career in government. Between 2015 and 2020, USAID will train more than 3,000 women through a year-long internship program for careers in government. As of July 2019, more than 2,800 women graduated from the program. Over 900 graduates are now employed in Kabul, Balkh, Kandahar, Herat, and Nangarhar ([USAID](#)).

Economic Developments

Two major natural reserves (gold and lapis lazuli) are in the hands of Taliban militants in the northeastern province of Badakhshan, provincial council confirmed Saturday. Bashir Samim, head of the council said that the Lapis Lazuli mine is located in Keran wa Monjan, while the gold mine is in the Raghestan districts, both under Taliban control ([Afghanistan Times](#)).



Political Developments

Peace Process

Imran Khan is supposed to meet with Donald Trump to talk on the Afghan peace process and other regional issues on Monday. Meanwhile, the Presidential Palace says that Pakistan has not taken any measures in action for contributing to the Afghan peace and ending the war in Afghanistan ([Ariana](#)).

New research of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) entitled ‘Women, Peace, and Security’ shows that 95.4 percent of the Afghan women oppose the return of the Taliban’s Islamic Emirate and want the democracy system to be sustained. More than 5,000 people were involved in the research and over 3,000 of them were interviewed ([Ariana](#)).

Four-Party Joint Statement on Afghan Peace Process

From July 11 to 12, U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad met with senior diplomats from Russia, China, and Pakistan in Beijing to discuss the resolution of the war in Afghanistan. U.S. officials viewed the summit favorably, and Khalilzad stated that the outcome of the negotiations was “very positive.” After the conclusion of the talks, all four countries reached an agreement on the need for “a permanent ceasefire that starts with intra-Afghan negotiations.” As Russia and the United States have clashed over Afghanistan due to Moscow’s alleged arms provisions to the Taliban and the Kremlin’s willingness to host peace negotiations that excluded Afghan President Ashraf Ghani’s government, the productive dialogue between American and Russian diplomats in Beijing was a significant milestone. In spite of these talks and recent statements from U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Russian President Vladimir Putin that acknowledge the value of U.S.-Russia dialogue on Afghanistan, substantive cooperation between the two countries on ending the war remains elusive ([The Diplomat](#)).

Presidential Elections

On occasion of the electoral campaigns, the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) says that it has sent out notices to the presidential candidates to begin their electoral campaigns based on the timeline and according to the law. The electoral campaigns will begin on July 28th when the 18 presidential candidates will start competing with each other for the next 60 days. The electoral campaigns period ends 48 hours before the polling day when the silence period begins ([Ariana](#)).

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) in a statement on Monday confirmed that a budget of \$149 million – of which nearly 60 percent will be provided by the Afghan government–has been approved for the upcoming presidential election. The statement further said that the government of **Afghanistan** would contribute \$90 million to the election budget, adding the international community would donate a further \$59 million to the democratic practice ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

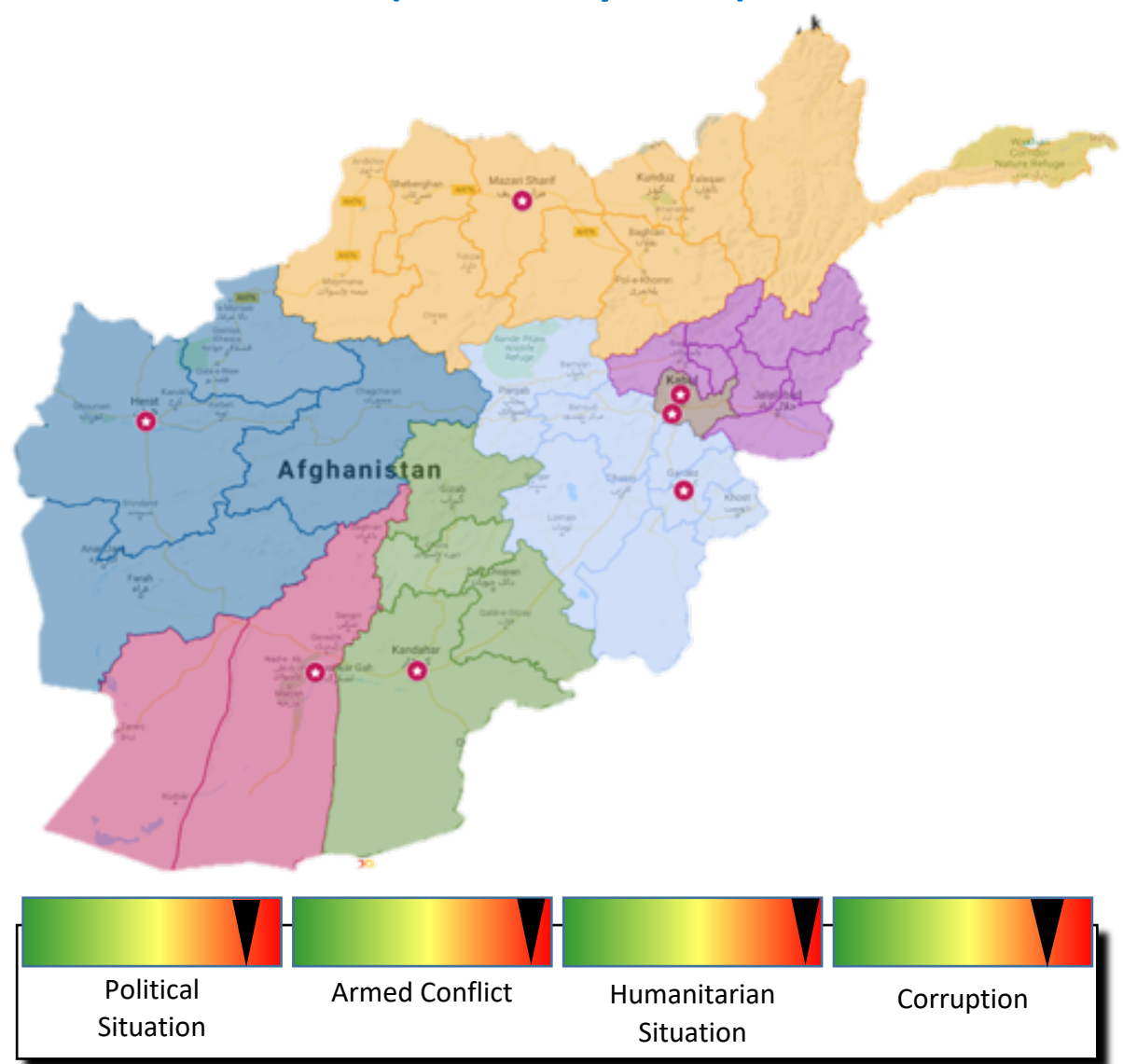
In a statement released on Wednesday, the U.S. Ambassador to **Kabul**, John R. Bass said, “We are pleased the election budget has finally been finalized. That enables the United States to provide up to \$29 million to support operations ([Ariana](#)).

Armed Conflict

According to Afghan MoD 508 insurgents have been killed in last week. At least 92 pro-government forces and 45 civilians were killed during another bloody week of fighting in Afghanistan. The deadliest of the attacks took place in **Badghis Province**, where 46 Afghan commandos who had been planning a raid on a Taliban prison ended up near the house of the Taliban shadow governor in the **Aab Kamari District**, where both sides fought for seven hours. Thirty-five commandos and four civilians were killed; four others were taken prisoners by insurgents. Elsewhere, in **Nangarhar Province**, nine people were killed when a child carried out a suicide attack at a wedding party in **Pachiragam District**. Among those killed was Malik Tor, a pro-government militia commander, and eight civilians, including a child. Fourteen others were wounded. On Saturday, Sgt. Maj. James G. “Ryan” Sartor, a Special Forces company sergeant major, was killed as a result of injuries sustained from enemy small-arms fire during combat operations, the American military announced ([NYT](#)).

AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(15 - 21 July 2019)



ASSESSMENT:

- While the issue of rights of women is gaining ground in peace process agenda, insurgents continue to use children and women as suicide bombers who kills innocent civilians, including other children and women. Afghan (Civil) War not only claimed more than 30,000 lives of civilians within a decade, it also transformed civilians into an instrument of armed aggression. Disciplines such as the law of the armed conflict, (military) targeting and rules of engagement in counterinsurgency operations and urban warfare derive lessons to learn from Afghanistan experience.
- Taliban should ask itself what it really offers to the Afghan society rather than death, illness, illiteracy and dogmatism in 2019. It has no tangible “exit plan” for Afghanistan from its current chronic problems. Barbarism enshrined by its salafi/jihadi interpretation of Islam leaves no ground to “others”, which is highly problematic in a fragmented country like Afghanistan.

Peace Agreement Deadline	01 September 2019
Presidential Elections	28 September 2019

Afghan officials say at least 10 civilians have been killed in separate airstrikes by Afghan security forces in western **Badghis province**. Insurgents have surrounded an army base in the district. He says choppers have been trying to reach the base, but insurgents are shooting from nearby villages and any return fire would endanger villagers. The Taliban later posted photos of dead children on their Twitter account saying that civilians killed by the air strikes in Badghis province ([NYT](#)).

According to statistics of the United Nations, at least 93,000 civilians have been killed or injured (93,448 victims, 32,695 killed, 60,753 wounded) in **Afghanistan** since 2009 through March 2019 as the result of war and violence. However, the figures of the civilian casualties are considerably more different in comparison to the recorded statistics in the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC). According to the AIHRC’s figures, over 75,000 civilians have been killed and injured (over 26,162 killed, around 49,154 wounded) in the last decade as the result of the Afghan war ([Ariana](#)).

A powerful bomb blast outside the gates of **Kabul** University in the **Afghan capital** on Friday killed at least eight people and wounded 33, as students and lawyers waited to take an examination, officials said ([NYT](#)).

A car bomb went off on Thursday near the internal gate of **Kandahar’s** Police Commanding Directorate. The Spokesperson of **Kandahar’s** Governor says that at least 99 people have been killed and injured as a result of the incident. According to him, 80 civilians and 3 militaries are among the wounded people ([Ariana](#)).

TTP used Female Suicide Bomber

The Movement of the Taliban in Pakistan claimed credit for a suicide attack that targeted a hospital in the northwestern district of **Dera Ismail Khan** that killed eight people. The Taliban has used female suicide bombers in the past ([FDD’s LWJ](#)).

IED Attack on Civilians

At least 11 pilgrims including seven children were killed and on Monday when their vehicle set off a landmine in southern Afghanistan, local government and health officials said. The blast happened in the **Khakrez district of Kandahar province**. A senior health official said 22 children and eight women were among another 34 women and children who were critically wounded ([NYT](#)).

Intimidation

A local radio station in the **city of Ghazni**, the capital of eastern **Ghazni province** was forced to shut down after repeated threats from the area's Taliban commander. Taliban insurgents, who control several districts in **Ghazni province**, threatened them because three of the station's 16 employees are women ([NYT](#)).

Lashkar - i Taiba Founder Arrested

Pakistani Police arrested Hafiz Saeed, the founder of the Lashkar-e-Taiba insurgent group in Punjab province on Wednesday ([Ariana](#)).

Taliban Overran a District in Paktika

The Taliban overran a district in the troubled eastern Afghan province of Paktika on July 13. Afghan officials confirmed the Taliban took the district after security forces retreated ([FDD’s LWJ](#)).

Humanitarian Situation

Taliban Shuts Down Swedish Charity Operating in Wardak

Taliban militants have forced a Swedish charity to close dozens of health centers in a central Afghan province, accusing it of failing to provide safety to civilians, the organization said on Wednesday. Four people were killed at a Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) center in **Wardak province**, west of **Kabul**, during a night raid by Afghan forces last week, SCA and Afghan government officials said. The attack was condemned by the SCA, but the Taliban accused it failing to provide adequate security ([NYT](#)). Wahidullah Mayar, a spokesman for the Health Ministry said in a tweet that the organization has resumed its normal activities on Friday ([Ariana](#)).



Political Developments

Peace Process

Taliban and Afghan representatives, including some government officials, agreed on Tuesday to a basic road map for negotiating the country’s political future, a major step that could help propel peace efforts to end the long war, now in its 18th year. In a joint declaration after two days of unprecedented and often emotional discussions in the Qatari capital, Doha, the two sides emphasized the need to work for reducing “civilian casualties to zero” and assuring women their fundamental rights in “political, social, economic, educational, cultural affairs.” (NYT)

The U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation on Tuesday headed to China after concluding talks with the Taliban representatives in Doha. Meanwhile, participants of the two-day intra-Afghan meeting held in Doha expressed their satisfaction from the outcome of the meeting on Tuesday (Ariana).

Following the seventh round of US-Taliban dialogue and intra-Afghan conference, Norway and Germany are said to have expressed readiness to host the next round of peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, sources said Wednesday (Afghanistan Times).

The next intra-Afghan meeting will be held in the Uzbek city of Samarkand in three to four weeks, a local TV channel reported on Sunday, citing participants in the recently-held intra-Afghan conference in Doha (Afghanistan Times).

Kazakhstan has invited the permanent representatives of members of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to gather in Nur-Sultan in fall for a special event for solving the problems in Afghanistan (Tolo).

Four-Party Joint Statement on Afghan Peace Process

A statement was jointly released by the Governments of the United States of America, Russia, Pakistan, and China on the occasion of the Four-Party Meeting on the Afghan Peace Process, held in Beijing on July 10 – 11, 2019.

Representatives of China, Russia, and the United States held their 3rd consultation on the Afghan peace process in Beijing. China, Russia, and the United States welcomed Pakistan joining the consultation and believe that Pakistan can play an important role in facilitating peace in Afghanistan. The four sides exchanged views on the current situation and joint efforts for realizing a political settlement to advance peace, stability, and prosperity of Afghanistan and the region.

They re-affirmed negotiations should be “Afghan-led and Afghan-owned” and further agreed that these negotiations should produce a peace framework as soon as possible. This framework should guarantee the orderly and responsible transition of the security situation and detail an agreement on a future inclusive political arrangement acceptable to all Afghans.

The four sides agreed to maintain the momentum of consultation, will invite other important stakeholders to join on the basis of the trilateral consensus agreed on April 25, 2019 in Moscow, and this broader group will meet when intra-Afghan negotiations start (U.S. Department of State).

Withdrawal

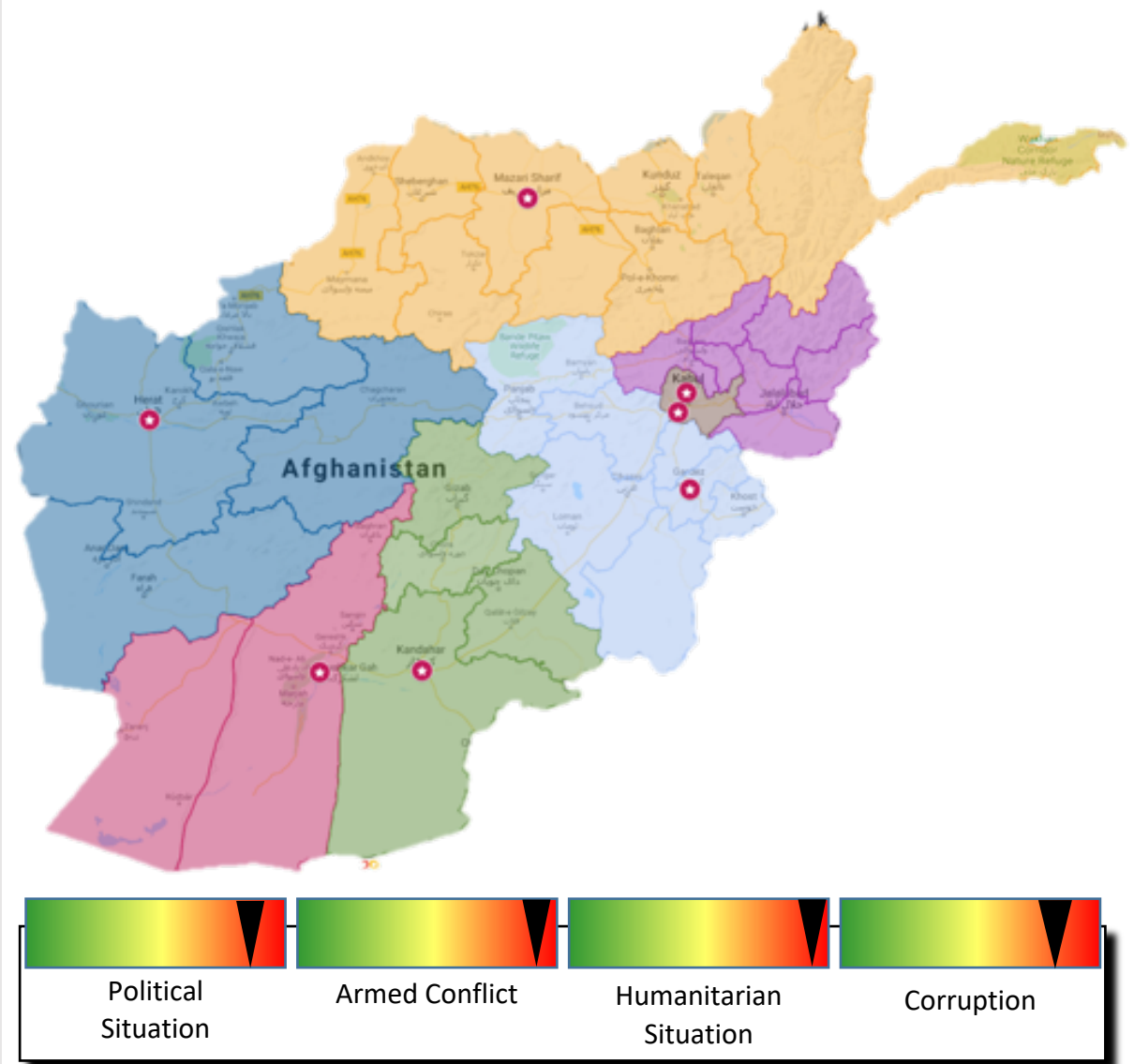
Zalmay Khalilzad stresses that the foreigner forces withdrawal from Afghanistan depends on the Taliban’s commitments in terms of countering terrorism (Ariana). General Mark Milley, the nominated chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, also warns of the foreigner forces’ premature withdrawal from Afghanistan (Ariana).

Taliban’s negotiating team with the US, has said that the group wants Japan, among other European and Asian guarantors, to serve as a guarantor to make sure the US will withdraw its forces from Afghanistan after a deal reached between the Taliban and the United States (Tolo).

Acting Defense Minister Assadullah Khalid, the Resolute Support Commander Gen. Scott Miller, and NATO’s Senior Civilian Representative Nicholas Kay on Wednesday visited Ghazni to assess the security of the central province. Addressing the meeting, Kay said

AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(08 - 15 July 2019)



ASSESSMENT:

- Current status of talks might be seen as a historical opportunity. The emphasis now needs to be given to intra-Afghan dialogue which has been the case for some time. Pakistan’s involvement in trilateral mechanism is also a positive development towards lasting peace.
- Timing is crucial in peace process since the presidential elections are approaching. Orderly withdrawal, intra-Afghan peace deal and an inclusive post-conflict order in Afghanistan should be achieved hand in hand without undermining each other.
- The real indicator of progress in peace talks can only be measured by decreasing casualties, including civil ones.

Peace Agreement Deadline	01 September 2019
Presidential Elections	28 September 2019

NATO will not leave Afghanistan until the job is done (Tolo).

Presidential Elections

The Wall Street Journal has written in an article that if the Taliban and US officials agree on a peace deal, it would cause a delay in the presidential elections (Afghanistan Times).

Armed Conflict

At least 143 pro-government forces and 52 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during another bloody week of fighting amid ongoing peace talks in Doha. The deadliest attack took place in Kunduz Province, where the Taliban attacked two military bases and several security outposts in Imam Sahib District, capturing one base and three security outposts in seven hours of fighting. At least 20 members of the security forces were killed, 15 were wounded and another 10 were taken prisoner. On Sunday, a Taliban car bomb killed 12 people in Ghazni City. Nearly 200 people were also wounded in the explosion, including more than 100 children (NYT).

A 13-year-old suicide bomber blew himself up at a wedding early Friday in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar province, killing five people and injuring 11 others, police officials said (NYT).

The Civilian Protection Advocacy Group says in a report that some 400 civilians have been killed and injured within the past 10 days across Afghanistan (Afghanistan Times).

Humanitarian Situation

Afghan Population is Growing

The Central Statistics and Information Authority of Afghanistan on Thursday said that the population of Afghanistan is growing in an unprecedented way. Speaking at a press conference on the occasion of World Population Day, Ahmad Javid Rasooli the National Statistics and Information Authority Director-General said that the total population of Afghanistan is about 32.2 million people that consists 15.8 million men and 16.4 million women. Mr. Rasooli added that 24 percent of Afghans are living in cities while 71.3 percent are living in the suburbs and rural areas.

At the same event, the Afghan Minister of Economy Mustafa Mastoor said that the increase of population without controls will cause different challenges such as lack of food safety, increasing poverty, drinking water shortage, air pollution, lack of proper education and employment opportunities (Ariana).

Economic Developments

Revenue Increase

Afghan government institutions have spent more than 40 percent of their development budget during the last six months of the fiscal year. According to the Finance Ministry, there is a 14 percent increase in the national revenues compared to the previous year due to the anti-corruption efforts undertaken by the government (Ariana).

Two New Air Routes Inaugurated

Pakistan closed its airspace in February this year after tensions erupted between India and Pakistan over an alleged suicide attack by a Pakistan-based militant group in Indian-controlled Kashmir. Afghanistan’s Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said Tuesday that two alternative new air routes have been inaugurated following closure of Pakistani airspace for the Afghan overflights for more than four months now. The newly launched airways would facilitate flights from Afghanistan and connect eastern and western Asia (Tolo).

Corruption

The European Union Delegation in Kabul held its Fifth Annual Anti-Corruption Conference at the Presidential Palace, which brought together around 250 participants from official institutions, international community, civil society, the private sector, students and media. The panel discussion addressed anti-corruption narratives and realities; the importance of integrity for the peace negotiations; and zero tolerance against corruption as a condition for sustainable peace (EEAS).





Political Developments

Peace Process

Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, said in a tweet on Saturday that the seventh round of the U.S. dialogue with the Taliban will begin on June 29th in **Doha** ([Ariana](#)). The U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Peace, Zalmay Khalilzad said in reaction to Taliban’s tweets over a withdrawal agreement, said that the United States sought “a comprehensive peace agreement, not a withdrawal agreement”. “A comprehensive peace agreement is made up of four inter-connected parts: counter-terrorism assurances, troop withdrawal, intra-Afghan negotiations that lead to a political settlement; and a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire. This is a framework which the Taliban accept” Khalilzad added ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

China recently played host to a Taliban delegation as part of efforts to promote peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan, China's foreign ministry said. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lu Kang told a daily news briefing that Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban representative in Qatar, and some of his colleagues had recently visited China. Chinese officials met them to discuss the Afghan peace process and counter-terror issues. China has long worried about links between militant groups and what it says are Islamist extremists operating in Xinjiang, home to the mostly Muslim Uighur people, who speak a Turkic language ([NYT](#)).

A six-party meeting on Afghanistan with the participation of Russia, China, India, Iran, and Pakistan took place on Wednesday in Russia. The office of National Security Advisor said in a statement that the meeting was held in the Ufa city of Russia. According to the statement, at the meeting, Afghan National Security Advisor Hamdullah Mohib described Afghanistan’s vision toward peace, security and regional cooperation. This comes after reports emerged that a delegation of Taliban has visited Beijing and Tehran where they have held meetings with Chinese and Iranian officials ([atnnews](#)).

Recently, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that they are closely chasing Afghanistan’s development, stressing that they would cooperate with the US to tackle the country’s crisis and improve its situation. This comes as earlier, a number of Afghan politicians accused Moscow of supporting the Taliban, adding Russia has organized a proxy war in Afghanistan ([Kabul Times](#)).

Dozens of Afghan political leaders attended a peace conference in neighboring Pakistan on Saturday to pave the way for further Afghan-to-Afghan dialogue. The conference is to be followed by meetings and working sessions over the next two days, all of which come in the run-up to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's visit to Pakistan next week ([NYT](#)).

Presidential Elections

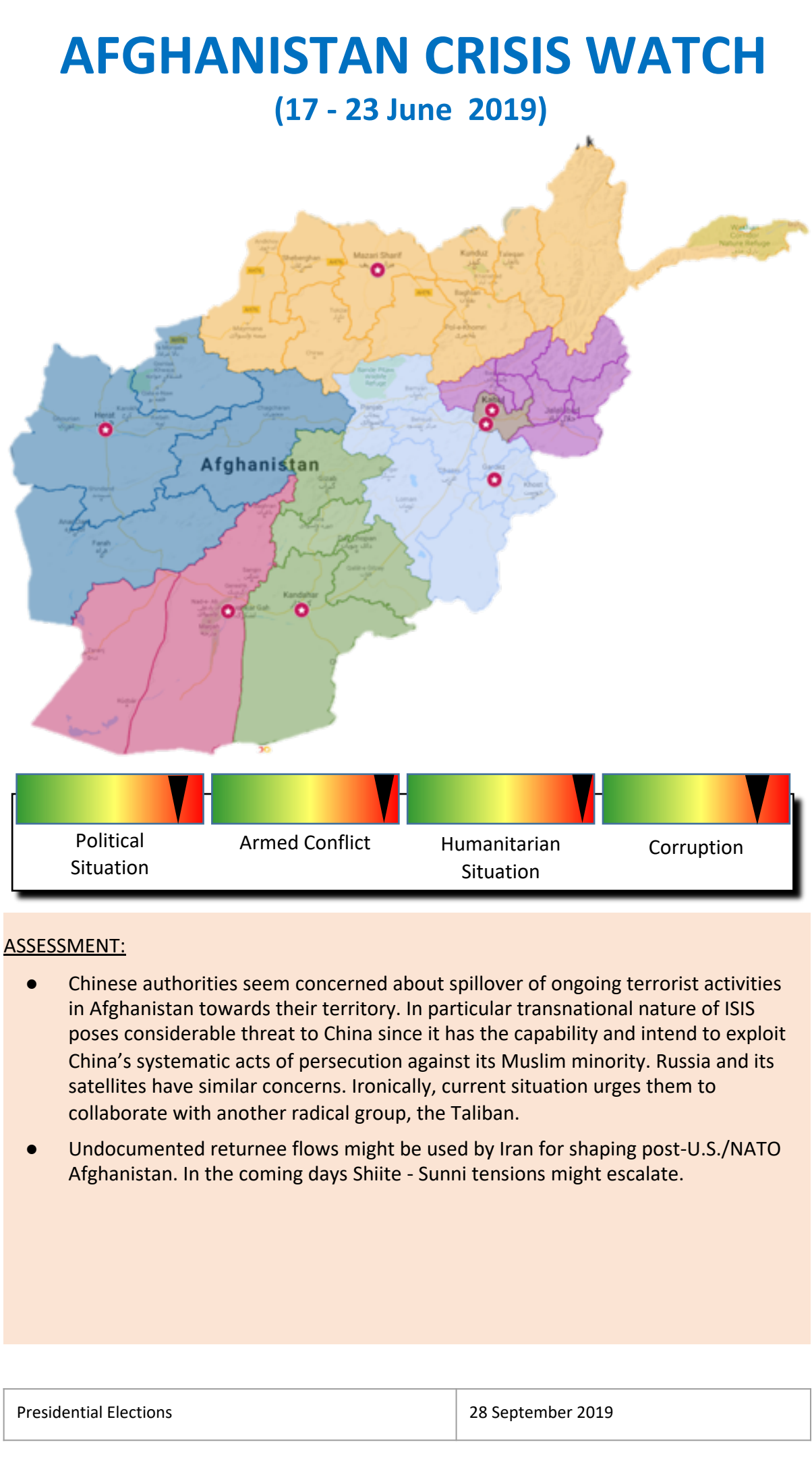
The Independent Election Commission has announced the number of newly registered voters over 100,000 but electoral observers describe this figure as deceptive and inaccurate. The electoral observers say that the “imaginary voters” provides the opportunity for fraud in the upcoming presidential election. The commission is expecting to register over 1.5 million voters ([Ariana](#)).

The Free and Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan (FEFA), an electoral watchdog based in **Kabul** claims that the Independent Election Commission would not be able to hold presidential elections in September, referring to mismanagement within the electoral body.

Yousuf Rashid, head of FEFA, said Wednesday that mismanagement, lack of a coordinated viewpoint among the members of the electoral body and ill-willing to hold the election has led to delay in implementation of operational project ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

Ghani Visited May

President Ashraf Ghani met with British Prime Minister Theresa May at the Prime Minister’s Office, and discussed elections, Afghan peace process and continued support for ANDSF ([Office of the President](#)).



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Armed Conflict

According to the Afghan MOD, 280 insurgents killed last week. At least seven pro-government forces and seven civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past week. Casualties among pro-government forces and civilians decreased significantly compared to previous weeks. The only mass-casualty incident against Afghan forces occurred in **Badakhshan** Province, where four pro-government forces were killed. Two pro-government forces were also killed a military operation against the Taliban in **Herat** Province, where officials claimed that 12 insurgents were killed. There were several Taliban attacks on outposts and bases, but Afghan security forces did not suffer casualties, which may be attributed to the improved arrival time of reinforcements. Airstrikes and commando operations were also accelerated all over the country recently ([NYT](#)).

Deported Refugees

According to the Border Monitoring Team of the Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR), a total of 9,284 undocumented Afghans spontaneously returned or were deported from Iran through the Milak (Nimroz) and Herat (Islam Qala) border crossings between 09-15 June 2019, 124 % more than the previous week (4,137). 4,122 returned voluntarily, 5,162 were deported. This brings the total number of undocumented returnees from Iran since 01 January 2019 to 205,125 ([IOM](#)).

UNSG’s Afghanistan Report

UN Secretary General issued a report named ‘The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security’ as tasked by the UNSC. The report shows that the number of security-related incidents has reduced 7 percent in the last four months in Afghanistan ([Ariana](#)). UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan, Tadamichi Yamamoto briefed the Security Council on the situation in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)).

All peace efforts in Afghanistan, including a new initiative by Germany and Qatar for talks among Afghans must be aimed at starting formal negotiations between the government and the Taliban, the U.N. envoy for the war-torn country said. Tadamichi Yamamoto told the Security Council he's encouraged by increasing support for a political settlement and called on countries "with direct contacts and with influence over the Taliban to intensify their efforts toward this goal." ([NYT](#)).

While some are eager to portray the Taliban as a purely nationalist organization, the UN notes that the Taliban is the “primary partner for all foreign terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan, with the exception of” the Islamic State’s Khorasan branch, which seeks to undermine the Taliban’s legitimacy.

Al Qaeda “members act as instructors and religious teachers for Taliban personnel and their family members.” And a “number of Al Qaeda activists have reportedly arrived in Afghanistan from Egypt,” though the UN did not identify these Egyptians or say when they arrived.

The UN’s analysts provide a brief geographic overview of al Qaeda’s footprint, saying the group “is seeking to strengthen its presence in **Badakhshan** Province, especially in **Shighnan** District, which shares a border with Tajikistan.” Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), which is clearly part of al Qaeda’s international web, also has a noteworthy presence in **Badakhshan**.

Elsewhere, Al Qaeda “is eager to expand its presence in **Barmal** District in **Paktika** Province,” which is dominated by the Haqqani Network ([FDD’s LWJ](#)).

Humanitarian Situation

Women, Peace and Security

No single female student has graduated from high schools in southern **Helmand** province of Afghanistan during the last 18 years. According to the local officials, even though there are no schools for girls in some districts of the province ([Ariana](#)).



AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(10 - 16 June 2019)

Political Developments

Peace Process

Renewed efforts are underway to jumpstart stalled peace talks with the Taliban as a U.S. envoy is in **Kabul** and Pakistani and Afghan officials are meeting in **Islamabad**. U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad says he's holding meetings with Kabul officials on Monday (10 Jun 2019), seeking to bring about a new round of Afghan-to-Afghan talks. Meanwhile, Afghan and Pakistani officials from a group tasked with finding ways to cooperate on diplomatic, military and intelligence-sharing are meeting in **Islamabad** ([NYT](#)).

U.S. has four pillars in Afghanistan: *troop withdrawal, counterterrorism assurances and cooperation, inter-Afghan dialogue, reduction in violence* ([U.S. Department of State](#)).

The U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad says if Iran create obstacles in front of the U.S. efforts for peace in Afghanistan, Washington will be tough against Tehran. Meanwhile, Khalilzad expressed his optimism regarding China-Russia agreement on the Afghan peace process, adding that Germany is also trying to mediate to bring peace in Afghanistan. In response to Kabul and Washington relation after a possible peace agreement, Khalilzad said Taliban is eager to have political and economic relations with the U.S. after a peace accord ([Ariana](#)).

Germany is trying to help the Afghan peace process by providing the ground for the launch of an intra-Afghan dialogue, said Idrees Zaman the Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs on Wednesday (12 Jun 2019). According to the Afghan official, Germany has taken the initiative upon the request of the Afghan government and will play a major role in the peace process of Afghanistan ([Ariana](#)).

NATO's Civilian Representative in Afghanistan, Sir Nicholas Kay, has called on the Taliban group to agree for an intra-Afghan talks in shortest time ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

President Ashraf Ghani is expected to form a new ministry for peace and reconciliation after more than 3,000 participants of a consultative Jirga on peace recommended the closure of Afghanistan's High Peace Council. Meanwhile, sources close to the Taliban says that a delegation of the Taliban militant group has traveled to **Beijing** to hold talks with Chinese officials ahead of their seventh round of talks with the United States in Qatar ([Ariana](#)).

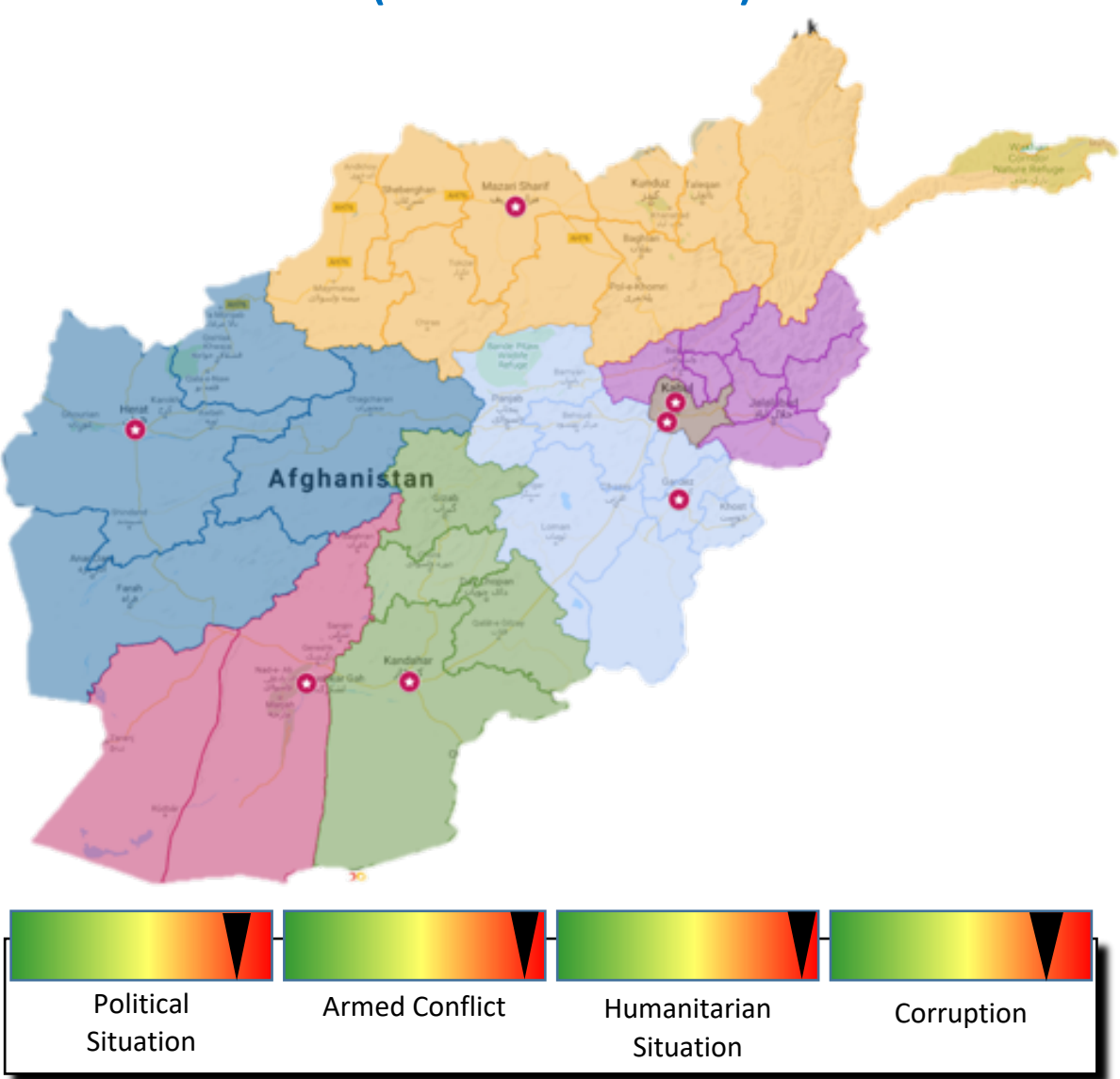
In an effort to convince the Taliban to open negotiations, the Afghan government has freed hundreds of Taliban prisoners without conditions, and will free hundreds more. The Taliban has not responded to the prisoner release, and continues to refuse to negotiate with the Afghan government. The Afghan government confirmed that 490 Taliban fighters and commanders have been released since the beginning of June, TOLONews reported. A total of 887 prisoners, all members of the Taliban, are slated to be released during the observance of Eid al Fitr, National Security Advisor Hamdullah Mohib confirmed ([FDD's LWJ](#)).

Presidential Elections

Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission (IEC) has submitted a proposal of \$150 million for holding the upcoming presidential elections. However, electoral observers and experts blame IEC officials for lack of competency to spend the budget as required ([Ariana](#)).

Armed Conflict

According to the Afghan officials 430 insurgents killed last week. At least 70 pro-government forces and 17 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past week. Casualties among pro-government forces increased compared to last week as the Taliban intensified their attacks in the north and west of the country. The deadliest attack occurred in **Ghor** Province where the Taliban attacked Posht Noor area in Dawlatyar District, killing 14 pro-government militia members and wounding two others. In **Kunduz** Province, an army outpost was bombed by an American airstrike in Ismail Qeshalq area of Imam Sahib District, killing six soldiers and wounding eight others ([NYT](#)).



ASSESSMENT:

- Reconciliation efforts have been expedited as Zalmay Khalilzad pushes actors to strike a peace deal. Russian&Chinese participation to the process is important for an ever lasting peace. However, these countries may react to a U.S. ally - Taliban.
- Increasing ISKP activity in Afghanistan is a matter of concern for every stakeholder. However, if the process can be managed responsively, it may also serve as a coordination catalyst. This global network of terrorism, although defeated in Iraq and Syria, will likely continue to shake the world in the coming days/years.

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The Least Peaceful Country on Earth

Afghanistan is officially the least peaceful country in the world and the site of the most violent conflict, according to the Institute for Economics and Peace's annual report. Afghanistan replaced Syria as the least peaceful country, which Steve Killelea, the founder and executive chairman of IEP, attributed to the collapse of ISIS's territorial holdings in Iraq and Syria ([Business Insider](#)).

Rescued Prisoners

The Interior Ministry says Afghan special forces have rescued 34 people from a Taliban-run prison in northern **Baghlan** province. Tuesday's statement from the ministry says 17 civilians and 17 members of the security forces — seven soldiers, seven policemen and three intelligence agents — were freed during the operation, which took place on Monday ([NYT](#)).

ISKP

Two years ago, Pentagon officials said that American forces in the remote reaches of Afghanistan could defeat the Islamic State's offshoot here by the end of 2017. This month, American Special Forces in eastern Afghanistan were still fighting, with no end in sight.

There are an estimated 3,000 Islamic State fighters in Afghanistan. In recent months, Islamic State cells have appeared in the northern province of **Kunduz** and the western province of **Herat**. But no Islamic State cell is more threatening to maintaining stability in Afghanistan than the one in **Kabul**, the Afghan capital.

The Islamic State groups there have become increasingly skilled in avoiding detection, the officials said, staging high-profile attacks more frequently since 2016. Last year, it carried out an estimated 24 attacks in **Kabul**, leaving hundreds dead or wounded and outpacing the Taliban's Haqqani network as the most lethal group in the capital, officials said.

American military leadership increasingly concerned about large groups of Taliban fighters shifting to the Islamic State if a peace deal is reached. Already, the Islamic State in Afghanistan is using propaganda in preparation for a concerted recruiting campaign after any settlement ([NYT](#)).

Humanitarian Situation

Women, Peace and Security

A consultative meeting was held under the title of "The Peace Process and Women's Role in it" under the chairmanship of the Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Mr. Idrees Zaman and the participation of the Federal Government of Germany's Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Ambassador Markus Potzel, as well as representatives of women and civil society activists of Afghanistan ([Afghan MFA](#)). Afghan women have a fundamental role to play in the ongoing peace process, which must be inclusive for the peace that emerges to be truly sustainable, said the UN's top envoy to Afghanistan during a human rights symposium this week in the northeast province of Kunduz ([UNAMA](#)).

Historical Heritage

An ancient tower dating back 2,000 years in the historic Afghan city of **Ghazni** collapsed this week, local officials said, raising concerns about the vulnerability of the country's cultural heritage and the government's ability to protect them. The old citadel known as Ghaznain Fort originally had 36 towers, but 14 of the towers had collapsed in recent years due to decades of war, heavy rain and neglect. The fort is one of dozens of unique historic sites in Afghanistan - ranging from the pre-Islamic Buddhist center in the Bamyán valley to the 12th century minaret of Jam in a remote area of **Ghor** province - in urgent need of protection ([NYT](#)).

Maternal Mortality

A survey in 2018 showed that 550 to 600 of every 100,000 mothers lose their lives during giving birth ([Afghanistan Times](#)).



Political Developments

Peace Process

Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad arrived in Kabul for consultations with leaders of the National Unity Government, political leaders, civil society, and women to discuss progress in U.S. efforts to facilitate an inclusive peace process. His arrival in Kabul follows stops in Islamabad, Berlin, and Brussels ([U.S. Embassy at Kabul](#)).

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg met with the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, at NATO Headquarters on Wednesday (5 June 2019). Ambassador Khalilzad also briefed all 41 NATO Allies and Resolute Support Mission operational partners on his latest efforts in support for peace in Afghanistan ([NATO](#)).

Germany and Qatar are expected to host the intra-Afghan dialogue between the Taliban representatives and the Afghan politicians. The U.S. Special Envoy for Afghan Peace Zalmay Khalilzad said that Germany hosted second US-Europe Group for Afghan Peace meeting where they reviewed upcoming Oslo Forum and German-Qatari hosted intra-Afghan dialogue ([Ariana](#)).

Armed Conflict

309 insurgents killed previous week according to the Afghan MOD. At least 50 pro-government forces and 19 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past week. The deadliest attack took place in Oruzgan Province, where the Taliban ambushed the police headquarters of Shahid Hasas District with two stolen Humvees packed with explosives. After the initial assault, insurgents entered the compound to target surviving officers. At least 11 soldiers and eight police officers were killed and six police officers were wounded. There are fears that the Taliban will soon capture the district center ([NYT](#)).

As the West continues to hold out hope for peace talks within Afghanistan, the Taliban presses its military efforts to take control of more areas of the country. The Taliban has claimed it overran five districts in four Afghan provinces since mid-May ([FDD’s LWJ](#)).

David Petrous, the former Director of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), said that the U.S. strategy for managing the 19 years old war in Afghanistan has not been suitable ([Ariana](#)).

IS Militants in Taliban Prison

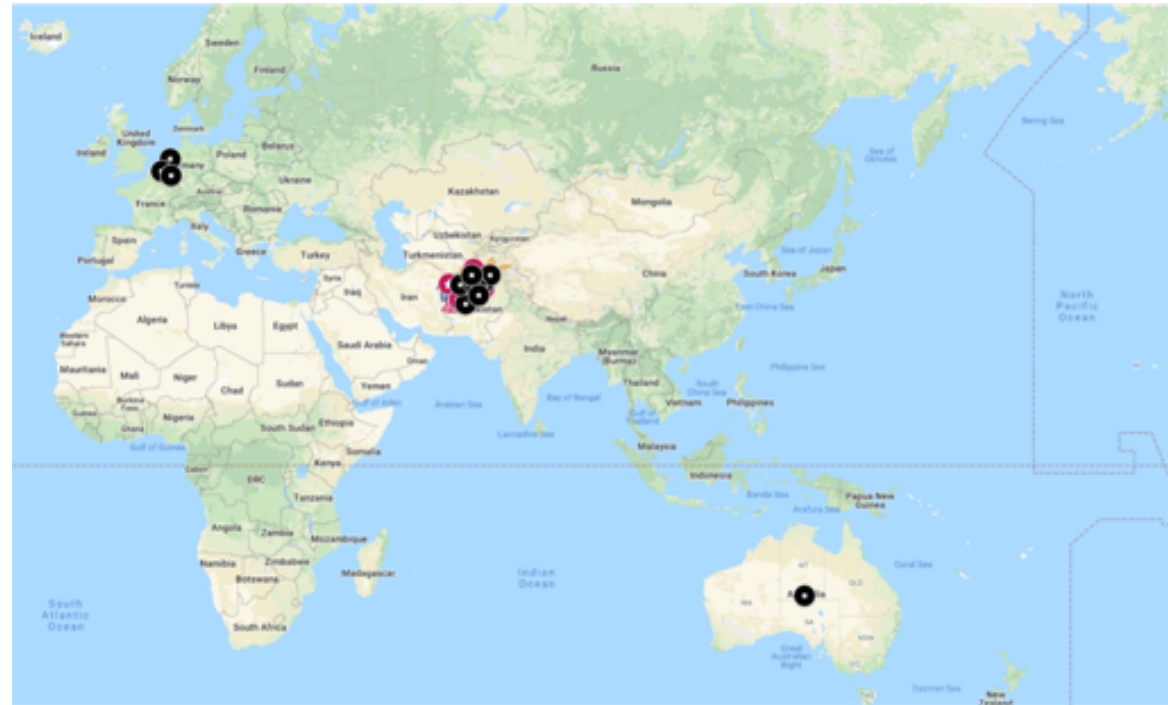
An Afghan military spokesman says troops have freed 84 prisoners from a Taliban-run facility in the northern Faryab province. Several captive Islamic State fighters were also found inside the facility. It was not immediately clear what would be done with the IS fighters, including four from Uzbekistan, three from Tajikistan and one from Kyrgyzstan ([NYT](#)). The Islamic State group has lost its caliphate in Syria and Iraq, but in the forbidding mountains of northeastern Afghanistan the group is expanding its footprint, recruiting new fighters and plotting attacks on the United States and other Western countries, according to U.S. and Afghan security officials ([The Washington Post](#)).

War Crimes Investigation

The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) filed a request on Friday seeking to overturn the rejection of her planned investigation into war crimes in Afghanistan allegedly committed by both Taliban insurgents and U.S. troops. In April, the court refused lead prosecutor Fatou Bensouda's request to open an investigation into alleged atrocities by all sides during the nearly

AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(03 - 09 June 2019)



ASSESSMENT:

- Germany is supporting U.S. led reconciliation efforts by actively participating in peace process and by assuming responsibility to facilitate intra-Afghan dialogue, a development that might be seen as a U.S. response to the so-called “Moscow Process”. German involvement might expedite the reconciliation and lead to a more coordinated and focused peace process ownership. What is missing in the picture is French and British involvement. Only then Taliban can feel a real pressure that force the insurgent group to make compromises.
- NATO facilitated ANA Trust Fund, theoretically, provides funding support to the ANDSF through 2024, as agreed at the NATO Brussels Summit, alongside UN facilitated LOTFA and U.S. DoD budget. However these financial aids should not be taken for granted by Afghanistan. They are strictly conditions-based and highly dependent on the outcome of the peace process.
- Increasing ISIS activity in Afghanistan is a matter of grave concern even for the Taliban. Given the multiethnic composition of its members, the terrorist organisation’s outreach is way beyond Afghanistan and poses a significant threat to the Central Asian States. ISIS also gives authoritarian regimes such as China and its satellites a reason to intimidate Muslim communities under their rule.

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two-decade conflict. ICC prosecutors had identified the Taliban and its affiliates, the Afghan authorities, and members of the U.S. armed forces and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) as potential perpetrators of crimes under the court's statute. The alleged atrocities took place in all 34 of Afghanistan’s provinces, with a smaller number of crimes alleged in Poland, Lithuania and Romania, where suspected members of the Taliban or al Qaeda were held for questioning ([NYT](#)).

Australia’s Federal Police raided the offices of the national public broadcaster on Wednesday in connection to a 2017 story based on leaked military documents that indicated the country’s military forces were being investigated for possible war crimes in Afghanistan ([the Washington Post](#)).

Humanitarian Situation

Civilian Casualties

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has found that anti-government elements deliberately and knowingly targeted civilians throughout the holy month of Ramadan. The attacks by anti-government elements mainly used improvised explosive devices and caused more than 100 civilian casualties in Kabul alone ([UNAMA](#)).

Opium

As pressure grows for a political settlement to end 18 years of war in Afghanistan, the drug trade remains a major threat, leaving the country at the risk of becoming a "narco-state", the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), a U.S. Congressional watchdog, said in a recent report. Efforts to develop alternative crops like saffron for poor farmers have had some success, but overall, they have hardly put a dent in the drugs trade. For years, Afghanistan has been the global leader in opium production, despite some \$8.9 billion spent since 2002 by the U.S. government to stop production and trafficking in narcotics ([NYT](#)).

Economy

ANA Trust Fund

At the plenary meeting of the Afghan National Army Trust Fund Board - held today (04 June 2019) at NATO Headquarters - NATO Allies and partners confirmed their steadfast support to the financial sustainment of the Afghan security forces. Together with representatives of the donors’ community, they reviewed the Trust Fund management, implementation and performance; and they outlined future requirements. As of 15 May 2019, total contributions made to the Trust Fund amount to 2.8 billion U.S. dollars. The ANA Trust Fund is open for contributions by the broader International Community. The NATO-run Afghan National Army (ANA) Trust Fund is one of three funding streams used by the International Community to channel its financial support to Afghanistan’s security forces and institutions. The other two are the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA), administered by the United Nations Development Programme, and the United States Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF). LOTFA is used to pay the salaries of police and corrections personnel and to build the capacity of the Afghan Ministry of the Interior and the police. The ASFF pays for equipping and running Afghanistan’s security forces, as well as facility and infrastructure repair, renovation and construction ([NATO](#)).



AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(27 May - 02 June 2019)

Political Developments

Peace Process

The Taliban and Russia have jointly called for the withdrawal of U.S.-led coalition troops from Afghanistan, with a top leader of the Islamist insurgent group denouncing the foreign presence in the country as a major obstacle to Afghan peace. Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the political deputy of the Taliban, made the remarks in Moscow to a gathering of Russian and Afghan government personnel, as well as representatives from prominent political groups from the war-torn country. Russia organized the meeting to mark the 100th anniversary of diplomatic relations with Afghanistan."The Islamic Emirate [Taliban] is truly committed to peace but the first step is to remove obstacles in the way of peace, meaning the occupation of Afghanistan must come to an end," Baradar said in rare public appearance and speech. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in his welcome address to the group urged that foreign forces leave Afghanistan. He underscored the importance of bilateral relations, saying Russia is ready to offer more help to Afghanistan to fight terrorist groups led by Islamic State and drug-trafficking networks ([VOA](#)). The visit is the latest sign that Russia is becoming an indispensable broker in the 18-year conflict in Afghanistan. “We invited both the Taliban and Afghan politicians to a solemn meeting dedicated to 100 years of diplomatic relations,” Russia’s special envoy to Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, told the TASS news agency on Monday. “They have the right and desire to communicate after that, and they will have such an opportunity.” The Islamist insurgent group’s third visit to Russia in less than one year comes as its leaders have intensified negotiations with the United States over the past few months to agree a drawdown of international troops from Afghanistan ([The National](#)). The ceremony serves as an excuse for informal peace talks between Afghan politicians and 14 Taliban negotiators. Afghan ambassador to Russia, Latif Bahand represented Kabul in “intra-Afghan” talks, according to Sibghatullah Ahmadi, the spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ([NYT](#)).

Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad will travel to Afghanistan, Belgium, Germany, Pakistan, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates from May 31 – June 16. In Doha, he will continue talks with the Taliban to move the peace process forward ([U.S. Department of State](#)).

Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Mr. Idrees Zaman came together with the representatives of NATO RSM Framework Nations in Brussels. Then he attended the session of European Union's Political and Security Committee with the presence of Ambassadors of 28 member states of the EU for the committee. He also met with the Deputy Secretary-General of the European External Action Service, Jean-Christophe Belliard ([Afghan MFA](#)).

Presidential Elections

The Chief of IEC told Ariana News that people will go to polls in 5,383 centers and the remaining 2,002 polling centers will be shut down on election day due to security threats and a lack of voters lists ([Ariana](#)).

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced on Wednesday that it will hold only the presidential elections on September 28. Speaking at a press conference in Kabul, the IEC Chairperson Hawa Alam Nooristani said that the decision was made due to the lack of budget. She added that the date of the provincial council and Ghazni parliamentary elections will be announced later ([Ariana](#)).

Armed Conflict

According to the Afghan MoD, 399 insurgents were killed last week. At least 134 pro-government forces and 47 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past seven days, in the deadliest week of fighting in 2019.



ASSESSMENT:

- Meeting at Moscow hit the headlines this week. Russia gave valuable political credit to the Taliban, and the Afghan opposition while consolidating its situation in peace talks as the holder of balance. Insistence of foreign troop withdrawal without mentioning counter terrorism obligations is of particular importance and contrary to U.S. position in the negotiations. This week Khalilzad is reinvigorating U.S. facilitated peace process. He needs to make a great effort to stick partners together. And for the National Unity Government, being out of the discussion in either process means being out of the game.
- 27 per cent of the polling centers will be closed during the presidential elections due to security concerns. Considering the fact that the turnout rates of any kind of elections in the last decade were less than 40 percent, whoever wins the forthcoming elections his legitimacy will always be questioned.
- Fighting is intensified ahead of the intra Afghan talks by the belligerents who aim to have the upper hand in the negotiations. But the thing is they are giving a strong indirect message to the Afghan society that their lives do not matter much when compared to a minor political gain.

Insurgent attacks intensified before and during a meeting between Afghan politicians and Taliban leaders in Moscow, a familiar Taliban tactic in which they intensify their attacks before high-profile talks on peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. The deadliest incident took place in Ghor Province, where the Taliban attacked a village in the provincial capital, killing 18 people and wounding 17 others. Three members of the Afghan special forces, two police officers and 13 civilians were among those killed. The Taliban attacked local residents when they stood in support of security forces who were defending the village. In the neighboring province of Badghis, Afghan commandos suffered some of their highest casualties of the year. At least 16 Afghan commandos were killed and 15 others were wounded when insurgents attacked the center of Bala Murghab District, capturing the district police headquarters and governor’s office ([NYT](#)).

Attacks on schools in the country surged from 68 in 2017 to 192 in 2018, according to UNICEF. This is the first time that the number of school attacks has increased, since 2015. The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) said that much greater protection for educational facilities was needed across Afghanistan where attacks against schools have increased three-fold in just one year ([UN News](#)).

Humanitarian Situation

Corruption

One of the many investigators of the American University in Afghanistan summed things up this way: If the United States government had paid to send every Afghan graduate to college in the United States, it would have spent less money than it did on financing a troubled, English-language university for them in the Afghan capital. The university graduated 1,281 Afghan degree students over the past decade, at a cost of \$126,000 each to American taxpayers, or a total of \$162 million. Now the continued existence of the university is potentially at risk after investigators said they were unable to determine what happened to \$63 million of that money, according to officials of the United States Agency for International Development and the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction. A compromise was reached that temporarily prevented that step. But the university, generally known as A.U.A.F., remains the subject of a criminal investigation as well as a forensic audit to find out what happened to all that money ([NYT](#)).

Former Afghan intelligence chief and current presidential candidate Rahmatullah Nabil on Sunday claimed that the National Directorate of Security (NDS) received reports of money injection in 2014 elections while he was in charge. Speaking at a press conference in Kabul, he said huge contracts have been awarded by the government during the last couple of years in return for supporting a specific candidate in the upcoming elections. Nabil claimed that President Ghani is misusing government resources for his premature election campaigns. He further accused the government of opening 40 electoral offices in the provinces before the launch of election campaigns ([Ariana](#)).

Illiteracy

According to a new report of the Save the Children in Afghanistan released on the occasion of children’s international day, two in every five children are deprived of going to school in Afghanistan. The report has evaluated children’s living condition based on their access to health, education, nutrition, and security facilities in 176 countries of the world. Based on the report, Afghanistan has placed in position 158 among the countries where children have no good living circumstances ([Ariana](#)).

Economy

Mines

Rich in copper, lithium, talc, marble, gold, uranium and others, Afghanistan's vast mineral wealth is estimated to exceed one trillion dollars. But according to data, every year the government loses around \$300m in revenue from mining. Poor security, the lack of proper legal framework and organisational capacity, as well as corruption, have prevented the development of the sector ([Al Jazeera](#)).

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# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

## (20-26 May 2019)

### Political Developments

#### Peace Process

Leaders and members of the Taliban office have been invited to attend the centennial celebration of the diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and Russia. The familiar sources with the event that Hamid Karzai and some other politicians will also attend this event. An intra-Afghan dialogue is supposed to be held between the Afghan politicians and the Taliban on the sideline of the event. The ceremony is going to take place on May 28 but it is not cleared yet if the Afghan government is invited to attend it or not ([ATN News](#)).

#### Presidential Elections

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani’s five-year term in office expired last week, but he’s conducting business as usual. Ghani’s position has been reinforced by a Supreme Court decision extending his tenure until an election is held in September. But opponents charge that he is inviting “chaos” at a time of aggressive insurgent attacks and growing political divisions, and they accuse him of using public patronage and funds to bolster his campaign for reelection ([Washington Post](#)).

Afghanistan’s IEC on Monday rejected the UN proposal of delaying the provincial councils and Ghazni parliamentary elections. UN insists on holding the timely presidential elections. The U.S. top diplomat recommended IEC officials to focus on the presidential elections on September 28. In addition, she urged electoral bodies to postpone the other two elections. However, the IEC Chief Hawa Alam Nuristani has said that the provincial council elections should be held as scheduled in order to legitimize the presidential election ([Ariana](#)).

#### Iran Sanctions

Afghanistan’s Central Bank canceled the license of the Arian Bank, an Iranian bank based in the capital Kabul with a branch in Herat province. Arian Bank was established in Afghanistan in 2004 and received a commercial banking license from the Central Bank ([Ariana](#)).

#### New UK Ambassador to Afghanistan

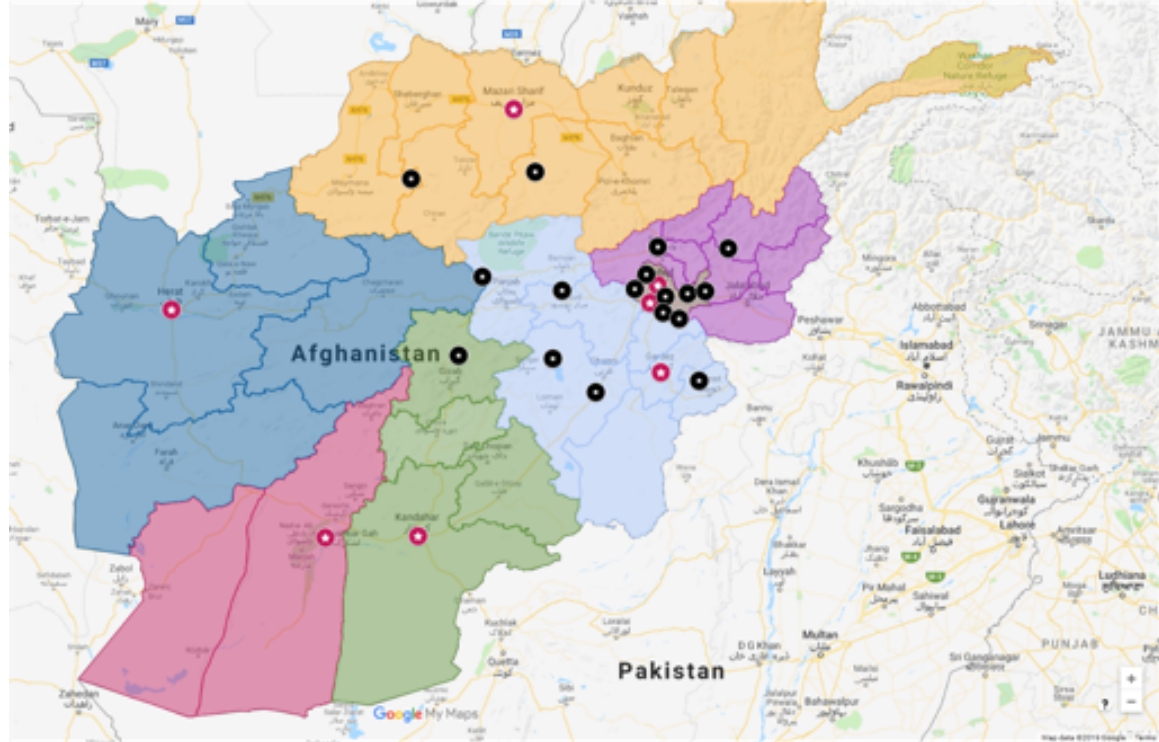
Ms. Alison Blake, who is appointed as UK’s ambassador to Afghanistan, presented her credential letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan H.E. Salahuddin Rabbani ([Afghan MFA](#)).

### Armed Conflict

At least 16 pro-government forces and 14 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past week. There was a notable decrease in attacks compared to the near-constant violence breaking out across the country in recent months, possibly because of Ramadan. Heavy rains in various parts of the country have also limited insurgents’ mobility. On Wednesday, a massive Taliban attack was thwarted by security forces in Ghazni Province. Afghan forces stopped a Humvee that was laden with explosives and heading toward government buildings in the provincial capital. The explosion that resulted from security forces striking the Humvee with a rocket killed two civilians and two police officers ([NYT](#)).

Russia’s top security chief is raising alarm about extremist militants massing on Afghanistan’s northern border. Alexander Bortnikov, chief of the main Russian intelligence agency FSB, said on a visit to Tajikistan on Tuesday that some 5,000 fighters of an ISIS extremist group affiliate have gathered in areas bordering on former Soviet states in Central Asia, saying that most of them fought alongside ISIS in Syria ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

Samiullah Raihan, a Sunni Muslim preacher who often appeared on television and condemned violence as not Islamic, was killed Friday while leading weekly prayers in the Al Taqwa mosque. A hidden explosive device detonated in the sanctuary. Kabul police said Raihan and three worshipers were killed and at least 16 people were injured ([Washington Post](#)).



### ASSESSMENT:

- Ghani’s insistence to stay at the Palace is casting doubts on the legitimacy of his Presidency, which is being exploited by his political rivals, most notably by the Taliban. Although his national unity government is being seen as the primary interlocutor by the wider international community, countries such as Russia are investing in other political figures, again exploiting the political fragmentation of the country. Additionally, IEC’s incompetence to deliver required administrative services for a multiple election to be held in September exacerbates the situation. Thus, the country is highly unlikely administer sound elections.
- Russia and the countries in its “sphere of influence” in Central/South Asia are increasingly voicing their concerns regarding terrorist groups operating in their neighbourhood. Cognisant of the problems that they may face after U.S./NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan, they might have started or would rather start contingency planning with an emphasis on counterterrorism for the security of their region. In this regard, CSTO might have a role to play in the near future.
- In Afghanistan, corruption serves as the mother of all crimes. Although mainstream political groups and the Taliban differ widely in what they offer to the community, their pattern of behaviour is totally in consonance when it comes to corruption.

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#### LIG OFS Quarterly Report

The DoD delivered 19 aircraft to the Afghan Air Force (AAF) during the quarter as part of the AAF Modernization plan, bringing the total size of the AAF fleet to 170. As Afghan Air Force grows, U.S. plans to boost maintenance training ([LIG OFS Report](#)).

#### Helicopter Crash Landed

A CH-47 Chinook helicopter hit the ground hard on the way to drop passengers off ([NDTV](#)).

#### Al Qaeda Presence in Afghanistan

Al Qaeda is operating “across the country” and not confined to one region, the commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan confirmed. Miller’s comments about al Qaeda’s presence throughout Afghanistan should call into question the US efforts to negotiate a peace deal with the Taliban. The Taliban is clearly supporting al Qaeda to this day, because al Qaeda would not be able to operate “across the country” without the explicit support and approval of the Taliban ([FDD LWJ](#)).

### Humanitarian Situation

#### Mistreated Prisoners Held by Taliban

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) expressed “grave concern” on Sunday over “credible accounts” it has been given that Taliban militants have been mistreating prisoners, which in some cases “may amount to torture”. The mission based its preliminary findings on face-to-face interviews with 13 detainees who were freed from a Taliban detention facility by Special Forces troops from the Afghan Army, on 25 April ([UN News](#)).

#### Flooding

Heavy flooding in Afghanistan killed at least 24 people and injured 11 others in the past 48 hours as a new wave of heavy rains swept parts of the country, Afghan officials said Saturday. The flooding affected six of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces, including the capital, Kabul, according to the Ministry for Disaster Management and Humanitarian Affairs ([Washington Post](#)).

#### Malnutrition

In Afghanistan, children suffering from the most serious form of malnutrition may die, unless \$7 million in funding is found within weeks, UNICEF said on Friday. Speaking in Geneva, UN Children’s Fund spokesperson Christophe Boulierac, likened the humanitarian situation in the war-torn country to “one of the worst disasters on earth” ([UN News](#)).

#### (Anti)-Corruption

Continued focus and effort are essential for building on the progress made in implementing Afghanistan’s anti-corruption strategy, finds a new United Nations report released today. UNAMA’s third anti-corruption report reviews the progress Afghanistan has made in anti-corruption reform and provides analysis and recommendations to support Afghanistan’s institutions in combating corruption to improve the lives of all citizens who must grapple with this challenging issue each day ([UN News](#)).

#### Afghanistan’s Dysfunctional Health System

According to the World Health Organization, there were 34 reported attacks on healthcare facilities in the first quarter of 2019, killing at least nine workers and patients and causing the closure of at least 87 medical facilities. In 2003, Afghanistan had the highest maternal mortality rate in the world - 1,600 of every 100,000 women would die during pregnancy. Today, that number has dropped to less than 300. The child mortality rate has also been reduced by more than a half, from 160 of every 1,000 children not making it to age five a decade ago to nearly 50 today ([Al Jazeera](#)).

#### Mental Health in Afghanistan

47 percent of Afghan population is suffering from mental illnesses, the ministry of public health stated in a report ([Afghanistan Times](#)).



## Political Developments

### Peace Process

The preparations are underway for holding the second round of intra-Afghan dialogue in Doha, the capital of Qatar, sources familiar with the peace talks said. “When the timetable of U.S. troops withdrawal from Afghanistan cleared, there will be opportunities for the intra-Afghan dialogue,” said Mawlawi Qalamuddin, another former Taliban official. This comes as the intra-Afghan peace dialogue in Doha was supposed to take place in April but the Summit canceled after disagreements over the lengthy list of government was introduced ([Ariana](#)).

Germany’s special envoy for Afghanistan Markus Potzel has met Taliban’s deputy leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar in Qatar. Mohammad Suhail Shaheen, spokesman for Taliban’s Qatar office confirmed the meeting ([Ariana](#)).

Donald Trump’s administration asked Congress to reimburse the Taliban for travel expenses, lodgings and food at peace talks. Earlier this week a bill passed by the House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee on Defence barred the US government from using money to pay for the Taliban’s expenses – unless the talks included members of the Afghan government or did not restrict the participation of women ([Independent](#)).

### EU-Afghanistan Cooperation

The second Joint Committee under the EU-Afghanistan Cooperation Agreement for Partnership and Development met in Kabul on 14 May 2019. The Joint Committee oversees the implementation of the Cooperation Agreement for Partnership and Development, signed by the EU and Afghanistan in February 2017 to underline their mutual commitment to deeper relations through a comprehensive partnership ([EEAS](#)).

### Parliamentary Elections

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) in a statement late on Tuesday night announced the final results of parliamentary elections for Kabul. There are 33 candidates including 24 male and 9 female who have secured their seats in the Lower House of the Afghan parliament ([Ariana](#)). Even now, Afghanistan does not have a completely newly-elected Wolesi Jirga as Ghazni’s elections have yet to take place; they are only planned for 28 September 2019 (together with the presidential and provincial council elections) ([AAN](#)).

U.S. Embassy welcomed the finalization of the Kabul parliamentary election results. The Embassy also noted the decision of the IEC on May 10 to focus on voting methods that can realistically be implemented this year for the 2019 presidential election and urged the IEC to turn its attention to preparing for the September presidential election, including putting forward a budget request aligned with an appropriate operational plan, hiring and training sufficient staff to complete voter registration and preparations, and coordinating with the security ministries ([U.S. Embassy](#)).

### U.S. Withdrawal

Republican and Democratic U.S. lawmakers on Wednesday revived an effort to provide visas to move to the United States for Afghans who worked for Americans during the long war in their country and are now stranded, their lives at risk due to that work. The bill would provide 4,000 Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) for the rest of the federal fiscal year ending on Sept. 30, and also try to address obstacles that have prevented Afghans from getting visas under previously passed legislation ([NYT](#)).

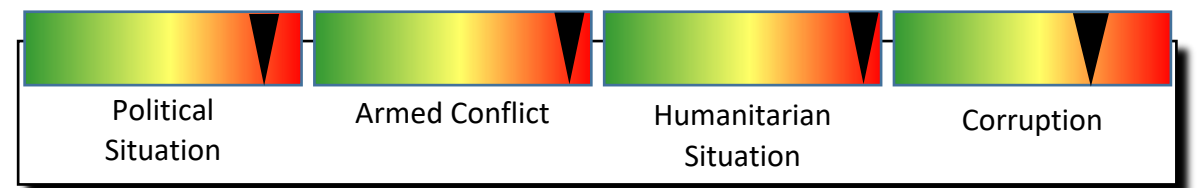
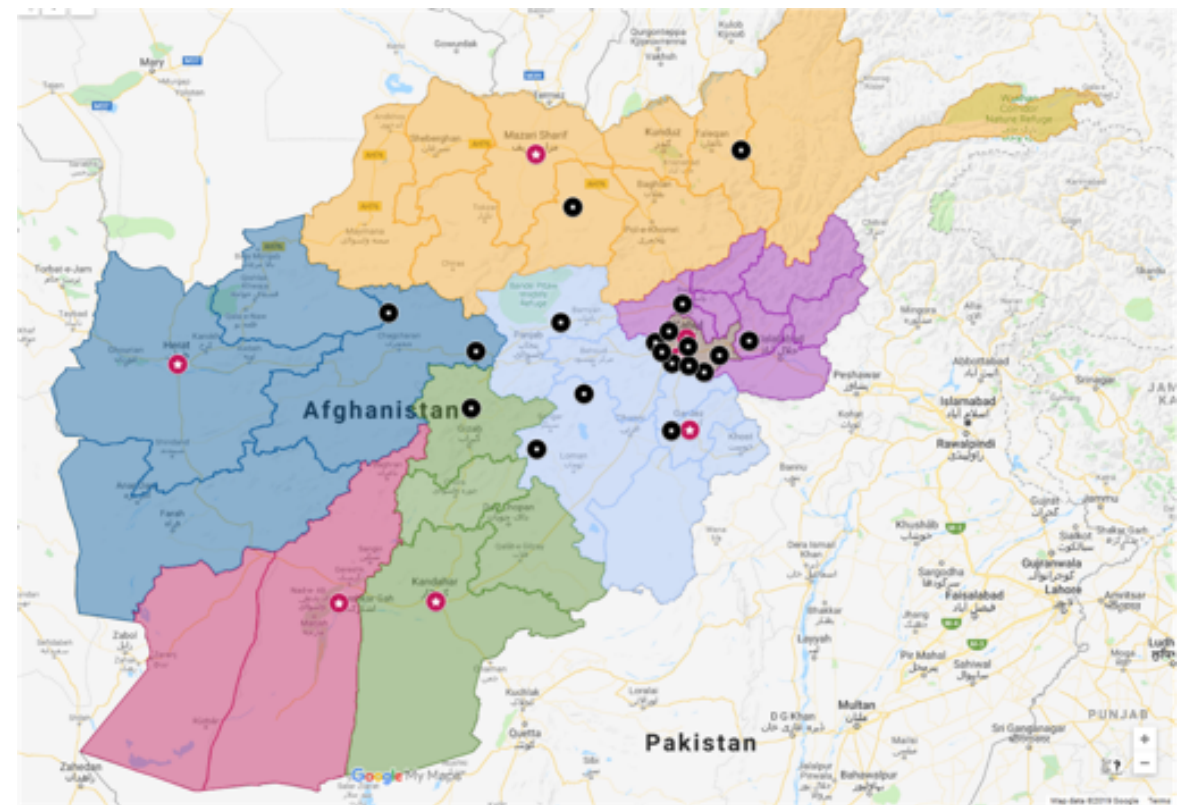
### Sochi Talks

Russian presidential aide Yury Ushakov said on Tuesday that Vladimir Putin and Michael Pompeo have discussed Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Venezuela, and Iran. Russia and the United States should cooperate more actively on settlement in Afghanistan, Ushakov said. “On the issue of Afghanistan, the (Russian) president and the (US) secretary of state also noted rather good cooperation between specialists of our countries” Ushakov said ([ATN News](#)).

### Consultative Peace Jirga

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

## (13-19 May 2019)



### ASSESSMENT:

- UNSC designation of ISKP as a terrorist organisation (an important achievement of U.S. diplomacy) is a late but important step. This decision indicates that the U.S., Russia and China reached a consensus on wiping out the terrorist organisation. Presumably, countering ISKP, which was formed by a “former Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP)” commander will be the price that Taliban must pay to broker a deal with the U.S. For Talibs, it would be hard to explain to its supporters joining the fight against their “brothers in arms”.
- Civilian casualties and blue on blue incidents are higher than expected during this period of the fighting season. Measures developed either by the ANDSF or by the Coalition fall short of what is required for minimising collateral damage. Other than that, this situation may help Taliban gain ground in public and infiltrate Afghan security forces.

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Some political parties said that the government has not taken any action to implement the key demands of Consultative Peace Jirga including the ceasefire, formation of negotiating team, and relocating the Taliban political office inside Afghanistan ([Ariana](#)).

### Armed Conflict

At least 80 pro-government forces and 29 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past week. The deadliest attack took place in Badghis Province, where the Taliban overran two outposts shared by the army, the police and the National Directorate of Security in Bala Murghab District, killing at least 20 soldiers and five police officers. In Paktika Province, hundreds of Taliban fighters attacked several security outposts in Mata Khan and Zurmat districts killing 13 police officers. In Ghazni Province, seven children were killed and two others were wounded after one of them stepped on a bomb planted by the Taliban in Moqor District. An American airstrike accidentally killed at least eight Afghan police officers in southern Afghanistan on Thursday, American and Afghan officials said. The police had requested air support after a Taliban attack near their outpost near the outskirts of Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand Province. Attaullah Afghan, the head of Helmand’s provincial council, estimated the police death toll at 17, including a commander and his assistant, and said that 14 more people were wounded ([NYT](#)).

### ISKP

The United Nations Security Council has added the Islamic State’s Wilayat Khorasan, or so-called Khorasan “province,” to its list of sanctioned terrorist groups. The UN’s description of the group includes few details, other than that the organization was formed on Jan. 10, 2015 by a “former Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP)” commander and “former Taliban faction commanders who swore an oath of allegiance” to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. It is not clear why it took the UN more than three years to similarly sanction the organization. Baghdadi’s representatives have been fighting in Afghanistan and Pakistan for several years, conducting a string of high-profile terrorist bombings and raids against civilian and government targets ([FDD LWJ](#)).

The United States previously designated ISKP as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in January 2016. ISIS-K is the first ISIS affiliate to be designated by the UN. This UN designation obligates all member states to implement a travel ban, arms embargo, and asset freeze on ISIS-K, actions that will cut the group off from the resources it needs to continue its terrorist activities ([U.S. Department of State](#)).

The number of Islamic State militants in Afghanistan has tripled since 2016, says a top Russian military commander. Similarly, Taliban ’s activities in the war-torn country had also gone up by 30 percent in the current year ([Pajhwok](#)).

### Indian Mi-35 Gunships Handed over to Afghan Air Force

India handed over two Mi-35 attack helicopters to the Afghan Air Force on Thursday ([Ariana](#)).

### CSIS Report

It is still clear, however, that the Afghan government cannot survive without billions of dollars in annual financial aid from outside powers like the U.S. It is equally clear that it would suffer unacceptable military losses if the U.S. did not continue to provide massive amounts of air support and if the U.S. and its allies did not provide substantial train and assist help to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and direct land force support to Afghan Special Security Forces and other elite units ([CSIS](#)).

### Humanitarian Situation

### Civilian Casualties

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) expresses grave concern about the impact on civilians from the increase in violence around the country during the first week of the holy month of Ramadan ([UNAMA](#)).

The United States and Afghan governments are not adequately investigating possibly unlawful airstrikes in Afghanistan, which may contribute to rising civilian casualties, Human Rights Watch said ([HRW](#)).



AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(06-12 May 19)

Political Developments

Peace Process

U.S. and Taliban negotiators wrapped up their sixth round of peace talks on Thursday (09 May 19) with "some progress" made on a draft agreement for when foreign troops might withdraw from Afghanistan, a Taliban official said (NYT). On the other side, the chief U.S. envoy involved in the negotiations said on Friday (10 May 19) that the talks are making steady but slow progress, while signaling growing frustration with relentless militant violence. The sixth round wound up early in response to a Taliban attack on an aid group in the capital, Kabul, on Wednesday (08 May 19) (NYT).

Parliamentary Elections

The Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) has finalized the assessment of Kabul parliamentary elections. IECC has sent its findings to the Independent Election Commission (IEC) for announcement. This comes a day after IECC said that 20 percent result sheets of Kabul parliamentary elections were missing and the electoral commissions were unable to find a solution to the problem. More than six months have passed since Afghanistan hold the country’s parliamentary elections but the final result of the capital Kabul is still awaiting due to major fraud and mismanagement by the IEC. Lawmakers who represent Kabul province have 33 of the 250 seats in Afghanistan’s lower house of parliament (Ariana).

ICC Visa Crisis

The Trump administration's revocation of International Criminal Court prosecutor Fatou Bensouda's U.S. visa didn't hinder her from coming to the United Nations on Wednesday to address the Security Council. Bensouda did not mention the visa ban in her briefing to the council on Libya (NYT).

U.S. Withdrawal

The United States will need to keep counterterrorism forces in Afghanistan until there is no insurgency left in the country, the the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford said on Wednesday during a congressional hearing, suggesting a far longer military presence even after more than 17 years of war (NYT).

Afghans in Iran

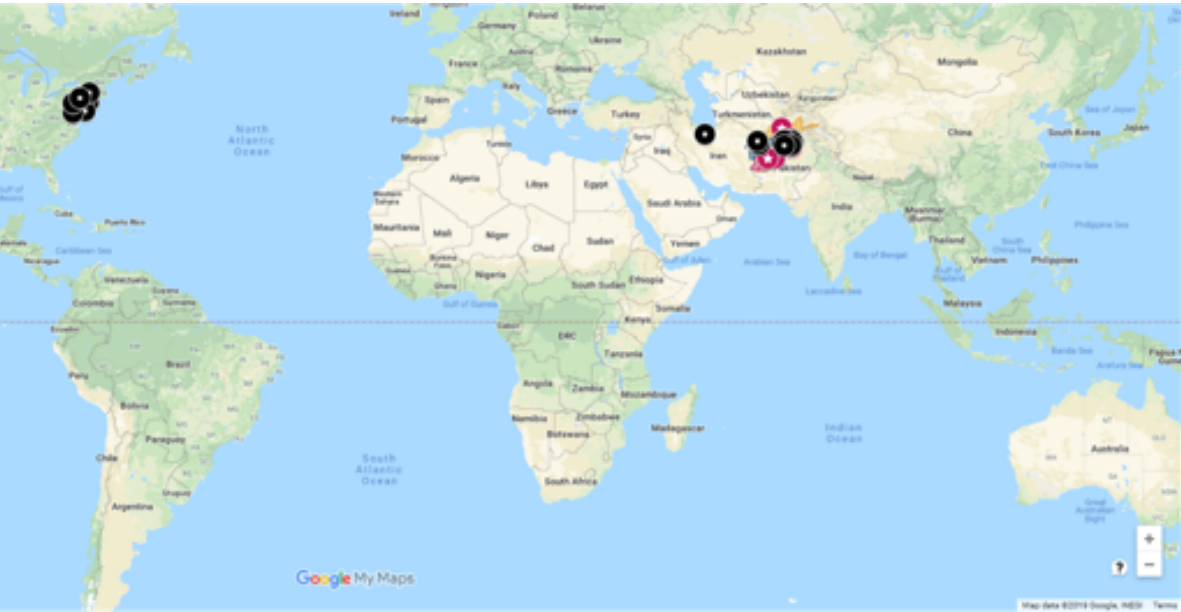
Araghchi said Wednesday (08 May 19) that if U.S. sanctions bring Iran crude exports to zero, "it is possible that we ask our Afghan brothers and sisters to leave Iran" because hosting them annually costs the equivalent of several billion dollars. Some 3 million Afghan refugees live in Iran (NYT). Iranians have harshly criticized the country's deputy foreign minister after he threatened to expel Afghan refugees from Iran in retaliation for U.S. sanctions.

Defense Budget Cut

The acting defense secretary, Patrick Shanahan, notified Congress on Friday (10 May 19) that he intended to shift \$1.5 billion that had been designated for the war in Afghanistan and other projects to help pay for work on President Trump’s border wall. The Pentagon had planned to spend \$4.9 billion in Afghanistan — primarily to support Afghan security forces who have struggled to hold parts of the country beyond Kabul, the capital, from Taliban militants. American officials said that the \$600 million that was being diverted to the border is coming from savings that officials found in contracts (NYT).

Armed Conflict

At least 80 pro-government forces and 47 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past week. While American and Taliban negotiators met for their sixth session of peace talks in Doha, there was no sign that the Taliban were letting up on the tempo of violence. Nor did they seem to be adhering to their pledge to avoid civilian casualties during the holy month of Ramadan, which began Monday, although there were also civilian deaths blamed on C.I.A.-backed militia groups (NYT).



ASSESSMENT:

- Peace talks and Ramadan will have little - if any- effect on armed conflict in Afghanistan. Taliban continues killing in Kabul and elsewhere while negotiating in Doha. Given the fact that intra - Afghan dialogue is yet to be started after six rounds of discussion, any meaningful change in the status quo is highly unlikely in the short term.
- Parliamentary elections which were originally scheduled for 2014 couldn’t be finalized yet. 33 empty Kabul seats which makes 13 % of the parliament raises legitimacy concerns. Presidential elections that were originally scheduled for April 2019 and then postponed to September 2019 will highly likely face similar problems.
- U.S. Department of Defence’s budget cut for FY 2020 will highly likely effect ANDSF performance in the coming year.

Presidential Elections	28 September 2019
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No Cease Fire During Ramadan

The Afghan government and the Taliban insurgent group have no intention to announce a ceasefire during the upcoming Eid days, a top Afghan official said (Ariana).

Taliban Attacks U.S. NGO

Taliban attacked against Counterpart International, a U.S. nonprofit organization and USAID implementing partner in Kabul. The organization targeted runs programs that encourage dialogue on peace, increase youth participation, and improve opportunities for women (U.S. Department of State).

Airstrike Targeted Taliban Drug Lab

Air strikes in western Afghanistan this week destroyed a number of Taliban drug labs and also killed dozens of civilians, according to reports from local officials. The Afghan defense ministry said coalition air strikes in three locations in the western province of Farah on 05 May 19 destroyed 68 Taliban drug labs and killed 150 insurgents, as part of an air campaign aimed at cutting off one of the movement's key sources of revenues. However Abdul Ghafoor Mujahid, the governor of Bakwa district, where the attacks took place, said many of those killed were civilians working in the labs. He said at least 45 civilians were killed in the strike, along with around 18 Taliban fighters (NYT).

Missing Parts of SIGAR Report

In the latest (SIGAR) report, in addition to the updates not provided to the inspector general on the number of districts and people living under Taliban control, the following metrics were classified or otherwise kept from the public eye: the number of casualties suffered by Afghan security forces; performance assessments of the Afghan Army, police and other security organizations; all but general information about the operational readiness of the security forces; the number and readiness of the elite Special Mission Wing of the Afghan Air Force; and reports on the progress of anti-corruption efforts by the Ministry of the Interior (NYT).

Humanitarian Situation

ICRC Ban

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) hopes the Taliban insurgent group reinstate the security assurance of its staff in Afghanistan to provide humanitarian assistance. Head of the ICRC Delegation in Afghanistan Schaerer Juan-Pedro on Wednesday told Ariana News that the ICRC has discussed its presence in Afghanistan with the representatives of the insurgent group based in Doha, the capital of Qatar. He added that the two sides have reached to an understanding and hopefully the Taliban will announce their support for their activities in Afghanistan in the coming days (Ariana).

Corruption

Embezzlement

Former Health Director of Afghan Defense Ministry together with nine members of the procurement directorate sentenced to six months in prison by an anti-corruption court on Sunday. The verdict was issued after they were found guilty for embezzlement of 17 million Afghanis in the procurement of 140.000 swine influenza capsules and other medical equipment (Ariana).

The former Chief of the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan Ahmad Yousuf Nuristani was sentenced to 13 months in prison on charges of embezzlement while he was serving as provincial governor of western Herat province. Mr. Nuristani was sentenced to prison by Major Crimes Tribunal convicting him of embezzlement of State funds amounting to one million Afghanis (Khaama).



Political Developments

Peace Process

American and Taliban negotiators began a new round of peace talks Wednesday in Doha, Qatar, aimed at securing a lasting peace agreement that would include Taliban guarantees regarding terrorism and a phased withdrawal of American troops. A Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, said on Twitter early Wednesday that the talks — the sixth round between American and Taliban officials — had begun in Doha, the Qatari capital. Zalmay Khalilzad, the special envoy leading the American delegation, has said the talks will ultimately focus on four main issues. They include troop withdrawal; guarantees against terrorism; talks between the Taliban and the American-supported government of Afghanistan to establish a path toward political settlement; and a lasting cease-fire (NYT).

The Taliban on Saturday said the gap is narrowing in talks with Washington's special peace envoy over a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan (NYT).

As the U.S. Special Envoy for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad travels to Pakistan to discuss the Afghan peace process, Kabul-based politicians and experts believe that it is impossible to bring peace in Afghanistan without a regional consensus (Ariana).

Consultative Loya Jirga

An Afghan grand council on Thursday agreed on several recommendations for peace talks with the Taliban, after four days of meetings in Kabul meant to hammer out a common strategy for future negotiations. President Ashraf Ghani had convened the council of more than 3,200 participants, known as Loya Jirga, earlier in the week. Though the gathering is consultative and its recommendations are not binding for Ghani, it underscored his government's effort to project a unified stance. However, a number of prominent Afghans, including Ghani's partner in the unity government, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, boycotted the council, which ends on Friday (NYT). At the end of the Peace Jirga, a 23-article resolution was also issued, mainly focusing on establishment of a ceasefire, prisoner exchange to build trust between the two sides, preservation of all Afghan's rights including women's rights, the launch of intra-Afghan dialogue, formation of a comprehensive peace negotiation team and reforming the High Peace Council's (HPC) structure and activities (Ariana). (For English translation see Afghanistan Analysts Network)

Russian Citizenship for Afghans

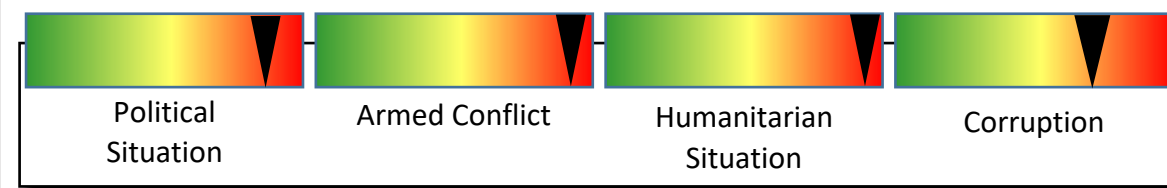
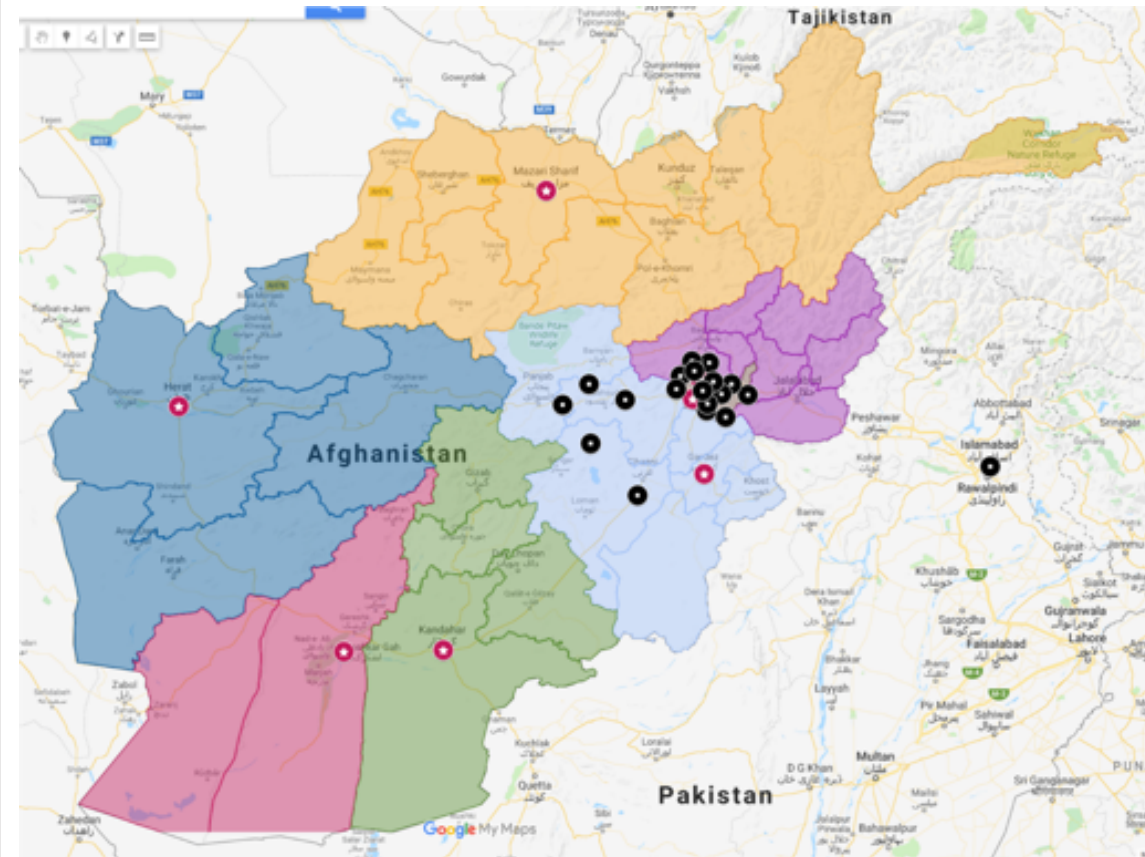
Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree simplifying the process for obtaining a Russian citizenship for the resident of several countries. The document is published on the Kremlin's legal information website. Following the simplified procedure, citizens of Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen and Syria will be able to apply for a Russian passport (UAWire).

Armed Conflict

At least 48 pro-government forces and 18 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past week. The deadliest attack took place in Feroz Koh City, the provincial capital of Ghor Province, where the Taliban attacked a security outpost, killing nine security forces and wounding five others (NYT).

AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(29 Apr-05 May 19)



ASSESSMENT:

- Presumably, it is aimed to initiate an intra-Afghan dialogue towards lasting peace with Consultative Loya Jirga. However, it revealed fractures and faultlines in Afghan politics. Moreover, three different initiatives (led by the U.S., the Russians and the Afghan President) may only be a sign of disarray. There is no tangible reason for Taliban to participate in the process initiated by Consultative Loya Jirga as long as it can negotiate with U.S. and Russia.
- Changes in U.S. reporting format is yet another indicator for U.S. withdrawal. While coalition partners are seeking ways to disengage from Afghanistan, countries in the region have already begun to deal with Afghanistan's problems.
- No matter what will be the outcome of the peace talks, it will take time, require tremendous efforts and resources to deal with the "generation of war" in Afghanistan.

Presidential Elections	28 September 2019
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Afghan government forces have launched attacks in a bid to clear rival militants who have been battling each other for territory near the Pakistan border in fighting that has forced thousands of villagers from their homes, officials said on Tuesday.

Taliban and Islamic State militants have been fighting for more than a week in the eastern border province of Nangarhar, since Islamic State fighters seized six villages in an area where the mineral talc is mined (NYT).

The American military command in Afghanistan has halted regular assessments of how many people and districts the government and insurgents there control, eliminating what has long been an important public measure of progress in the war. The military said the assessments had "limited decision-making value" for commanders. As recently as November 2017, the previous American commander in Afghanistan had called them "the metric that's most telling in a counterinsurgency." (NYT).

The Russian defense minister Sergei Shoigu has said that the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist group is using Afghanistan as a bridgehead to further expand its foothold into the region (Khaama).

The United Nation envoy in Afghanistan calls on all warring parties in the country to halt the fighting during the holy month of Ramadan (Ariana).

More than 40 percent of the Afghan cadets sent to train on the AC-208 light reconnaissance aircraft deserted the training program, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported. The watchdog did not detail exactly how many trainees went missing, but said it resulted in only one graduating class. Consequently, the entire program was disbanded, with the second and third classes sent back to Afghanistan – possibly to prevent further desertions. The Afghan Air Force (AAF) has five AC-208s in their inventory (RT).

Humanitarian Situation

Civilian Casualties

The American military killed 120 civilians in strikes, raids and firefights across two continents in 2018, the Pentagon said Thursday — a far lower number than what watchdog groups have reported. The Defense Department's annual report to Congress said 42 civilians were killed in Iraq and Syria during military operations against the Islamic State, and 76 in Afghanistan as American troops fought extremist groups and resurgent Taliban militants (NYT).

Illiteracy

VP Danish said that 44 percent of eligible children have no access to education across the country. He blamed war, security threats, and absurd customs as the main factors deprived Afghan children of education. Referring to the UNICEF annual report 2018, Danish said that 5,000 children and teenagers have been killed or injured in nine months in Afghanistan last year. The acting representative for UNICEF Afghanistan, Sheema Sen Gupta said that 3.7 million children are out of school in Afghanistan. She added that 60 percent of these children are girls and in some areas, up to 85 percent of Afghan girls are not going to school (Ariana).



Twelve electoral tickets for the Afghan presidential election warn President Ashraf Ghani that they will form a similar Loya Jirga if the result of the upcoming Consultative Loya Jirga on Peace is against the people's expectations. Former President Hamid Karzai opposes with the convening of the upcoming Consultative Loya Jirga on peace, saying it is better to postpone the Jirga until a peace agreement with the Taliban insurgent group. Members of the Consultative Loya Jirga on Peace have no idea what will be discussed in the upcoming Jirga, some of the participants said on Saturday (27.04.2019) ([Ariana](#)).



# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

## (15-22 Apr 19)

### Political Developments

#### Peace Process

Doha talks between the Taliban and senior Afghan political figures scheduled for April 19-21, aimed at ending the long-term conflict in the war-weary country was “canceled,” According to the statement, the meeting was canceled due to a disagreement between the Qatari and Afghan governments on the 250-member delegation proposed the Afghan government ([Ariana](#)). Other sources claim that Taliban objected to the presence of Afghan government officials ([FDD’s Long War Journal](#)).

The U.S. envoy for peace in Afghanistan expressed disappointment after the collapse of a planned meeting between the Taliban and a group of Afghan politicians in Qatar that exposed some of the deep divisions hampering efforts to end the war. A 250-strong delegation of Afghan politicians and civil society figures had been due to meet Taliban officials in Doha at the weekend. But the event was abruptly canceled on Thursday amid arguments over the size and status of the group, which included some government officials attending in a personal capacity ([NYT](#)).

Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad will travel to Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Qatar, Russia, and the United Kingdom April 21 to May 11, as part of the overall effort to facilitate a political settlement that ends the conflict in Afghanistan ([U.S. Department of State](#)).

#### Presidential Elections

Afghanistan’s Supreme Court said that President Ashraf Ghani will continue his term until a new president will be elected. The letter doesn’t say anything about the fate of Afghanistan’s Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah who owns a 50% share of the government based on the National Unity Government agreement. However, a majority of the presidential candidates claim that based on the country’s constitution, President Ghani’s term will end on 22 May 2019. According to these presidential candidates, Ghani has forced the Supreme Court to make the decision. The candidates also call on President Ghani and CE Abdullah to step down, emphasizing on the formation of a caretaker government until the end of the election. This comes as Afghanistan’s presidential election is scheduled to be held on 28 September 2019 ([Ariana](#)).

### Armed Conflict

In the past week, at least 76 pro-government forces and 12 civilians were killed in Afghanistan. The deadliest attack took place in Kunduz Province, where the Taliban attacked Kunduz City from three directions, capturing four security outposts in different parts of the city. Fourteen members of the security forces and six civilians were killed and 88 people were wounded in 20 hours of fighting. The attack was eventually repelled by American and Afghan air power ([NYT](#)).

According to [Ariana News](#) findings, at least 349 Afghan security forces have been killed and 242 others injured during the last one month as a result of explosions and direct fighting with the Taliban militants across the country. In addition, at least 102 civilians including women and children have been killed and 360 others injured due to IED explosions and fighting between the government and Taliban forces. Reports suggest that at least five U.S. service members have been killed and three others injured in last one month in Afghanistan.

#### ISIS-K

Russian officials allege that fighters loyal to Daesh terrorist network were shifted to Afghanistan after being defeated in Syria. Russian Defense Minister, Sergey Shoygu, said that a Russian military contingent needed to be deployed in Tajikistan near the border with Afghanistan to prevent the infiltration of Daesh terrorists to the Central Asian states and to Russia. Russian media have reported that Russian and Tajik leaders had agreed on further security along Tajikistan’s southern border ([Afghanistan Times](#)). Addressing a press conference following the meeting in Moscow, the two leaders stressed the importance of the Afghan settlement for stability in the region. Putin said that the parties had agreed to continue boosting defense cooperation and cooperation in the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking at the bilateral level and within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) ([1 TV News](#)).



### ASSESSMENT:

- Russia perceives developments in Afghanistan as a security concern and continues to act accordingly. Growing amount of concern emanating from ISIS-K will likely led CSTO to search harder ways to counter.
- Political debate prior to presidential elections continue to obstruct peace. Fractured Afghan politics facilitate Taliban’s work. 250-member Afghan delegation for peace talks can only be interpreted as reluctance if not humiliation. The question is to whom NUG counts on against Taliban?
- Afghanistan’s Supreme Court’s decision regarding Ghani’s extension of term until the next president gets elected will highly likely trigger another intra-government crisis since it doesn’t say anything about Abdullah’s tenure.

Consultative Loya Jirga	29 April 2019
Presidential Elections	28 September 2019

#### Taliban Spring Offensive

The United Nations Security Council has condemned the announcement by Taliban militants in Afghanistan of its spring offensive, saying it will result in more “unnecessary suffering and destruction for the Afghan people”. According to news reports, the announcement, which came as the UN lifted travel bans on the Taliban’s senior leaders to facilitate United States-led peace talks, signals that although negotiations are gaining momentum, fighting is likely to intensify around the country ([UN News](#)).

### Corruption

Nearly two decades of American investment has produced no enduring progress and in some cases—such as corruption—actually made things worse. More money, time, and precious life will not produce a secure and stable Afghanistan. According to SIGAR, the three most pressing threats in Afghanistan, as cataloged in their recent 2019 High Risk list, are widespread insecurity, endemic corruption, and an underdeveloped civil policing capability. Corruption is the state’s Achilles heel. It alienates the population, eliminates the possibility of a real rule of law, and deprives the state of revenue and credibility. Specifically, the “Afghan government is still slow to prosecute corruption cases and has a poor record of prosecuting powerful and influential actors.” Their anti-corruption efforts don’t “meet international standards and best practices,” and their “goals are not fully aligned with the benchmarks set to measure progress toward implementation, complicating assessments of progress toward the goals.” ([The National Interest](#))

### Humanitarian Situation

#### Torture

In its latest report on the treatment of conflict-related detainees in Afghanistan, the UN documents an encouraging reduction in the number of cases of torture since 2016 but notes its ongoing concern at the high number of detainees who continue to report torture and ill-treatment. The joint report by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the UN Human Rights Office, issued on the first anniversary of Afghanistan’s accession to the Convention Against Torture’s Optional Protocol, finds that nearly a third of conflict-related detainees interviewed provided credible and reliable accounts of having been subject to torture or ill-treatment ([UNAMA](#)).

#### Floods

At least 250 people have died and 300 more wounded by the flash floods recently targeted different provinces including the capital Kabul. 15 people had gone missing during the flooding, while more than 33,000 houses were destroyed in 24 provinces. 6,000 of families whose houses were destroyed were provided with government’s aids in cash, 19,000 with foodstuff and another 16,000 ones with non-foodstuff. President Ghani has ordered a 15,000 Afs donation to those whose houses have been completely damaged, 7,500 Afs to those with partly damaged houses, 50,000 Afs to the families of dead and 25,000 Afs to injured people ([Ariana](#)).

### Economic Developments

#### Cryptocurrency in Afghanistan

At the annual Spring Meetings of the Boards of Governors of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund in Washington, Khalil Sediq, governor at the Central Bank of Afghanistan, told The Asia Times that Afghanistan might issue a sovereign crypto bond that uses blockchain technology. The goal is to raise \$5.8 billion to support the country’s critical mining, energy and agriculture sectors ([PYMNTS](#)).

#### Investing in Women

USAID’s internship program equips women with the knowledge and skills to qualify for jobs with the Afghan civil service. Between 2015 and 2020, USAID will train more than 3,000 women through a year-long internship program for careers in government. As of February 2019, more than 2,400 women graduated from the program and are currently applying for government jobs. Over 700 graduates are now employed ([USAID](#)).



## Peace Process

The EU encourages the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban to intensify their efforts towards a peaceful and negotiated settlement of the conflict. Direct negotiations between Afghans, with the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban at their core, should begin as soon as possible, ensuring an inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan- owned peace and reconciliation process. The Afghan peace process requires the full support and constructive involvement of the entire international community, in particular key regional and international stakeholders. The EU must be associated from the outset to all stages of the peace process ([Consilium](#)).

The Reconciliation Leadership Council convened its second meeting in the Afghan presidential palace on Wednesday (10 Apr 2019) to follow-up the decisions made in their first meeting on April 6 ([Ariana](#)).

## Loya Jirga

The Taliban insurgent group announced on Wednesday (10 Apr 2019) that the representatives of the group will not attend at the consultative peace Jirga in Kabul. In a statement, the group said the National Unity Government (NUG) is attempting to ensure it's "illegitimate survival". The group further urges the residents of the country not to participate in the Consultative Peace Jirga ([Ariana](#)).

Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah said that he will not participate at the Grand Consultative Peace Jirga. According to Afghanistan's Chief Executive, the upcoming Loya Jirga would not be helpful to overcome the current challenges in the country. At least two thousand people would participate in the Loya Jirga. It would comprise of 23 sections to represent political parties, civil society, tribal elders, and member of the national council ([Ariana](#)). Most of the presidential candidates are against the upcoming Grand Consultative Peace Jirga, reasoning that it is an electoral campaign for President Ashraf Ghani.

## U.S. Withdrawal

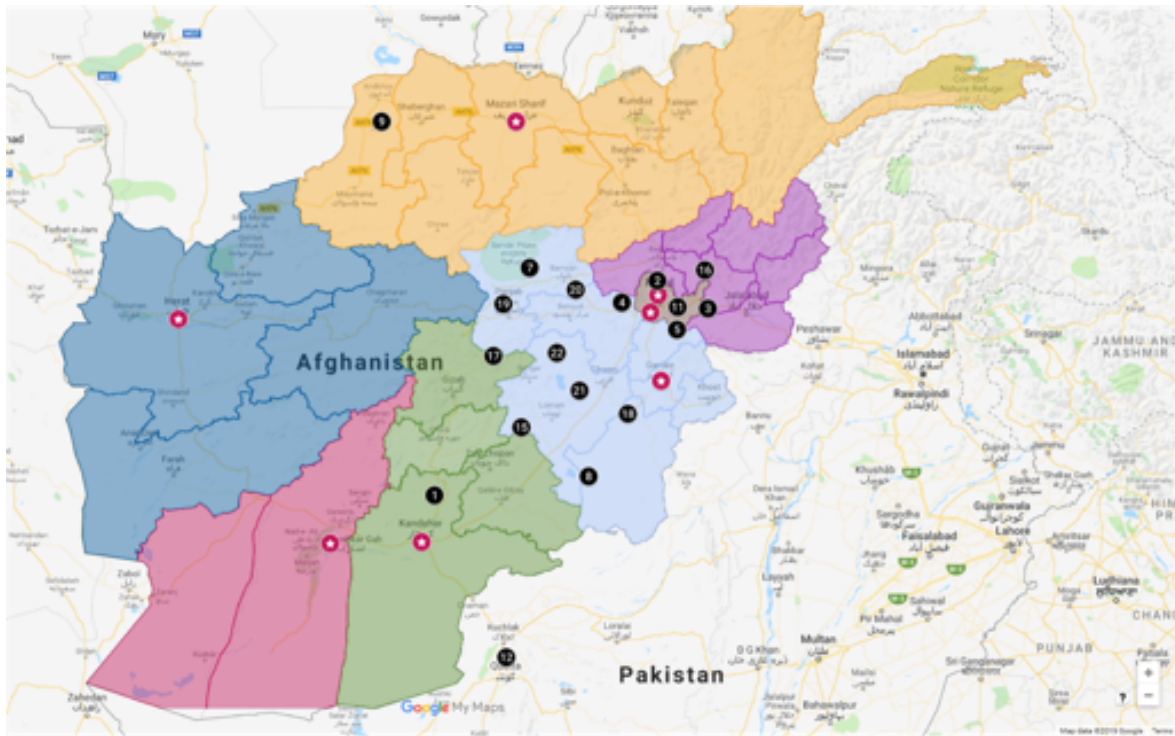
CIA Director Gina Haspel visited Afghanistan this week to discuss a number of issues including maintaining and possibly expanding the US intelligence presence in the country, according to sources familiar with the visit. The US intelligence footprint in Afghanistan is intimately tied to the US military presence in the country and US bases there provide protection for that intelligence presence. Maintaining that presence, or expanding it, if the US military does begin to draw down, would require the CIA committing more resources to the country. It's also a national security priority to collect intelligence on terrorist groups operating in the area, including ISIS's regional offshoot, especially along the Afghan-Pakistani border ([CNN](#)).

## ICC Decision

In a decision decried as "deeply flawed" and a "devastating blow for victims," International Criminal Court judges on Friday (12 Apr 2019) rejected a request by the court's prosecutor to open an investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Afghanistan and alleged crimes by U.S. forces linked to the conflict. In a lengthy written ruling, judges said an investigation "would not serve the interests of justice" because an investigation and prosecution were unlikely to be successful, as those targeted, including the United States, Afghan authorities and the Taliban, are not expected to cooperate, the court said in a statement. ([NYT](#))

## Armed Conflict

According to the Afghan MoD, 99 insurgents were killed in previous week. In the past week, 10 civilians and 114 pro-government security forces were killed, including three United States service members who died when a vehicle laden with explosives targeted their convoy near Bagram Air Base. The deadliest assault took place in Kandahar Province, where the Taliban attacked border-force outposts in the Srochahan area of Shorabak District, killing 18 soldiers. In Badghis Province, 66 members of the Afghan security forces surrendered to the Taliban in two different incidents, as intense fighting over control of Bala Murghab District continued to escalate ([NYT](#)).



### ASSESSMENT:

- Taliban's new campaign season announcement can be interpreted to mean that the insurgents will not share power with National Unity Government any time soon. There is little chance - if any - to find a common ground between two.
- EU, as a global actor, presuming that its area of interest covers South and Middle Asia needs to do more in Afghanistan to shape the country's future and pursue its interests.
- There is a widespread consensus among political actors that consultative Loya Jirga doesn't serve peace but President's political aspirations. Thus, its potential to produce a solution is highly unlikely.

Consultative Loya Jirga	29 April 2019
Presidential Elections	28 September 2019

The Taliban announced the beginning of their spring offensive on Friday (12 Apr 2019), even as the United Nations lifted travel bans on 11 of their senior leaders to facilitate peace talks with the United States. The announcements were a sign that though the peace talks are gaining momentum, with an Afghan delegation expected to meet with insurgents soon, fighting is likely to intensify all over the country ([NYT](#)). Unlike in previous years, the Taliban does not prioritize attacks on US and NATO forces, but instead sets its crosshairs on those working for the Afghan government, military, and police. The statement is yet another clear indication that the Taliban will not share power with the Afghan government, but instead seeks to impose its will on the country. In this year's statement, the Taliban does say that "eradicating occupation, cleansing our Muslim homeland from invasion and corruption, establishing an Islamic system" were also goals of Al-Fath. But not the main goal ([FDD's LWJ](#)). The US Special Envoy for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad expressed his rage over so-called Taliban's spring offensive announcement, terming it "reckless" and "indifference" to the demands of Afghans for peace ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

The Taliban launched a new assault early Saturday (13 Apr 2019) on the northern city of Kunduz, which briefly fell to the insurgents in 2015 and has come under attack several times since then. At least six people were killed and more than 50 were wounded as the insurgents attacked from multiple directions just after midnight ([NYT](#)).

## Corruption

## Unpaid Electricity Bills

A number of politicians, warlords, members of the National Assembly, and government officials owe 4.5 billion Afghanis in unpaid electricity bills to the Afghanistan power utility company – Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS). According to the authorities, the warlords and powerful figures have beaten the staff of DABS in many occasions after they were asked to pay dues ([Ariana](#)).

## Humanitarian Situation

## WHO and Red Cross Ban

The Afghan Taliban have banned the World Health Organization and the Red Cross from operating in areas under their control until further notice, a spokesman said on Thursday (11 April 2019), citing unspecified "suspicious" actions during vaccination campaigns. The WHO is carrying out a vaccination campaign in Afghanistan, one of the last countries in the world where polio is still endemic ([NYT](#)).

## SIGAR Report

SIGAR identified eight key high-risk areas for U.S. Reconstruction Efforts in Afghanistan:

- Widespread Insecurity
- Underdeveloped Civil Policing Capability
- Endemic Corruption
- Sluggish Economic Growth
- Illicit Narcotics Trade
- Threats to Women's Rights
- Reintegration of Ex-Combatants
- Restricted Oversight

Three of these areas -economic growth, women's rights and reintegration- are new to High-Risk List ([SIGAR](#)).

## Facebook Ban

The Afghan telecommunications and information technology minister warned that Facebook will be blocked in Afghanistan during the next six months if it doesn't follow the country's regulations ([Ariana](#)).



Political Developments

Peace Process

Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah said that the Afghan government has received an invitation for attending the second round of meeting between Afghan politicians and the Taliban in Qatar, insisting that they will make a final call in this regard after consultations in Kabul. The second round of intra-Afghan dialogue will be held in mid-April in Doha, the capital of Qatar. The meeting is expected to open the door for inclusive peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government ([Ariana](#)).

US Special Envoy for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad accuses Afghan government of failing to form an “inclusive team” for peace negotiations with Taliban, asking that “who would take responsibility of killing of Afghans in the past six month?” “We are tired of this war (in Afghanistan) and we don’t want to continue killing of Afghans. Surely Afghans are also tired of the war and killing of each other,” said the US special envoy ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

China has once again reiterated full support to the Afghan-owned peace process. Supporting the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned Peace Process, the Chinese Ambassador added that the Chinese government would increase the number of short-term training scholarships for the diplomats and the administrative staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

Loya Jirga

Political parties called the calling of Loya Jirga as a move towards presidential election campaign. The Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) will be held on April 29th in Kabul. The Jirga costs five million US\$ in which 2,500 representatives of the people from across the country are to attend. Fozia Koofi a former member of the parliament said that the five million US\$ is a defect on the national budget ([Afghanistan Times](#)). President Ghani’s Special Envoy and Head of High Peace Council’s Secretariat said that they will invite the Taliban group to take part in the upcoming Loya Jirga for Peace, where they would discuss ongoing peace efforts ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

U.S. Withdrawal

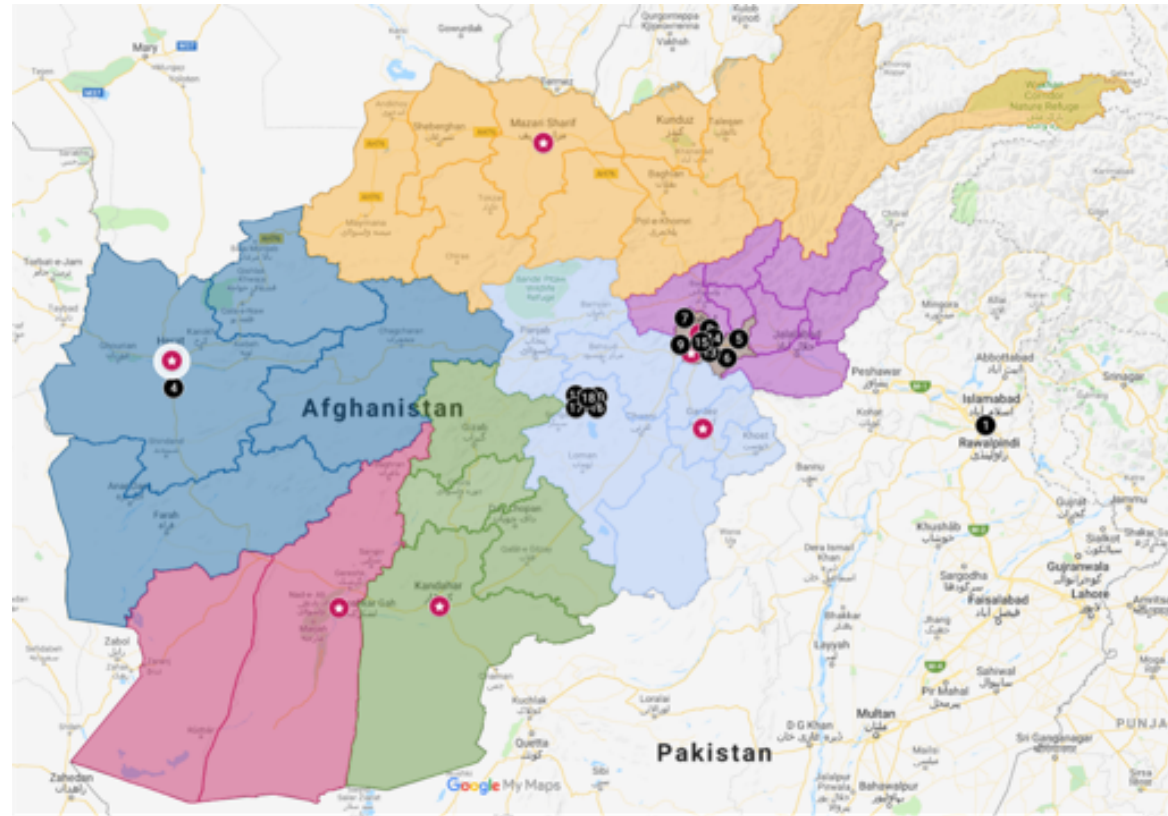
The State Department is prepared to cut by half the number of U.S. diplomats in Kabul in 2020 ([Ariana](#)). Stoltenberg made the remarks in his address to U.S. Congress on Wednesday to mark the 70th anniversary of NATO. He said NATO remains in Afghanistan to fight terrorism and to train Afghan forces, emphasizing that the goal of the alliance is not to stay there forever ([Khaama](#)).

ICC Visa Ban

The United States has revoked the visa of the International Criminal Court’s chief prosecutor because of her attempts to investigate allegations of war crimes in Afghanistan, including any that may have been committed by American forces. Ms. Bensouda, a Gambian lawyer for the court, which is based in The Hague, formally requested an investigation more than a year ago into war crimes in Afghanistan. The inquiry would mostly focus on large-scale crimes against civilians attributed to the Taliban and Afghan government forces. But it would also examine alleged C.I.A. and American military abuse in detention centers in Afghanistan in 2003 and 2004, and at sites in Poland, Lithuania and Romania, putting the court directly at odds with the United States ([NYT](#)).

AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(01-07 Apr 19)



ASSESSMENT:

- Second round of intra-Afghan peace talks to be held in Doha would be an opportunity ahead of 2019 fighting season if the parties manage to find a common ground to stop violence. Meanwhile, the Afghan Government might attempt to transform Loya Jirga into a parallel Afghan-led Afghan-owned peace process alongside ongoing U.S./Russian efforts given the Taliban accepts to move forward. However, the government lacks sufficient economic, political and military leverages to support such an initiative. Moreover, such a move might endanger foreign support to the current government which it desperately needs.
- Even though the Afghans could find a way towards peace any time soon, their biggest enemies, poverty and illiteracy that creates fertile ground for terrorism and corruption will likely to remain.

Consultative Loya Jirga	29 April 2019
Presidential Elections	28 September 2019

Armed Conflict

Casualties

According to the Afghan MoD, 198 insurgents were killed in previous week. Nearly 120 security forces and 10 civilians were killed in the past week. In Oruzgan Province, local officials claimed that between 10 and 13 civilians were killed and five others were wounded in an American airstrike on a hotel located along the Oruzgan-Kandahar highway. The provincial governor’s office and the Kandahar police chief said there were no civilians killed in the airstrike. ([NYT](#)).

President Ashraf Ghani approved solar year security plan “Khalid”, where a secure electoral process is one of the highest priority of the plan. “The plan also focuses to improve security in urban areas and highways, step up offensive against those elements who threaten our security, protect vulnerable areas, prevent harm to civilians, and improve logistic management for efficient allocation of resources,” Presidential Palace tweeted ([Afghanistan Times](#)).

Hundreds of Taliban fighters stormed a district in Afghanistan's western Badghis province, with both Afghan government forces and the insurgent group suffering dozens of casualties. The Taliban killed 36 members of the government forces and captured several security checkpoints in attacks that began on Wednesday night. More than 30 Taliban were also killed ([NYT](#)).

Corruption

Some seven billion dollars’ worth of equipment was stolen from Camp Kearney base in Paktika province in the east of the country, after it was handed to the Afghan forces by the US in 2014, provincial governor Mujib Rahman Samkanai told local media. The looters, he claimed, were “former governors, commanders, mayors, directors, parliament members.” ([RT](#))

Humanitarian Situation

Airspace Restrictions

Airspace restrictions in Pakistan due to simmering tensions with India have caused airfares to spike for Afghans who travel for medical treatment, education and business. The restrictions have forced commercial and passenger flights that connect Afghanistan with India, a major trading partner, to double back west through Iranian airspace and then pass south of Pakistan into India. The detour extends what is usually a two-and-a-half-hour Kabul-New Delhi flight into a five-hour trip, increasing fuel costs for airlines and fares for passengers ([NYT](#)).

Floods

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) in Afghanistan said in a report on Tuesday that flash flood on 27, 28 and 29 March in Faryab, Balkh, Jawzjan, Sar-e-Pul, Herat and Badghis provinces have affected thousands of people in the country. According to the report, heavy rains caused flash flooding in provinces of Afghanistan, while assessments are ongoing, an estimated 17,000 people have been affected with Balkh and Herat suffering the worst impacts ([Ariana](#)).



AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(24-31 Mar 19)

Political Developments

Peace Process

Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad will travel to Afghanistan, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Jordan and Qatar March 25-April 10, as part of the overall effort to facilitate a peace process that brings all Afghan parties together in inclusive intra-Afghan negotiations ([U.S. Department of State](#)).

Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah said that the Afghan government has received an invitation for attending the second round of meeting between Afghan politicians and the Taliban in Qatar, insisting that they will make a final call in this regard after consultations in Kabul. The second round of intra-Afghan dialogue will be held in mid-April in Doha, the capital of Qatar. The meeting is expected to open the door for inclusive peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government ([Ariana](#)).

President Ashraf Ghani on Sunday met with visiting Uzbekistan delegation in Kabul.The visiting delegation said that Uzbekistan was ready to host peace negotiations between the Afghan government and Taliban in Samarkand ([Ariana](#)).

Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan on 26 Mar 2019 suggested an interim setup in Afghanistan as a possible solution to an apparent impasse in the ongoing peace process, while blaming the Afghan government for the stalemate in talks ([Ariana](#)).

The Pakistani military officials have said that Pakistan values Russia’s role in Afghan settlement process and the important role of Moscow in other regional processes. “We greatly value the relevance and importance of Russia in the region, especially what role Russia has lately played toward the Afghan reconciliation... Russia looks toward balance of power and multipolarity in the world,” Gen. Asif Ghafoor, a spokesman for the Military of Pakistan was quoted. Gen. Ghafoor further added “We value Russia’s voice as the voice of reason, and we would love if Russia, being a powerful country, plays its role which enables bringing peace in South Asia and beyond.” ([Khaama](#))

Federica Mogherini met with Ashraf Ghani. In her meetings in Kabul, the High Representative stressed three conditions to make the result of any negotiation sustainable over time. First, a ceasefire agreed by the Taliban and peace talks with the Afghan government. Second, an inclusive negotiation team, with representatives of all Afghan society, including women. Third, she emphasised that the political, economic and social achievements of the last 18 years, in particular regarding the rights of women, girls, children and minorities, must be upheld and strengthened ([EEAS](#)).

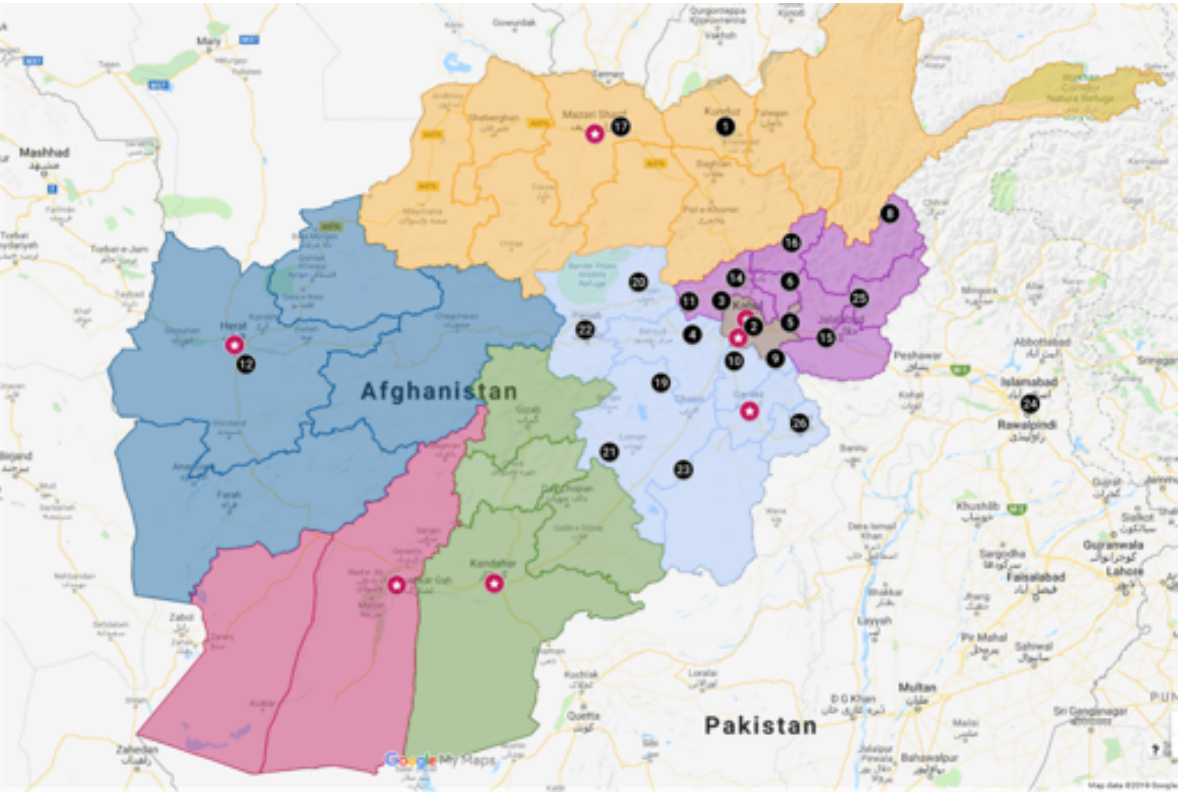
Angelina Jolie pushed for the inclusion of women in peace talks to end the conflict in Afghanistan during an address to ministers and diplomats at the United Nations on Friday (29 Mar 2019) ([NYT](#)).

SIGAR Report

Afghanistan will remain dependent on international donors and foreign help even after a peace deal with the Taliban is reached, Washington’s Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction, said in a new report identifying main high-risk areas for Afghanistan. The report said main points of concern include widespread insecurity, underdeveloped civil policing capability, endemic corruption, sluggish economy, the Taliban-run narcotics trade and threats to women’s rights ([SIGAR](#))..

Presidential Elections

Afghanistan’s Independent Election Commission (IEC) says it needs \$192 million to hold the upcoming presidential and provincial council elections. Afghanistan presidential election will be held on 28 September 2019. Originally it was scheduled to be held on 20 April, but later it was delayed two times after problems raised in using a biometric system and finalizing results of Afghan parliamentary elections ([Ariana](#)).



ASSESSMENT:

- After a long exile as a result of alleged torture and harassment to one of his political rivals, General Dostum, Vice President of National Unity Government, returned to Afghanistan eight months ago. Yesterday’s ambush in Balkh province was the second attempt since June 2018 to assassinate him and it was a clear message to Dostum and his Allies to stay away from what they are doing or about to do. It seems that neither ruling Pashtuns nor Taliban likes him.
- As the fight gets intense, civilian casualties become more and more critical. More needs to be done in order to save non-belligerent civilians.
- Even though peace will prevail at the end of the process, floods, diseases and drought indicate yet another tough year in Afghanistan and continue to take lives.

Consultative Loya Jirga	29 April 2019
Presidential Elections	28 September 2019

Armed Conflict

Casualties

According to the Afghan MoD, 46 insurgents were killed in previous week. More than 100 security forces and 28 civilians were killed in the past week. The Afghan military suffered its worst loss of the year in southern Afghanistan, where an estimated 65 security forces were killed in coordinated attacks by the Taliban in Helmand Province. “The government is trying to keep it secret, but this is what has happened in just a single attack in Sangin District,” a local official told ([NYT](#)).

The Taliban ambushed a convoy escorting the vice president of Afghanistan, killing at least one of his bodyguards, Afghan officials said Sunday. The vice president, Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum, survived. General Dostum, the leader of the Uzbek ethnic minority in Afghanistan and a bitter foe of the Taliban, had just returned to Mazar-i-Sharif, the capital of Balkh Province in northern Afghanistan, after a personal trip to Uzbekistan. On Saturday evening, he was traveling to his home province of Jowzjan when his convoy came under attack for about an hour in the village of Timorak, in Balkh ([NYT](#)).

Civilian Casualties

Drones have been the main weapon in the counterterrorism fight for more than a decade. They kill extremists without risking American lives, making combat seem antiseptic on the home front. But the number of civilians killed in these attacks is shrouded in secrecy. President Trump has made it even harder to lift that shroud, by allowing the Central Intelligence Agency to keep secret how many civilians are killed in the agency’s airstrikes outside of the Afghan, Iraqi and Syrian war zones — in places like Yemen, the lawless border region of Pakistan and North Africa. President Barack Obama aggressively expanded drone use in these airstrikes. But he eventually came to understand the need for more transparency and accountability, and, under pressure, he put some sensible safeguards in place. Among them was a July 2016 order requiring the government to issue annual public reports on the civilian death tolls in those areas. Mr. Trump revoked that order this month. His National Security Council called it superfluous because Congress had subsequently passed a law mandating that the Pentagon publicly report any civilians killed in any of its operations. But that law covered only the Pentagon, not the separate C.I.A. drone campaign, which has broadened under Mr. Trump ([NYT](#)).

Humanitarian Situation

Flood

Flash floods have killed at least 32 people in western Afghanistan, destroyed homes and swept through makeshift shelters that housed displaced families. Flooding caused by heavy rains started spreading on Thursday and left a trail of devastation across seven provinces ([NYT](#)).

Drought

Afghanistan’s summer harvest will be one of the most critical in years, especially of wheat, its biggest cereal crop, as the country recovers from floods and the worst drought in decades, government and aid organization officials say. Ample snow and rain during winter partly replenished soil moisture and raised hopes for a better wheat crop, which is a food source for rural families who turn their harvested grain into bread. Last year, however, drought displaced hundreds of thousands of people and also forced farmers who stayed in their homes to sell livestock and tools to survive, making recovery a multi-year challenge. Many farmers were unable to plant crops last year because of parched conditions ([NYT](#)).

Tuberculosis

Around 20 percent of Afghanistan’s estimated 31 million population are affiliated with the Tuberculosis, health officials say. Last year, 9,000 people in the country lost their lives due to the disease ([Afghanistan Times](#)).



# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(18-24 Mar 19)

## Political Developments

### Peace Process

Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad hosted his Russia, China, and the EU counterparts at the Department of State for talks on March 21 and 22. Discussion topics included: international support for the Afghan peace process, the role each party can play in bringing an end to the war, and progress to date in peace talks ([U.S. Department of State](#)). Russia and China support US talks with the Taliban movement and show interest in immediate success of this dialogue, Russia’s Presidential Envoy for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov said after trilateral consultations on Afghanistan in Washington with the US and Chinese envoys ([TASS](#)).

U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan John R. Bass met with civil society representatives at the U.S. Embassy this week. During their meeting, Ambassador Bass provided an update on U.S. efforts to promote an intra-Afghan dialogue and peace in Afghanistan. ([U.S. Embassy in Kabul](#)).

Mohammed bin Zayed, Abu Dhabi’s crown prince of UAE, proposed to set up an assassination programme targeting senior Taliban leaders during a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo earlier this year ([Ariana](#)).

### ICC Sanctions

United Nations human rights experts called on the United States on Friday to stop its "threats" and visa bans against the International Criminal Court (ICC), which they rejected as "improper interference". U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said a week ago that the United States will withdraw or deny visas to any ICC personnel investigating possible war crimes by U.S. forces or allies in Afghanistan. The visa restrictions may also be used to deter ICC efforts to pursue allied personnel, including Israelis, he said. The Hague-based court has responded that it was an independent and impartial institution and would continue to do its work "undeterred" by Washington's actions ([NYT](#)).

### Presidential Elections

Afghanistan's presidential election has been postponed by more than two months to Sept. 28, a spokesman for the country's Independent Election Commission said on Wednesday (20 Mar 2019). It had previously been scheduled for July 20. It is unclear how recurring peace talks between U.S. officials and the Taliban may affect the election ([NYT](#)).

An official of Afghanistan’s Independent Election Commission (IEC) said Friday (22 Mar 2019) that the DERMALOG biometric devices used in last October’s parliamentary elections will be used for the upcoming presidential election in September. An investigation by some electoral monitoring organizations in Kabul revealed that at least 5,000 biometric devices were lost during and after the parliamentary elections. DERMALOG delivered more than 24,000 biometric capture devices for that election ([Biometric Update](#)).

### Germany Extends Military Mandate for Afghanistan

Germany’s parliament has granted a one-year extension of its military mandate for Afghanistan, allowing the country’s first major post-war troop deployment to continue until March 31, 2020. The approval allows Germany’s military, the Bundeswehr, to keep up to 1,300 soldiers in the country as part of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission (RSM), providing support and training to Afghan security forces. Currently, Germany has 1,200 troops stationed in Afghanistan. As quoted by dpa International, Fritz Felgentreu, a lawmaker from Germany’s Social Democrats, urged the deployment to continue, but warned that if the U.S. were to leave prematurely, the Bundeswehr would be expected to depart as well ([Ariana](#)).

### Loya Jirga

A government official says that the representatives of Afghan refugees in the neighboring countries of Iran and Pakistan would participate in the Consultative Loya Jirga slated in April to discuss ways of peace ([Afghanistan Times](#)).



### ASSESSMENT:

- Talks between U.S., the EU, Russia and China is a positive sign for a coordinated peace process. Consensus must be reached among Great Powers concerning the future of Afghanistan for a lasting peace. However, intra-Afghan dialogue still lacks.
- Debate on International Criminal Court signals the rupture of “transatlantic bond” much needed particularly in Afghanistan. Together with Brexit, “burden sharing” discussions and frustration over defence spending, diverging views among Western powers serve further to destabilize Afghanistan.
- By postponing presidential elections, Afghan Unity Government is trying to influence the peace process, a multilateral endeavour of which it has long waited to be a part.
- Even if the peace process succeeds, proxy conflicts between Fatemiyoun, Taliban and ISKP will highly likely break out in Afghanistan.
- Fatemiyoun returnees from Syrian theatre and latest decision on the participation of Afghan diaspora in Iran to the consultative loya jirga - taken shortly after Umer Daudzai’s Tehran visit - are clear signs of growing Iranian influence in Afghanistan. An Afghanistan without U.S. and NATO security assurances might be a second Syria in the middle of Asia.

Consultative Loya Jirga	29 April 2019
Presidential Elections	28 September 2019

## Armed Conflict

### Casualties

According to the Afghan MoD, 87 insurgents were killed in previous week. At least 45 pro-government forces and 12 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the reporting period. The deadliest attack took place in Faryab Province, where a Taliban Red Unit attacked a military base and security outposts in Arkalik village. At least 22 Afghan security forces were killed, eight police officers were wounded and four police officers were taken prisoner. The Taliban captured the military base and four outposts, looting all weapons and equipment ([NYT](#)).

After the second firefight in the past 10 days between American soldiers and their Afghan allies, at least 14 civilians, most of them women and children, were killed in an airstrike on Saturday in northern Kunduz province, according to Afghan officials. At least four Afghan soldiers were also killed. The episode on Saturday came a day after two members of an American Special Forces unit and four Afghan Special Forces soldiers were killed during a joint operation ([NYT](#)).

Russia has urged the warring parties in Afghanistan to cease hostilities and display their “goodwill” to Afghan people and strive for “genuine” peace ([ATN](#)).

### The Fatemiyoun

With the war now dying down, Afghan fighters, recruited by Iran are starting to come home from Syria. Just as the West agonises about the return of radicalised émigrés, many in Afghanistan worry about what the former fighters will do—and where their loyalties lie. At its height, the Fatemiyoun, as the Afghan militia was known, had as many as 20,000 fighters, largely from the Hazara ethnic minority. Iran was handing out prized residency permits to those who fought—a powerful incentive given that around 250,000 Afghans who lack the right papers are deported from Iran each year. There were also historical reasons for the birth of the Fatemiyoun. Many Afghans had fought for their neighbour during the Iran-Iraq War, and ties between those veterans and the Iranian security apparatus endured. The founder of the Fatemiyoun, Alireza Tavasoli, was one such veteran.

Although most Fatemiyoun veterans are thought to have remained in Iran, many have returned to Afghanistan. That is causing unease. During the most chaotic phase of Afghanistan’s civil war, in the 1990s, Iran backed militias as proxies, just as Pakistan backed the Taliban. The Fatemiyoun may play such a role in the future, Afghan intelligence officials fear. With Iran having declared victory in Syria, the future of the Fatemiyoun is uncertain. In January America blacklisted it for its ties to Iran’s Revolutionary Guards ([The Economist](#)).

Some analysts say the Iranian regime is considering the foreign fighters backed by Tehran as a potential reserve force for emergency use. Musa Ghazanfarabadi, head of the Tehran Islamic Revolution Courts, told religious students in Qom this month that his government could use foreign fighters to crack down on potential popular uprisings in Iran. "If we don't support [our] revolution, the Iraqi Hashd al-Shaabi, the Afghan Fatemiyoun [Brigade], the Pakistani Zainebiyoun and Yemeni Houthis will come and support the revolution," he said ([VOA](#)).

### Humanitarian Situation

The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs says recent flooding in Afghanistan has left more than 122,600 people in need of assistance and affected 14 out of the country's 34 provinces. Thousands of houses have been destroyed or damaged. Heavy snowfall across Afghanistan this winter had cut off many areas, raising fears of severe floods in the spring. So far this year, 63 people have died as heavy rains and flooding swept away their homes ([NYT](#)).

### Economic Developments

President Ashraf Ghani who was on a two-day visit to the United Arab Emirates, says Abu Dhabi is ready to buy all Afghan saffron and establish air corridor with Afghanistan ([Ariana](#)).



Political Developments  
UNAMA Mandate

The Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) by unanimously adopting resolution 2460 (2019). UNAMA’S mandate will now run until 17 September 2019 (UNAMA).The United States and China clashed over Beijing's \$1 trillion "belt and road" global infrastructure program after the Security Council unanimously approved a bare bones resolution extending the mandate of the U.N. political mission in Afghanistan for six months (NYT).

Peace Process

The latest round of talks in Qatar lasted 16 days and finished on Tuesday, with officials from both sides saying that progress had been made, but there was no agreement on when foreign troops might be withdrawn (NYT). Special Representative Khalilzad and a team representing agencies across the United States Government concluded talks with the Taliban delegation in Doha. The Taliban have agreed that peace will require both sides to fully address four core issues, and they are: counterterrorism assurances, troop withdrawal, intra-Afghan dialogue, and a comprehensive ceasefire. In this round of talks, parties were able to move to agreement in draft on the first two principles – counterterrorism assurances and troop withdrawal. And when that agreement, in draft, is finalized, the Taliban and an inclusive Afghan negotiating team that includes the Afghan Government and other Afghans will begin intra-Afghan negotiations of a political settlement and comprehensive ceasefire (U.S. Department of State).

Under Secretary for Political Affairs David Hale summoned Afghan National Security Advisor Hamdullah Mohib March 14 to reject the public comments attributed to National Security Advisor Mohib criticizing the U.S. approach to reconciliation. (U.S. Embassy in Kabul). President Donald Trump and his national security team had an hourlong, classified meeting on Afghanistan on Friday, a day after a top Afghan official openly complained that the Trump administration was keeping his government in the dark about its negotiations with the Taliban. The meeting in the secure room at the Pentagon called “the tank” included Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, CIA Director Gina Haspel and Trump’s national security adviser John Bolton, among others (AP).

The UN Special Representative in Afghanistan, Tadamichi Yamamoto, hailed ongoing efforts made towards peace and the engagement of women and youth across the country, but warned the Security Council on Monday that “daunting challenges” remain (UN News).

Umer Daudzai, head of the High Peace Council’s secretariat, flew to Tehran to talk to the Islamic Republic of Iran’s officials about the ongoing peace process in Afghanistan and ask them for assistance. Prior to Iran, Daudzai went to China and Pakistan, talking to their officials over peace efforts in Afghanistan (Afghanistan Times). The future of NATO's 15-year-long military operation in Afghanistan will depend on the outcome of peace talks involving Taliban insurgents, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said (NYT).

"If Qatari officials can be at the negotiating table, then how did the U.S. forget to invite its key allies who have fought the Afghan war since 2001?" said the diplomat, whose nation has contributed hundreds of troops to NATO's mission in the country. "We continue to pour millions of dollars as an act of solidarity, but when it comes to peace talks, the U.S. decided to go solo." Reuters spoke with 10 diplomats from countries spanning three continents that are among the 39 that provide military personnel to the NATO training operation, known as Resolute Support, in Afghanistan, and those that provide development aid (NYT).

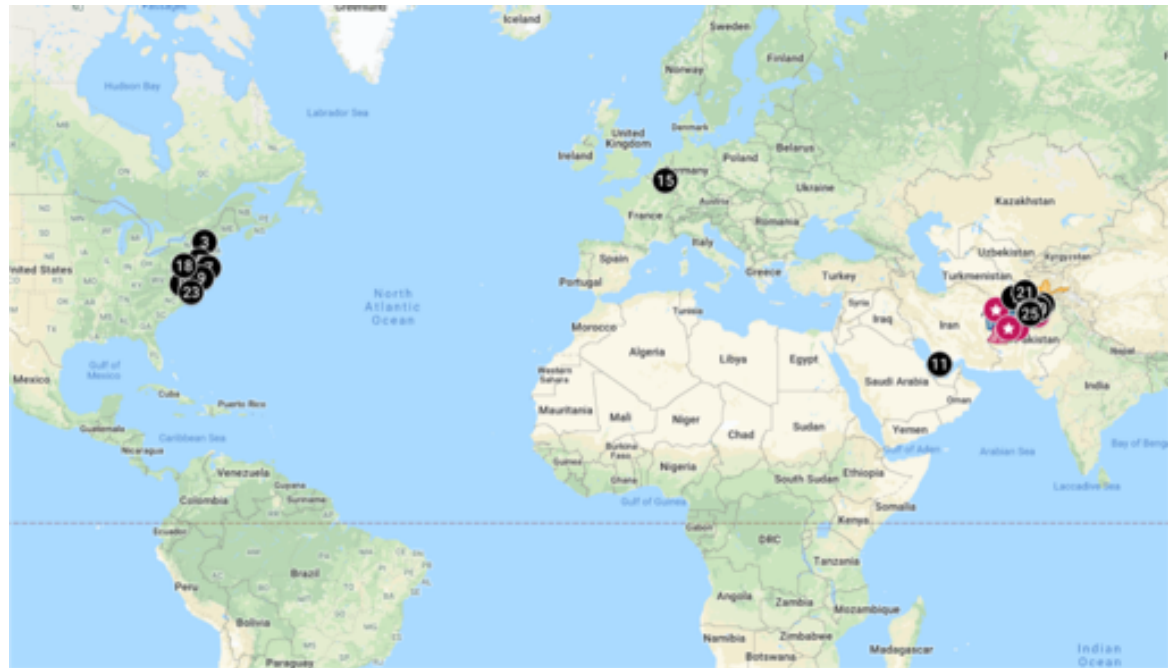
Russia has voiced concern over the continuation of peace talks between the U.S. and the Taliban representatives in Qatar behind closed-doors. Russian Ambassador in Kabul Alexander Mantytskiy said that “ambitious” peace talks in Qatar have concern Moscow, adding that if the U.S. and Taliban reach into an agreement in the ongoing peace talks it should be acceptable to all countries involved in Afghanistan issue (Ariana).

Consultative Loya Jirga

President Ashraf Ghani has ordered to call the consultative Loya Jirga on April 29, some 40 days delay from the previous date was slated on March 17. Around 2,000 representatives from 34 provinces are scheduled to attend the jirga which is expected to discuss peace ways (Afghanistan Times).

AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(11-17 Mar 19)



ASSESSMENT:

- Allegedly, reconciliation process began as a U.S. initiative without sufficient consultation with Allies and partners, including Afghan government. Side effects of lack of dialogue likely to grow among parties as things go worse in Afghanistan.
- Taliban’s gains both on the ground and in negotiations are alarming for National Unity Government. Recent remarks of Afghan National Security Adviser is a clear sign of Afghan government’s distaste towards U.S. policy. If negotiating parties continue to exclude National Unity Government from the process (even though the U.S. position is to include them to transition the process to an Afghan-owned, Afghan-led one) Russia, China and Iran will benefit from current situation.
- Ghani’s move to convene Loya Jirga might not help as long as ANDSF lose not only individuals but also camps and companies.

Consultative Loya Jirga	29 April 2019
Parliamentary elections results	(?)
Presidential Elections	20 July 2019 (?)

ICC Sanctions

On November 2017, the ICC prosecutor requested approval to initiate investigation into, quote, “the situation in Afghanistan,” end of quote. That could illegitimately target American personnel for prosecutions and sentencing. In September of 2018, the Trump administration warned the ICC that if it tried to pursue an investigation of Americans there would be consequences.

A policy of U.S. visa restrictions on those individuals directly responsible for any ICC investigation of U.S. personnel is underway. This includes persons who take or have taken action to request or further such an investigation. These visa restrictions may also be used to deter ICC efforts to pursue allied personnel, including Israelis, without allies’ consent. Implementation of this policy has already begun. The U.S. administration is prepared to take additional steps, including economic sanctions if the ICC does not change its course (U.S. Department of State).

Armed Conflict

Casualties

According to the Afghan MoD, 210 insurgents were killed in previous week. At least 74 pro-government forces and 26 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the reporting period (8-14 March 2019). The deadliest attack took place in Badghis Province, where the Taliban completely wiped out an Afghan army company, killing 16 soldiers and taking 40 others prisoner. Thirteen civilians were killed by American airstrikes in the district of Hesarak in Nangarhar, and six Afghan soldiers were killed in an American airstrike in Oruzgan Province, after Afghan soldiers targeted a joint convoy of Afghan and American forces. Officials later called the incident “a mistake between forces.” (NYT)

The Taliban carried out the biggest known capture of Afghan soldiers of the war, taking 150 prisoners after they chased units into neighboring Turkmenistan and that country forced them back, Afghan officials said. The operation took place in the northwestern Afghan province of Badghis, and brought to 190 the number of soldiers captured by insurgents in the hotly contested district of Bala Murghab — with 16 more soldiers killed — in less than a week. Last Monday, an entire Afghan Army company was killed or captured there. By Saturday, its defenders said the district had fallen mostly into Taliban control, though Afghan forces were still holding the district’s government center. The latest capture was perhaps the biggest setback for the Afghan security forces since a Taliban offensive in August in the southeastern city of Ghazni killed as many as 200 soldiers and police officers, but few prisoners were taken then. The biggest recent capture of soldiers by the Taliban was about 50 who surrendered after a siege of their base, known as Chinese Camp, in Faryab Province, also in August (NYT).

Preliminary findings from the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) indicate that 24 civilians were killed and injured in three separate operations by pro-Government forces on 8 and 9 March in Maidan Wardak, Nangarhar and Paktika provinces. The incidents in Maidan Wardak and Nangarhar provinces took place on the evening of 8 March when the National Directorate of Security Special Forces supported by international military forces carried out operations against Taliban in Sayed Abad and Hisarak districts, respectively. In both incidents, airstrikes by international military forces caused civilian deaths and injuries. Thirteen women and children were killed and injured in the Hisarak incident. One day later, a pro-Government armed group, supported by international forces, carried out an evening search operation in Barmal district, Paktika province, against Taliban, that resulted in civilian casualties, including children (UNAMA).

The fight against the Daesh terrorist group continues in Syria; on 15 March, the Syrian Army liquidated several Daesh fighters in Idlib Province and destroyed their headquarters, according to the local Ikhbariya broadcaster. The terror group has picked Northern Afghanistan as the new centre of its so-called caliphate (Sputnik).

Privatization of Afghan War

The debate on privatizing the war in Afghanistan is heating up yet again, with Democratic lawmakers pledging to end so-called “forever wars.” The public is slowly recognizing the war’s hidden costs and global scale. In 2016, 1 in 4 US armed personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan was a private contractor. This means that the war is already being outsourced, yet scholars, the media and the general public know almost nothing about it (PRI).



# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

## (03-10 Mar 19)

### Political Developments

#### Peace Process

The National Security Adviser of the United States John Bolton has said there is no blind trust in Taliban in President Donald Trump’s administration as negotiations are underway between the U.S. and Taliban representatives in Qatar ([Khaama](#)). Regarding the negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban the two sides had already agreed in principle on a framework for two crucial issues: the withdrawal of American troops, and a commitment that Afghan soil would not again be used to launch terrorist attacks against the United States and its allies, as Al Qaeda did with its strikes on Sept. 11, 2001. The Taliban have said they would not allow Afghanistan to be used as a launching pad for international attacks. American negotiators have insisted on specifying that Afghanistan not be used by “terrorist” groups, but the Taliban have resisted, saying there was no universal definition of terrorism ([NYT](#)). The Secretary publicly addressed the Taliban as terrorists in Afghanistan, at a time when a team from the U.S. is in negotiations with the Taliban even though it is not listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S. ([U.S. Department of State](#))

#### UNSG Report on Afghanistan

UNSG report on the situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security was published on 6 Mar 2019 ([UNAMA](#)). Main findings are as follows;

- Efforts towards a negotiated settlement to the conflict intensified.
- The Government of Afghanistan also continued its preparations for an intra-Afghan peace dialogue.
- October 2018 parliamentary elections remained contentious.
- The Independent Election Commission postponed the 2019 presidential elections by three months until 20 July.
- Security remained volatile.
- Civilian casualties continued at record high levels.
- The humanitarian situation remained grave.

#### New NATO SCR

Sir Nicholas has arrived in Kabul to take up his role as the NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan ([NATO RSM](#)).

#### Defence Education

Experts in defence education gathered from 19 to 21 February, 2019 at NATO Headquarters, Belgium to conduct the annual review of NATO’s Defence Education Enhancement Programme (DEEP) with Afghanistan. The Programme has several objectives. These include contributing to the creation of a Professional Military Education (PME) policy, the development of specific curriculum subjects such as the Civilian Oversight of the Armed Forces, the Interagency Coordination or Leadership, and the development of faculties by bringing together defence and military experts from Allied countries and partners to exchange experience in modern teaching methodologies. DEEP also facilitates efforts to foster cooperation between similar military educational institutions from around the world ([NATO](#)).

### Armed Conflict

#### Casualties

According to the Afghan MoD, 410 insurgents were killed in previous week. At least 119 pro-government forces and 26 civilian were killed in Afghanistan



#### ASSESSMENT:

- The patience shown towards Taliban has its limits. To make a deal with the U.S. (and Russia), Taliban should not only distance itself from AQ and ISKP but it should also effectively fight with them.
- Kabul attack was against Shiite minority in the country. Similar incidents might provoke retaliation by Iran.
- Privatization of Afghan War might exacerbate humanitarian situation. Furthermore it might trigger intervention of third parties (regional actors) and cause Allies lose moral superiority.

Parliamentary elections results	(?)
Presidential Elections	20 July 2019 (?)

between 01-07 March. The deadliest attack took place in Helmand Province, where insurgents penetrated a military compound and killed at least 40 Afghan soldiers over 36 hours of fighting. The site was once a major base for United States forces, and an adjoining part of the compound still houses American troops. There were no American casualties ([NYT](#)).

Mortar shells exploded Thursday (7 Mar 2019) outside a ceremony in the Afghan capital Kabul attended by the country's chief executive and a former president. Both men were unharmed, but 11 others were killed and 100 people were wounded in the attack. The ISKP claimed responsibility ([NYT](#)).

At least 13 civilians, including several children, were killed in American airstrikes in eastern Afghanistan that were carried out in support of an Afghan-led operation against the Taliban ([NYT](#)).

#### Privatization of Afghan War

Erik Prince, the founder and former CEO of Blackwater, has a plan to privatise the war in Afghanistan.

Speaking to Mehdi Hasan in front of an audience at the Oxford Union, Prince said that while he supports US President Donald Trump's campaign promises to stop "endless wars", he doesn't necessarily support the rapid withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.

"Here's the thing," said Prince: "if we, if the United States leaves Afghanistan, withdraws any of the troops support or monetary support, you will have a moment like Saigon in 1975 with helicopters having to lift people off the roof of the US Embassy. It will be that bad."

Instead, he'd like to have a hand in running the war. Prince has suggested replacing almost 50,000 NATO troops and private contractors with 2,000 US special operators and 6,000 contractors, cutting spending on the war by 30 billion dollars a year. ([Al Jazeera](#))

### Humanitarian Situation

#### Flash Floods, Snow and Rain

Flash floods, heavy rains and snowfall have killed at least 59 people across Afghanistan during the past two weeks and left thousands homeless, with the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar the worst-hit. Some 5,000 people were displaced in Kandahar alone, the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) said ([NYT](#)).

### Economic Developments

#### Rail Link To Connect Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, Russia

Pakistan railways will connect Iran, Afghanistan Turkey, and Russia through rail link, according to Pakistani media reports ([TOLO](#)).

### Corruption

The Department of Justice has reached a settlement of its civil forfeiture case against assets owned by Hikmatullah Shadman that he wrongfully acquired as a government contractor in Afghanistan. Under the terms of the settlement, approximately \$25 million will be forfeited to the United States ([U.S. Department of Justice](#)).



# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(25 Feb - 03 Mar 19)

## Political Developments

### Peace Process

The highest-level negotiations yet between American diplomats and the Taliban began in Qatar’s capital on Monday (25.02.2019). The latest round of talks to take place in Doha since President Trump ordered direct negotiations with the Taliban last summer focused on fleshing out the details of a framework agreement in principle both sides say they reached last month (NYT). During a two-day break from direct negotiations at a holiday resort in Doha, a series of small meetings continued around town to bridge the gap on core issues, such as withdrawal of American troops and prohibiting international terror groups from using Afghan soil, according to several current and former officials from all sides involved in the talks (NYT).

An influential former adviser to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, now a leading electoral rival, Mohammad Haneef Atmar, a former national security adviser has accused his old boss of hampering peace with the Taliban by blocking efforts to include a broad range of voices in the process (NYT).

### Consultative Loya Jirga

A planned meeting of hundreds of Afghan politicians and tribal, ethnic, and religious leaders aimed at discussing negotiations with the Taliban known as consultative loya jirga has been postponed, which was initially set to be held in Kabul from March 17-20. The Loya Jirga was now expected to gather at the beginning of the new year, which in Afghanistan starts on March 21. The meeting will aim to come up with a framework for the Western-backed government in Kabul to engage in peace negotiations with the Taliban (Radio Free Europe).

### U.S. Withdrawal

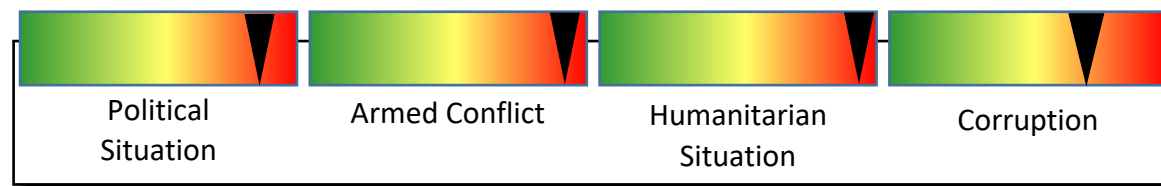
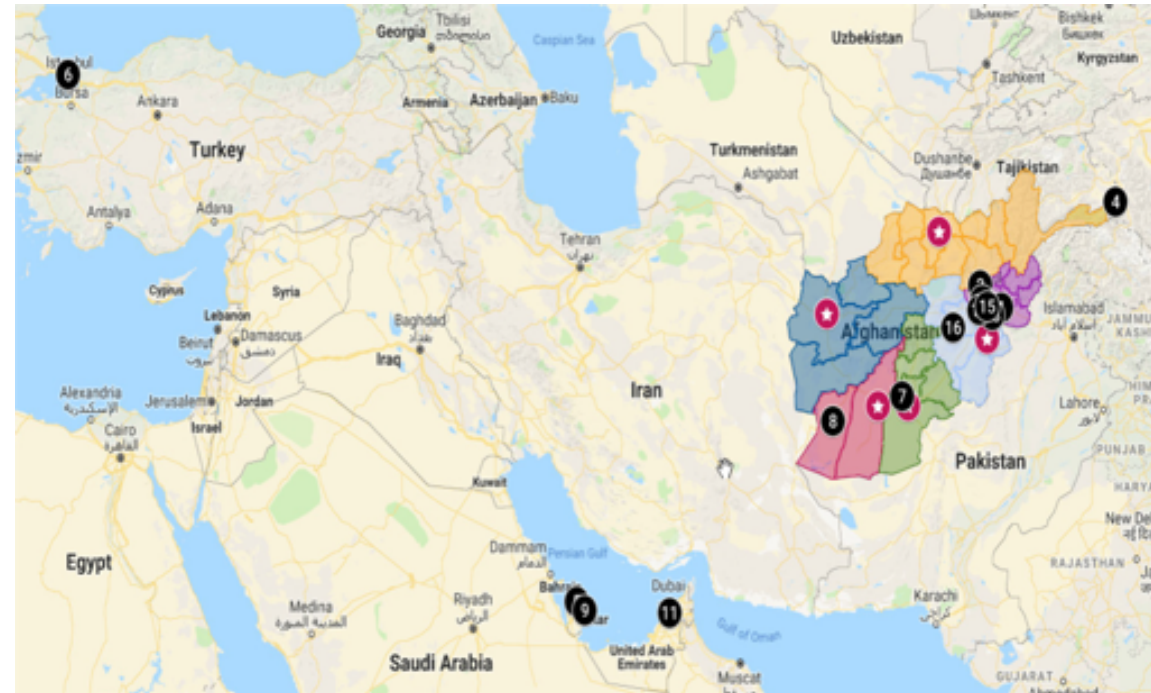
All American troops would withdraw from Afghanistan over the next three to five years under a new Pentagon plan being offered in peace negotiations that could lead to a government in Kabul that shares power with the Taliban. The rest of the international force in Afghanistan would leave at the same time, after having mixed success in stabilizing the country since 2001. The plan is being discussed with European allies. The plan calls for cutting by half, in coming months, the 14,000 American troops currently in Afghanistan (NYT).

### Chinese Military Presence in Afghanistan

China's defense ministry defended military cooperation with Tajikistan following a report of a sizeable Chinese troop presence at a base in the Central Asian state. Ministry spokesman Ren Guoqiang said there was no Chinese presence in the adjacent Wakhan Corridor belonging to Afghanistan, in line with earlier denials of any plans to deploy troops to the war-torn nation with which it shares a narrow border. Despite the denials of Chinese military activity in the area, unconfirmed reports have shown what appear to be Chinese military vehicles operating in the corridor, which lies in the shadow of the Hindu Kush mountains with Tajikistan to the north and Pakistan to the south (NYT).

### Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process

First Ambassadors meeting in 2019, with respect to holding of the upcoming Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process Meeting, was held on 27 Feb 2019. Turkey will host the 8th session of the Istanbul Process Meeting (Afghan MFA).



### ASSESSMENT:

- Given the casualty figures and intensity of the conflict, parties are determined to fight till the end. On the other hand, as U.S.-Taliban talks continue, expectations towards a peace (deal) rise. In line with the talks, Pentagon sources reveal the details of the (possible) withdrawal which will highly likely be binding for NATO and its partners as well. If Taliban ease its stance towards Afghan Unity Government, assure International Community that it will behave women humanely and open room for them in society and accept to fight with ISIS-K (an idea proposed by Russia but shared by others) there remains trivial issues to solve.
- As indicators of a possible U.S./NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan became evident, regional actors increased their interest in the country. Russia, China, India, Pakistan and Iran are taking different initiatives to create conditions for stabilizing Afghanistan after U.S. withdrawal. These very same countries are quite aware of the fact that Afghanistan may turn into a fireball and export terrorism/extremism/instability to its neighbours.

Parliamentary elections results	(?)
Presidential Elections	20 July 2019 (?)

## Armed Conflict

### Casualties

According to the Afghan MoD, 212 insurgents were killed in previous week. At least 28 pro-government forces and one civilian were killed in Afghanistan between 22-28 February, in the quietest week since September 2018 (NYT).

Taliban insurgents targeted an Afghan army corps at their camp in the southern Helmand province, killing at least 23, on 02 March 2019. 20 other troops were wounded in the attack that began Friday (01 March 2019) and ended Saturday evening after a 40-hour battle in the Wahser district (NYT).

### Counter-Terrorism

Saudi Arabia announced on 01 March 2019 that it had revoked the citizenship of Hamza bin Laden, the son of the late al-Qaida leader who has become an increasingly prominent figure in the terror network. There was no immediate explanation why the royal decree stripping his citizenship, signed in November, was only becoming public now. However, the announcement comes after the U.S. government on Thursday offered a \$1 million reward for information leading to his capture as part of its "Rewards for Justice" program. He also was added Thursday (28 February 2019) to a United Nations Security Council terrorism sanctions list (NYT).

### Taliban vs. ISIS-K

Russia’s special envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov told that the Taliban can be instrumental in defeating Islamic State in Afghanistan if it stops being a threat to the Kabul government and joins forces with the Afghan army. The Taliban has demonstrated its distaste for IS militants when they began spreading in some of Afghanistan’s provinces, but over the years the mutual hostility evolved into open confrontation (RT).

## Humanitarian Situation

### Flood in Kandahar

A U.N. humanitarian agency says at least 20 people died as heavy rains and flooding over the past few days swept away their homes and cars in Afghanistan's southern Kandahar province. The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said on Saturday night that at least 10 people, including children, remain missing. OCHA's statement says up to 2,000 homes are believed to have been damaged (NYT).

More than 700 women from across Afghanistan gathered at a conference in Kabul to send an unequivocal message to the men now negotiating with the Taliban. We want peace, the women said, but not at the cost of our rights. Several women expressed fears that a peace deal could bring the Taliban back into the government, leaving women and girls vulnerable to a new wave of the sort of edicts that constrained their lives until the group’s overthrow in 2001 (NYT).

## Economic Developments

### Afghanistan - China - India Trilateral Meeting

The first trilateral meeting between Afghanistan, India, and China was held on 02 March 2019. Three countries focus on training civil and military personnel, mining, increased energy production, agriculture and transportation development, regional connectivity, establishing joint chamber of commerce, and other areas of mutual economic interest (Afghan MFA).



# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(18 - 24 Feb 19)

Political Developments

Peace Process

US special representative Zalmay Khalilzad and Russian President Vladimir Putin's envoy for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov reached the agreement at a meeting in Ankara. After Friday's meeting, Khalilzad told Anadolu Agency: "We agreed the region can play an important role in facilitating peace in Afghanistan. We talked about some options how the region could play that role." He said: "We want Russia to play a constructive role. We don't want to monopolise the diplomacy of peace in Afghanistan. We welcome all efforts that promote peace." (Pajhwok). They have also agreed to explore options on securing travel waivers for Taliban negotiators to participate in talks to end the war in Afghanistan. Lifting the travel ban imposed on Taliban leaders by the United Nations has been one of the key demands of the Taliban who started negotiations with US officials in 2018 to end the 17-year-old war (The News).

The Taliban's deputy leader, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, arrived in Qatar on Sunday (24 Feb 2019), for what could be the highest-level negotiations yet between the insurgents and American diplomats to end the long Afghan war. The next round of talks, scheduled to begin on Monday (25 Feb 2019) in Doha, is expected to focus on the details of a framework deal that the two sides agreed to in principle last month, in which American troops would withdraw from Afghanistan in return for a guarantee by the Taliban that Afghan territory would never be used by terrorists (NYT).

Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan said on Tuesday (19 Feb 2019) that peace talks between the United States and Afghan Taliban militants would be affected if India resorted to violence against Pakistan in response to a deadly bombing in the Kashmir region. The remarks by Zahid Nasrullah come as tension between the nuclear-armed neighbors has risen sharply over the killing in Indian-controlled Kashmir on Thursday of 40 Indian paramilitary police in a suicide bomb attack claimed by the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad militant group (NYT). Afghanistan's Foreign Ministry summoned the Pakistani ambassador on Wednesday (20 Feb 2019) over his remarks (NYT).

Strategic Partnership Agreement with Turkmenistan

The government of Afghanistan signed a strategic partnership agreement with Turkmenistan (Khaama).

Armed Conflict

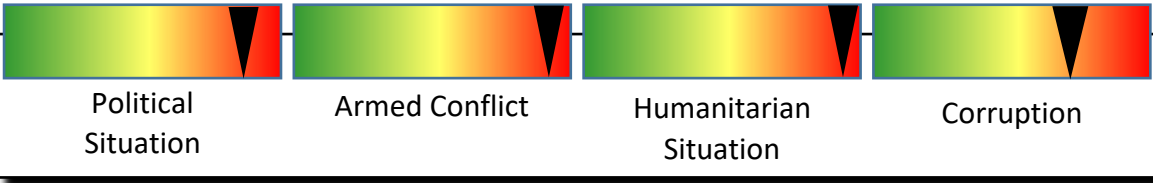
Operation Freedom's Sentinel Quarterly Report

According to the Lead Inspector General quarterly report to the U.S. Congress, the security situation in Afghanistan remained volatile. The Taliban continued to attack Afghan security forces and election facilities while U.S. and coalition forces intensified Afghan-led operations to counter the Taliban and terrorist organizations in Afghanistan (OIG).

Casualties

According to the Afghan MoD, 114 insurgents were killed in previous week. At least 52 pro-government forces and 14 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past week (NYT).

More civilians were killed in the Afghan conflict last year than at any time since records have been kept, according to a United Nations report by the UN



ASSESSMENT:

- U.S.-Russia agreement might expedite the peace process, only if all stakeholders behave constructively.
- As Afghanistan campaign is coming to an end, rising number of civilian casualties is a strong indicator of intense fight on the ground.
- Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, who spent years in jail is now heading the Taliban delegation. This U.S.-Pakistan gesture, together with travel waivers for Taliban will highly likely facilitate negotiations. It is now Taliban's turn to sit around the table with Afghan Unity Government representatives and ease its acrimonious language.
- Chabahar port serves as a stovepipe to Afghan economy. It also provides options for Afghanistan to reach South Asia markets, without having dependency on Pakistan. On the other hand, Iran will not hesitate to use Chabahar port as a political/economic leverage to further its deeds. It would be wise for Afghanistan to have multiple choices and to pursue a proper policy.

Parliamentary elections results	(?)
Presidential Elections	20 July 2019 (?)

Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the UN Human Rights Office. The report documented 3,804 civilian deaths in 2018. Among the dead were 927 children, the highest recorded number of boys and girls killed in the conflict during a single year. In total, UNAMA documented 10,993 civilian casualties (3,804 deaths and 7,189 injured), representing a five per cent increase in overall civilian casualties and an 11 per cent increase in civilian deaths compared to 2017. UNAMA attributed the majority of civilian casualties –63 per cent– to Anti-Government Elements (AGEs), 37 per cent to Taliban, 20 percent to Daesh/Islamic State Khorosan Province (ISKP), and 6 per cent to undetermined AGEs. Pro-Government Forces caused 24 percent of civilian casualties --14 per cent by Afghan national security forces, six per cent by international military forces, as well as four per cent by other pro-Government armed groups and forces (UNAMA).

ISIS

The increased control of ISIS in Afghanistan is a threat to CSTO member states, said Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov. According to him, there is a growing danger of overflowing Middle Eastern terrorism to the post-Soviet space through the Afghan territory (News AM).

Humanitarian Situation

Polio

The unmonitored movement of people across the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan threatens efforts to eradicate polio from the two countries, as the year's first cases of the virus are recorded in the volatile region. The Global Polio Eradication Initiative said people travelling through unchecked crossings is believed to be one of the main causes of the spread of the disease in the area. Pakistan and Afghanistan, along with Nigeria, are the only three countries in the world where polio remains endemic (Guardian).

Economic Developments

Chabahar Port

Afghanistan began exports to India through an Iranian port (Chabahar) on Sunday (24 Feb 2019), as the landlocked, war-torn nation turns to overseas markets to improve its economy. The Iranian port provides easy access to the sea to Afghanistan and India has helped developed this route to allow both countries to engage in trade bypassing Pakistan.

Last year the US government granted an exception to certain US sanctions that allowed development of Chabahar port as part of a new transportation corridor designed to boost Afghanistan's economy and meet their needs of non-sanctionable goods such as food and medicines. Both countries established an air corridor in 2017. Afghan exports to India stood at \$740 million in 2018, making it the largest export destination, officials said (Arab News).

Gulfood Exhibition

Over 50 Afghan businesses are attending the five-day Gulfood Exhibition in Dubai from February 17 to 21 to meet prospective buyers, with over half of them displaying Afghanistan's finest fruits, saffron, nuts, spices, vegetables and juices. Last year, Afghan businesses inked over \$30 million in signed and potential deals for Afghan agricultural products. This is the ninth consecutive year that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) supported the participation of Afghan traders at Gulfood (USAID).



# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(11 - 17 Feb 19)

**Political Developments**

**30th Anniversary of Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan**

February 15 marks 30 years since the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. They were deployed in the country in 1979. 30 years on, a concerted effort is being made to rehabilitate the Afghan war in Russians’ minds. In April last year, Vladimir Putin used a choreographed exchange to order his officials to bring about new “memorials and evaluations” in relation to the war. Sure enough, within a few months, legislation appeared in Russia’s parliament, seeking to reverse the 1989 condemnation. Notionally, the bill came in response to pressure from Afghan veterans. But it was clear it had the support of vast sections of the Russian elite, presidential administration, security services and army ([Independent](#)).

A senior Russian envoy asserted Wednesday that the U.S. has “completely failed” in Afghanistan, opening the way for Moscow to play the role of peace broker in the war-torn country from which the Soviets pulled out in 1989. The comments underscore Moscow’s ambition to expand its clout in Afghanistan at a time when the United States, with its envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, has stepped up efforts to find a peace deal for the country and is holding a series of talks with the Taliban. In an interview with The Associated Press, Kabulov said he believes many Afghans now see Russia as a useful broker that could help advance the political process, despite lingering memories of the 10-year Soviet invasion. Kabulov argued that the protracted, 17-year U.S.-led war in Afghanistan helped change Afghan perceptions of the Soviet invasion and has made many local leaders support the idea of Russian mediation ([Associated Press](#)).

**U.S. Withdrawal**

Russia’s Security Council Secretary Nikolay Patrushev has said that instead of fulfilling the UN mandate in Afghanistan, the US has been trying to gain a foothold in the country and increase Kabul’s dependence on Washington. He also said that US announcements about the possible withdrawal of NATO troops from the country “are in reality not being put into practice.” None of the tasks set by the relevant UN Security Council mandate have been fulfilled by the US in Afghanistan, including the elimination of terrorists, Patrushev said ([RT](#)).

Russia believes there would be no power vacuum in Afghanistan after the US withdraw its troops from the war-stricken country, and the Taliban—an extremist group where US currently engaged in peace talks with its representatives, can be trusted as an ally to fight Daesh terrorist outfit. Kabulov says if the US fails to strike an agreement on a military pullout with Taliban, “they could stay for another few years but in the end, they’ll have to go, and this time in disgrace.” ([Afghanistan Times](#))

Russia’s Afghan initiative has not encountered protests from Washington. Russia is recognized as a global player. This is bad news for the Afghan president, who is left sitting on the sidelines. Even so, this may be good for Afghanistan in the longer term. One thing is certain: at negotiating tables where Afghanistan is at stake we are now seeing a new and different world order being played out ([Prio](#)).

In yet another example illustrating the waste of taxpayer funds in Afghanistan, the US plans to go ahead with the delivery of 159 expensive Black Hawk helicopters — even though there may not be enough pilots to fly them or ground crews to maintain them. According to John Sopko, head of the SIGAR mission, the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan has reduced the number of pilots it plans to train to fly UH-60 Black Hawks, from 477 to 320, and still may not meet its target in time. To make matters worse, the Black Hawks turn out to be inferior to the Russian-built Mi-17s, which are currently the workhorse of the Afghan air force. The Russian helicopter “can fly higher and carry more passengers,” the report acknowledges — both key advantages in the mountainous terrain where the Afghan Taliban have built their main bases ([Salon](#)).

[NPR](#) has obtained talking points written by staff at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. It says the embassy is too big and calls for a "comprehensive review" to determine that it's "right-sized for the long-term."

Afghan government is completely dependent on external resources, thus on the US and their allies. According to various sources, the state relies on financial support for between 60 and 90 percent of its costs – more than any other country in the world.



<b>ASSESSMENT:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>This week marked the 30th anniversary of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. While U.S. and its Allies are preparing for a withdrawal and are trying to shape the political arena for a swift and seamless one, history has its one way to remind how costly can it be to disengage from graveyard of empires without a comprehensive strategy.</li><li><b>Moscow’s</b> move to facilitate dialogue between Taliban and opposition groups in Afghanistan exacerbates National Unity Government’s (NUG) situation. Without dialogue between NUG and Taliban, finding a common ground for peace is not likely. With current trends the country runs the risk of fracturing.</li></ul>	
Parliamentary elections results	(?)
Presidential Elections	20 July 2019 (?)

Along with the US soldiers, the 38 other NATO and non-NATO countries would also leave. Afghan security forces are far from being able to hold the insurgency in check without outside help. US military experts say that Afghan troops need “at least another 5–10 years” of international aid and advice.

Since the end of 2014, the war has significantly broadened and intensified. Indicators such as the number of civilian war casualties, losses among armed government forces, internally displaced persons and the ratio between government and Taliban-controlled areas are plateauing on all-time highs. Under these conditions, the Afghan government, when provided with foreign aid, can barely hold its ground against the Taliban. The upcoming presidential election, now delayed until July 2019, could become mired in organizational chaos, as was the case with the 2018 parliamentary elections and most other previous ones. The Taliban can simply wait and see if the Kabul government proceeds to crumble ([Security Times](#)).

**Munich Security Conference**

High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani discuss peace process, in the margins of the Munich Security Conference. High Representative/Vice President Mogherini reiterated the European Union’s concrete 5-point offer made in Geneva last November to support peace in Afghanistan ([EEAS](#)).

President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and the U.S. Vice President Mike Pence met on the sidelines of Munich Security Conference to discuss key issues of mutual interest including the South Asia Strategy, electoral reforms, and peace process ([Khaama](#)).

The NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani met on the sidelines of Munich Security Conference to hold talks regarding the issues of bilateral interest including peace efforts in Afghanistan ([Khaama](#)).

**Peace Process**

Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai said that previously unscheduled peace talks between the Taliban and the United States in Pakistan risk engulfing the country in regional rivalries. Karzai worried that the accelerated peace process was being hijacked by competing territorial interests in Afghanistan ([NYT](#)).

An upcoming meeting in Pakistan between a delegation of the United States and Taliban representatives has been cancelled, according to information coming from both sides. A Taliban statement said the talks were postponed because many members of its 14 person negotiating team were unable to go overseas since they are on "the US and UN blacklist." Several of them are on the U.N. Security Council sanctions list which bars them from international travel ([VOA](#)).

Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is likely to meet Afghan Taliban representatives during his visit to Pakistan starting on Sunday, Pakistani government sources said ([Reuters](#)).

A fresh round of Russia-U.S. talks on Afghanistan will take place in Ankara on Feb. 22. Speaking at a news conference, Russia’s Presidential Envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov announced his meeting with his U.S. counterpart Zalmay Khalilzad. He said both sides agreed to meet at a neutral venue in the region and Turkey came up as a "comfortable" option ([Daily Sabah](#)).

**Armed Conflict**

**Casualties**

According to the Afghan MoD, 254 insurgents were killed in previous week. At least 78 pro-government forces and 23 civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past week ([NYT](#)).

**Corruption**

45 highly trained and motivated Afghan National Army Officers have become the newest leaders in the fight against corruption within the ANDSF. Their single aim is to make the ANDSF a more effective organisation ([RSM](#)).

Afghanistan has dismissed 12 election officials amid an investigation into corruption following problems with the organization of a general election last year, with fears growing that the purge could delay a July presidential election. Election authorities have yet to announce the final results ([NYT](#)).



Political Developments

U.S. Withdrawal

Russia said it was willing to assist the United States in withdrawing from Afghanistan as President Donald Trump attempts to formulate an exit strategy for the longest war in his country's history. Zamir Kabulov, the director of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Second Asia Department and special envoy for Afghanistan, told the state-run Tass Russian News Agency in an interview that the threat of the Islamic State militant group (ISIS) taking hold in Central Asia "remains and keeps growing." He said that Russia "cannot afford to wait for the Americans to address this issue," so it would work alongside regional partners. He then raised the possibility of helping U.S. troops depart, saying, "They will have to leave, sooner or later." He continued: "And they need to withdraw without a loss of face. We in Russia are ready to offer help—to the extent we are capable of doing so—so that this agreement could be achieved." ([Newsweek](#)).

The Senate approved a Middle East policy bill that includes a provision urging President Donald Trump not to precipitously withdraw troops from Afghanistan and Syria until terrorist groups there are destroyed ([CNN](#)).

The Taliban is seeking the pullout of all foreign troops from Afghanistan within months, a senior official said, as the fundamentalist Islamic movement reached out to opponents of U.S.-backed President Ashraf Ghani at talks in Moscow.

The Afghan government is worrying openly that the U.S. will leave them at the mercy of the Taliban. The militant group, which is on the offensive and already controls or contests about half of territory in Afghanistan, refuses to hold talks with the authorities in Kabul until it reaches a binding deal on the pullout of foreign troops, including 14,000 from the U.S.

At talks last month, the Taliban agreed with the U.S. on the withdrawal of “all foreign troops from Afghanistan” and “that the soil of Afghanistan would not be used against them,” said Stanikzai ([Bloomberg](#)).

Peace Process

Zalmay Khalilzad, the top U.S. negotiator in peace talks with Afghanistan’s Taliban leaders says he hopes a peace agreement can be achieved before Afghanistan’s next set of elections just five months away ([VOA](#)).

Moscow hosted a meeting of the opinion leaders of Afghan political parties, as well as representatives of the Taliban Movement on February 5-6. The Afghan diasporas living in Russia meeting, the CIS states, a number of European and Asian countries has taken the initiative and organised the meeting. The aim of this event was to form a broad inter-Afghan basis for launching peace process in Afghanistan and to involve main political formations representing the interests of all public strata of this country ([Pajhwok](#)).

The delegates who attended the two-day peace talks in Moscow on Wednesday issued a joint declaration as a move towards initiating an intra-Afghan dialogue to end the nearly two decades of conflict in Afghanistan. The joint declaration which includes nine key points has considered the Moscow meeting as a major step towards promoting intra-Afghan dialogue. The declaration read that ensuring lasting peace, protecting the national sovereignty and promoting social justice, paving ground for complete withdrawal of foreign forces from the country, maintaining national unity, ensuring the principles of Islamic and its national values, preventing the occurrence of dark events of the recent decades in the country and mutual respect and understanding among Afghans were among issues as the delegates have agreed upon in the meeting.

Establishment of an official political office for the Taliban in Qatar, removal of some Taliban leaders from the UN blacklist, providing assurance to the international community that Afghanistan will not be used against any other nations, protection of educational, political, economic and social rights of women and freedom of speech in accordance with the Islamic principles, protection of political and social rights of the entire people of Afghanistan in line with Islamic principles were the other important points which were outlined in the declaration ([Ariana](#)).

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(04 - 10 Feb 19)



ASSESSMENT:

- Actors in the region are getting prepared to post-U.S. era in Afghanistan. In line with the developments, Taliban will more likely find room in the international arena in the coming days.
- Moscow’s** move to facilitate dialogue between Taliban and opposition groups in Afghanistan exacerbates National Unity Government’s (NUG) situation. With Russian apparent vision of Afghanistan where its current rulers have no place, the country will not likely find peace.
- Paradoxically, peace talks cause fighting parties intensify violence to have the upper hand in the negotiations.

Parliamentary elections results	(?)
NATO DEFMIN	February 2019
Presidential Elections	20 July 2019 (?)

The leader of the Taliban's peace negotiations with the US says the insurgents do not want to seize "the whole country by [military] power". Mr Stanikzai, who until recently was the head of the Taliban's political office in Qatar and remains a leading figure in the group, was giving his first interview to the international media while attending a meeting in Moscow with senior Afghan opposition politicians ([BBC](#)).

Pakistan has begun to play a behind-the-scenes but central role in supporting U.S. peace talks with the Afghan Taliban, including by facilitating travel to negotiations. The Pakistani assistance, which has not been reported in such detail before, also includes exerting pressure on Taliban leaders who fail to cooperate, including by detaining members of the militants’ families, the insurgents say ([Reuters](#)).

Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad will lead an interagency delegation to Belgium, Germany, Turkey, Qatar, Afghanistan, and Pakistan from February 10 – 28. This trip is part of an overall effort to facilitate a peace process that protects U.S. national security interests and brings all Afghan parties together in an intra-Afghan dialogue through which they can determine a path for their country’s future. He will meet with our allies and partners to discuss mutual efforts to advance that goal and will consult with the Afghan government throughout the trip ([U.S. Department of State](#)).

Armed Conflict

Casualties

According to the Afghan MoD 219 insurgents killed in the previous week. At least 85 pro-government forces and three civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past week — a spike in casualties among pro-government security forces compared to last week. The deadliest attack took place in Kunduz, where at least 30 Afghan security force members were killed in Taliban attacks on four security outposts in the Telawka area of Kunduz City, the provincial capital ([NYT](#)).

The Pentagon has stepped up airstrikes and special operations raids in Afghanistan to the highest levels since 2014 in what Defense Department officials described as a coordinated series of attacks on Taliban leaders and fighters. The surge, which began during the fall, is intended to give American negotiators leverage in peace talks with the Taliban after President Trump said he would begin withdrawing troops and wind down the nearly 18-year war ([NYT](#)).

Russian Helicopter Procurement

Moscow has no intention of providing helicopters to Afghanistan for free, Russian Presidential Representative for Afghanistan and Director of the Foreign Ministry’s Second Asian Department, Zamir Kabulov, told TASS in an interview. "The current leadership of Afghanistan is behaving in Russian-Afghan relations in such a way that we have no wish at all," Kabulov said. Asked about Washington’s refusal to help Afghanistan purchase aircraft from Russia, the diplomat said that Kabul should look for other avenues to bankroll the deal. "If the Americans wish to provide their helicopters, they are free to do so. If the Afghan government wants to have our helicopters, it should look for ways of persuading the Americans or other donors," Kabulov said. Earlier, the Afghan authorities had repeatedly shown interest in building up military-technical cooperation with Moscow. Russian companies were asked to provide Mi-17 helicopters to Afghanistan ([Russian Aviation](#)).

The United States risks providing Afghanistan with state-of-the-art Black Hawk helicopters that the country's embattled air force does not have the pilots to fly nor the engineers to maintain. The warning, by the U.S. Special Inspector for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), comes amid widespread fears that the Afghan military will struggle to cope with a looming pullout of allied foreign troops after more than 17 years of conflict. The U.S. military has provided the first 16 of a scheduled 159 UH-60 Black Hawks to the Afghan air force and its special forces, a move the watchdog says raises concerns about the country's ability to absorb the rest by 2023 ([NYT](#)).



AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(14 Jan - 03 Feb 19)

Political Situation

U.S. Withdrawal

NATO will not stay in Afghanistan longer than necessary, the alliance's chief said while meeting with acting US defense secretary in Washington ([1TV News](#)).

In a bipartisan rebuke to President Donald Trump, the Senate voted 68-23 Thursday to advance an amendment that would oppose withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria and Afghanistan ([NYT](#)).

Italy is considering pulling its troops out of Afghanistan within a year, a senior defence ministry source said on 25 January 2019, following reports the United States may cut back its own military presence. The source told a group of journalists that Defence Minister Elisabetta Trenta had demanded that military command should start initial planning for a full withdrawal of the Italian contingent in Afghanistan. "The timeframe could be 12 months," the source said ([NYT](#)).

Peace Process

Representatives of the European Union and the Afghan government met in Kabul to discuss specific steps in operationalizing the offer to support Afghanistan’s peace process made by EU High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission Federica Mogherini at the Geneva Ministerial Conference on Afghanistan on 28 November 2018. The meeting addressed the five areas outlined by the European Union in Geneva: making the peace process more inclusive; reforms, including of the security sector; reintegration of former fighters and their families; acting as a possible guarantor of a future peace agreement; and regional trade and connectivity ([EEAS](#)).

Taliban has appointed Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, who was released from a prison in Pakistan in October last year, as head of its political office in Qatar to strengthen its hand in peace talks with the United States ([Ariana](#)).

Negotiations in Afghanistan are going well, U.S. President Donald Trump said on Wednesday (30.01.2019), after U.S. officials earlier this week said there had been significant progress in talks to end 17 years of war in the country ([Reuters](#)). On Monday (28.01.2019), U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad told the New York Times that the United States and the insurgent group had sketched the outlines of an eventual peace deal ([NYT](#)).

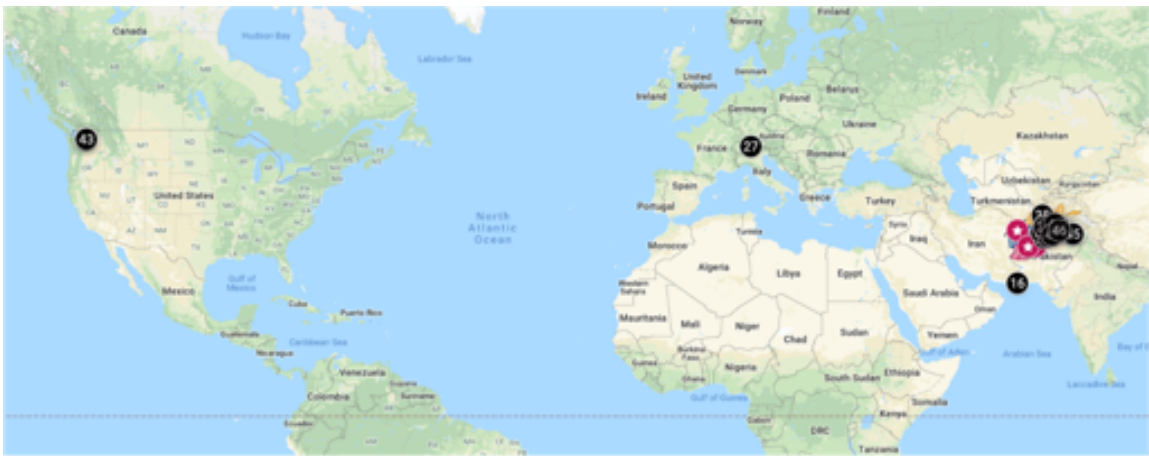
The Taliban are expected to meet with Afghan opposition leaders in Moscow in the coming days, a development that could further undermine the government of President Ashraf Ghani, which has found itself excluded from the talks seeking an end to the 17-year war. Even as the insurgents say they are close to a deal on core issues with American diplomats, they have refused to meet with the Afghan government. Mr. Ghani has repeatedly expressed concern that if the Americans rush to make a deal with the Taliban before the insurgents agree to negotiate with his officials, it could undermine a fragile Afghan state built at tremendous cost ([NYT](#)).

President Ashraf Ghani said that the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan is based on need and that no Afghans want them for the long term in the country ([Ariana](#)).

Parliamentary Elections

The Independent Election Commission announced preliminary results on 14 January 2019 for the delayed parliamentary vote for Kabul (NYT), on 20 January 2019 final results of nine provinces (Daikundi, Laghman, Bامyаn, Jawzjan, Samangan, Uruzgan, Nimruz, Zabul, Parwan) ([Ariana](#)) and on 23 January 2019 for three other provinces (Kapisa, Panjshir and Sar-e-Pul) ([Ariana](#)).

The Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) has accused the election commission of corruption by saying the commission has failed to hold transparent parliamentary elections in the country. The IECC has registered about 18,000 complaints regarding parliamentary elections which was held in 20th and 21th of October, last year ([Ariana](#)).



ASSESSMENT:

- Should **Washington** proceed with the withdrawal, framework nations of Resolute Support Mission (RSM), other allies and RSM partners will follow. It seems that the pace of the withdrawal will synch with political developments in and around Afghanistan. In line with these developments, NATO might initiate a post RSM NATO mission.
- Moscow**’s move to facilitate dialogue between Taliban and opposition groups in Afghanistan exacerbates National Unity Government’s (NUG) situation.
- With lack of transparency, endless fraud allegations and NUG’s inability to manage the election process effectively, parliamentary elections did more harm than good and served NUG’s legitimacy to get further deteriorated. Having seen the candidates, the presidential election process will be much more difficult to cope with.
- There is an urgent need to restore daily life for the suffering Afghans which has not been properly addressed in the peace talks yet.

Parliamentary elections results	January 2019 (?)
NATO DEFMIN	February 2019
Presidential Elections	20 July 2019 (?)

Presidential Elections

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, whose fighters killed thousands in Kabul during the bloody civil war of the 1990s, entered Afghanistan's presidential race on 19 January 2019 in a new challenge to President Ashraf Ghani who allowed him to return from exile two decades he was forced out by the Taliban. His decision to contest the presidential polls in July is seen by analysts as the ex-warlord's attempt legitimize his Hizb-i-Islami party. The faction has been blamed for atrocities committed during Afghanistan's brutal civil war, which led many Afghans to welcome the emergence of the Taliban in 1996 in the hope the hardline Islamist group would restore law and order (NYT).

Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah on Sunday officially registered to run for president in the July presidential elections. With them, 14 candidates have registered their names for the presidential elections including Hakim Torsan, Latif Pedram, Faramuz Tamana, Enayatullah Hafiz, Mohammad Hanif Atmar, Zalmi Rasool, Noor Ul Haq Ulomi, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Ahmad Wali Massoud, Syed Noorullah Jalili, Rahmatullah Nabil, Mohammad Ibrabim Alokozai, Abdullah Abdullah, and Mohammad Ashraf Ghani ([Ariana](#)).

Armed Conflict

Casualties

According to Afghan MOD, 110 insurgents killed during the past week. Besides, At least 51 pro-government forces and eight civilians were killed in Afghanistan during the past week ([NYT](#)).

At least 45 people were killed and as many as 70 were wounded by a suicide bomber who drove an armored Humvee packed with explosives at the base in eastern Maidan Wardak province on 21 January 2019. There were fears the death toll from the daytime assault could increase. The base, which also serves as a training center for pro-government militias, is run by Afghanistan’s intelligence service known as the National Directorate for Security, or NDS ([NYT](#)).

An airstrike on a home in southern Afghanistan (Sangin district) killed 16 civilians from the same extended family. All of the victims belonged to the Akthar Mohammad family and eight children and three women were among the dead. It was not immediately clear if the airstrike was launched by Afghan forces or NATO, which often provides air support to Afghan ground troops ([NYT](#)).

Addressing a panel at the World Economic Forum in Davos, President Ashraf Ghani said that more than 45,000 Afghan security personnel have lost their lives since he took the office in September 2014. “The number of international casualties is less than 72,” he added ([Ariana](#)).

Moscow urges Washington to complete the probe into the US troops’ erroneous air strikes against civilians in Afghanistan and hold culprits liable. Over the past week alone, the US indiscriminate airstrikes in Afghanistan have killed about 35 civilians, the ministry said. "Special attention was captured by the latest incident when a drone’s erroneous strike in the province of Helmand on January 24 killed 16 civilians and the following day a strike was delivered against a funeral procession organized by the relatives of those people. The strike killed 13 more people," the ministry said ([TASS](#)).

Humanitarian Situation

Recent peace negotiations have focused on US troop withdrawal, and whether the Taliban will pledge not to provide a base for international terrorism, with little public discussion of women’s rights ([Human Rights Watch](#)). Neither party has addressed key human rights concerns in the peace process . There is scarcely any representation of women – just three women have been included in the government’s negotiation team of 12 people. There is no word on how the process will ensure victims of war crimes access reparations, let alone how it will ensure accountability for perpetrators. There is no mention of how the limited but important gains on human rights – including women’s and minorities’ rights – will be preserved ([Amnesty International](#)).



Political Situation

U.S. Withdrawal

The U.S. military is drafting plans to withdraw a few thousand troops from Afghanistan while continuing all major missions in the longest war in American history, U.S. officials said, three weeks after President Trump sought options for a more drastic pullout. Trump still wants to remove troops from Afghanistan — eventually all of them — but the current withdrawal probably will be far fewer than 7,000, two senior White House officials said. Military advisers have convinced him that a smaller, and slower, withdrawal is best for now — although officials cautioned that a final decision had not been reached and that the president could order a full pull out at any moment.

Several officials who described the plan were hesitant to name a specific number, citing the evolving nature of the discussions. But some said it could be about half of what Trump was initially seeking. That would mark nearly a full rollback of the 3,900-troop increase Trump authorized in August 2017 ([Washington Post](#)).

It is evident that the withdrawal process in Syria and Afghanistan will happen much more slowly than Trump initially claimed. Shortly after his shock announcement, the president offered significant caveats. The administration has added conditions for a departure from Syria that include defeating the last ISIS holdouts—“We won’t be finally pulled out until ISIS is gone,” Trump said—and protecting U.S. allies such as the Syrian Kurds. The U.S. National-Security Adviser John Bolton claimed that “the timetable flows from the policy decisions that we need to implement.” ([The Atlantic](#)).

Iran and Russia have interpreted the announced U.S. withdrawal from Syria — be it tactical or strategic — as an American failure and an indication that their own policies have succeeded. In Iran, the deputy commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, Brig. Gen. Hossein Salami, has described the US exit as an obvious retreat and a sign that US policies in the region have hit a dead end. In Russia, President Vladimir Putin has stressed that there is no need for a US presence in Syria, suggesting that US policy has been but a failure. Yet, when geopolitics and regional security are considered, many Iranian and Russian officials are skeptical about the withdrawal and do not see it as a significant shift in Washington's Syria strategy ([AI Monitor](#)).

Peace Process

Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad will lead an interagency U.S. delegation to India, China, Afghanistan, and Pakistan from January 8 – 21. Special Representative Khalilzad will meet with Afghan government officials and other interested parties to support and facilitate an inclusive peace process in Afghanistan. The U.S. goal is to promote dialogue among Afghans about how to end the conflict, and to encourage the parties to come together at the negotiating table to reach a political settlement ([U.S. Department of State](#)). Khalilzad also met with EU officials and parties shared their ideas on how best to support future inclusive peace process and achieve sustainable peace ([EEAS Twitter](#)).

The Taliban said on 08 Jan 19 that they had canceled planned peace talks with U.S. officials in Qatar last week over an agenda disagreement. Talks had been planned for two days starting Wednesday (09 Jan 19) in Qatar. Reportedly, the Taliban had rejected requests from regional powers to allow Afghan officials to take part in the discussion ([Reuters](#)).

New Delhi and Moscow are gravely concerned at the situation in Afghanistan. They planned joint projects in Afghanistan and had held two rounds of talks since November on the subject. India and Russia had a similar approach to the Afghan-owned political processes, according to the officials ([PAN](#)).

Afghanistan's national security adviser was in Beijing on Thursday as part of a push by his beleaguered nation for help in ending its 17-year-old war with the Taliban. Hamdullah Mohib met with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, telling him Afghanistan is seeking to "bring some long-term stability to our region." ([NYT](#))

The Taliban must have a role in Afghanistan in future, Iran's foreign minister said on Wednesday, but added that the hardline Islamist group should not have a dominant role ([NYT](#)).

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(07 - 14 Jan 19)



ASSESSMENT:

- **U.S. institutions** are adjusting President’s initial withdrawal calendar in accordance with the realities on the ground. It is highly unlikely to assume that neither U.S. nor its Allies will fully withdraw from Afghanistan in the foreseeable future. Strategic consequences of such a move will not be manageable. That’s why regional actors are sceptical about what is going on in Washington.
- As **Zalmay Khalilzad** continues his efforts to find a common ground between all stakeholders, **Kabul** intensifies consultations with Moscow, New Delhi, Tehran and Beijing, another indication of growing influence of regional actors on Afghanistan.
- Despite tiresome U.S./NATO efforts to transform ANDSF, Afghan Air Forces in particular into a self-sustainable military instrument, it is evident that they are not capable of fulfilling their duties. If civil war continues, **Afghan government** might need foreign military support and assistance whether from U.S./NATO or not.

Presidential candidates’ registration process	January 2019 (TBD after postponement)
NATO MC/CS	15-16 January 2019
Parliamentary elections results	January 2019 (?)
SIGAR 2018Q4 Report	~30 January 2019
NATO DEFMIN	February 2019
Presidential Elections	20 July 2019 (?)

Presidential Elections

Russia has claimed that Afghanistan’s presidential elections were postponed from April to July due to pressure from the United States. Referring to the possible drawdown of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, the Russian Foreign Ministry said that the U.S. military is trying to create some Afghan ‘counter-terrorist units which will operate for the U.S. interests. In reaction to the statement of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Afghan elections, the U.S. Embassy in Kabul in a statement said that the decision to delay presidential elections was made by the Independent Election Commission (IEC) in order to address administrative and technical deficiencies that were apparent in the parliamentary elections in the fall ([Ariana](#)).

Armed Conflict

Casualties

According to Afghan MOD 388 insurgents killed during the past week. Besides, at least 139 pro-government forces and 15 civilians were killed in Afghanistan between 4-10 Jan 2019 ([NYT](#)).

Afghan Air Force

Eleven years after the United States began building an air force for Afghanistan at a cost now nearing \$8 billion, it remains a frustrating work in progress, with no end in sight. Some aviation experts say the Afghans will rely on American maintenance and other support for years.

For years beginning with the Obama administration, part of the American exit strategy has been to build and train the Afghan military — including the air force — to fight the insurgents on its own. That strategy appeared to be undermined in December when Mr. Trump was said to have ordered preparations for half the 14,000 American troops in Afghanistan to come home.

Airstrikes from Afghan aircraft have killed civilians at a disproportionately higher rate than American ones. In July, the United Nations said the Afghan Air Force had been responsible for 52 percent of civilian casualties caused by airstrikes in the first half of 2018, despite having conducted far fewer strikes than coalition aircraft.

At least eight Afghan military helicopters crashed last year, according to a tally by The New York Times. Although Afghan and American commanders say they have tried to crack down on corruption, the use of air force aircraft as personal taxis by Afghan political bigwigs remains a problem. American commanders say theft of aviation fuel delivered by Afghan contractors is another ([NYT](#)).

Economic Developments

Balkh – Istanbul air corridor, linking Afghanistan with European countries via Turkey, inaugurated on Wednesday (9 Jan 19). According to the officials, the Afghan government air corridor program has exported more than \$100 million worth of Afghan goods to global markets during the last one year ([Ariana](#)).

Humanitarian Situation

Child casualties from Afghanistan’s conflict are running at alarming rates, say religious scholars during a UN-backed seminar on human rights in the western province of Herat. Thousands of children in Afghanistan have been killed, injured, maimed, and displaced in recent years. Between January and September 2018, as many as 653 children were killed and 1,483 injured in the conflict according to UNAMA’s latest Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, accounting for 26 per cent of the total civilian casualties ([UN News](#)).

International rights group Human Rights Watch (HRW) has urged major donors to impose sanctions on Afghanistan's newly appointed acting defense minister over alleged war crimes and human rights abuses. President Ashraf Ghani's decision last month to appoint the fiercely anti-Taliban Asadullah Khalid prompted an outcry from human rights organizations which accuse him of being involved in assassinations, torture and illicit drug business while serving as governor of Ghazni and later of southern Kandahar in 2005 and 2008 ([HRW](#)).



## Political Situation:

### Peace Process

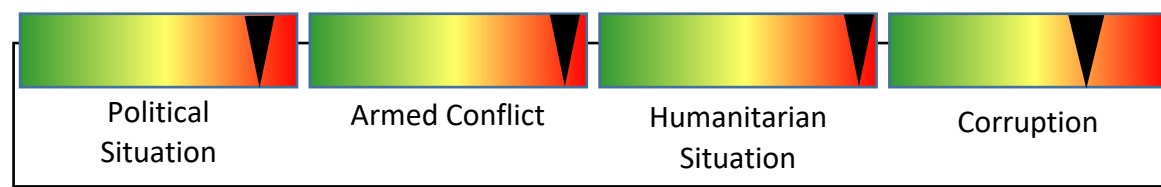
The **Taliban** have rejected Kabul’s offer of talks next month in Saudi Arabia but they will meet U.S. officials to further peace efforts in January ([Reuters](#)). The Taliban want to shift the venue to Qatar, seeking to fend off Riyadh’s push to include the Afghan government in talks ([Reuters](#)).

**Iran** confirmed that a delegation of the Taliban visited Tehran and discussed efforts to bring a negotiated end to Afghanistan's 17-year war ([NYT](#)). Following meeting with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Seyed Abbas Araghchi who arrived in the Afghan capital Kabul, met and held talks with Chief Executive of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Abdullah Abdullah in the afternoon. The Iranian deputy foreign minister further referred to a Taliban delegation visit to Tehran earlier this week, saying “the Islamic Republic of Iran supports the Afghan government and Afghan-led peace talks.” ([Mehr](#)).

The **U.S. Army's chief of staff** made a surprise visit to the Afghanistan's capital, where he met President Ashraf Ghani to discuss prospects for a peaceful end to the country's 17-year war, the United States' longest ([Stars and Stripes](#)).

**Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan** says his country will host the leaders of Pakistan and Afghanistan for a meeting geared toward bringing peace to Afghanistan ([NYT](#)).

**Note:** On 9 November 2018, at the invitation of **the Russian Government** and under the chairmanship of the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov began what has been called “The Moscow Format” to end the armed conflicts and to find appropriate structures of governance in Afghanistan. Present for the first time were representatives of the Afghanistan High Peace Council – a government-appointed body charged with overseeing the peace process first appointed by then President Hamid Kassai and a five-member delegation of the Taliban from its political office in Doha, Qatar. Indicating an awareness of the trans-frontier aspects of the Afghanistan armed conflicts, there were representatives from **China, Pakistan, Iran, India, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan**. In practice each country has its favored groups within Afghanistan. The U.S. declined to participate but sent its chief political officer from the Moscow Embassy as an “observer” ([Transconflict](#)). The conference brought together diplomatic representatives from the Afghan government and the Taliban, which had refused to attend the two previous rounds of these talks in 2017. And yet this conference, too, ended in failure. The Taliban condemned the Afghan president as illegitimate; the Afghan government accused Russia of boosting the Taliban’s legitimacy on the world stage. Nevertheless the Russian Foreign Ministry described the talks as a historic step, potentially leading toward peace ([Washington Post](#)).



## ASSESSMENT:

- Regional actors** are increasingly involved in Afghan politics. Of particular importance is Iran’s growing role in Afghan politics. Regional actors, including **Russia** and **Iran** will have to stabilize Syria and Afghanistan as U.S. pull out its forces from these countries, a task which presumably is beyond their capabilities.
- Discrepancy among **U.S. institutions** - particularly between civilian and military ones - continues over the future of U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Current atmosphere in U.S. politics limits Zalmay Khalilzad’s options in his endeavour to find a peaceful solution to long lasting conflict.
- Taliban** continues to consolidate its gains. For the time being, there seems no reason for Taliban to make compromise. Given the current strategic indications, it is harder than ever to broker a peace deal between Taliban and Afghan government. **U.S.** needs to use other instruments of power rather than military means to convince not only Taliban but also other actors involved to make a peace deal.

Presidential candidates’ registration process	January 2019 (TBD after postponement)
NATO MC/CS	January 2019
Parliamentary elections results	January 2019 (?)
SIGAR 2018Q4 Report	~30 January 2019
NATO DEFMIN	February 2019
Presidential Elections	20 July 2019

### U.S. Withdrawal

Amid reports on a possible withdrawal of American troops, the **U.S. President Donald Trump** at a cabinet meeting on Wednesday (02 Jan 19) insisted on regional countries' role in Afghanistan and said that Russia and Pakistan should be fighting in Afghanistan, not the United States ([TOLO](#)).

## Armed Conflict:

### Casualties

At least 75 members of pro-government forces and 14 civilians were killed this week. Pro-government forces casualties increased this week compared to last week, but civilian casualties were down. The deadliest violence took place in Sar-i-Pul Province, where the Taliban attacked security forces in three areas, killing at least 27 people and wounding 25 others ([NYT](#)). Following the attack, Taliban fighters are threatening major oil wells near Sar-i Pul. The wells in the Angot field, about 11 km east of Sar-e Pul city and Kashkari, 12 km to the south, were developed during the Soviet presence in Afghanistan ([Reuters](#)). At least 10 civilians suffered casualties in two operations by pro-government forces in Paktia and Faryab provinces. Casualties in both provinces were caused by American air power ([NYT](#)).

### Mine Accident

At least 40 people were killed when a gold mine collapsed Sunday (6 Jan 19) in northern Afghanistan ([Reuters](#)).



Political Situation:

U.S. Withdrawal

The situation has put the U.S. generals in the awkward position of attempting to downplay the significance of a potential reduction in U.S. troops in Afghanistan while American diplomats try to negotiate a peace deal with the Taliban. They must do so just weeks ahead of Trump’s State of the Union address, slated for Jan. 22, an event at which presidents often roll out new policy plans. If Trump proceeds with cutting U.S. troop numbers in Afghanistan, many of the remaining forces are likely to focus on counterterrorism operations or supporting forces that carry them out ([Washington Post](#)).

Former senior diplomats who have steered U.S. policy on Afghanistan say U.S. President Donald Trump’s reported decision to pull thousands of troops out of that country complicates U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad’s efforts to broker a cease-fire with the Taliban ([VOA](#)).

Russian government on Wednesday (26 December 2018) welcomed reported US plan to withdraw half of its troops from Afghanistan, considering it "a move in the right direction, which can bring the start of the peace process closer" ([1TV News](#)). But surprisingly, a White House spokesman said Friday that President Trump has not yet ordered the Pentagon to pull troops out of Afghanistan, contradicting reports last week that the president has called for the withdrawal of 7,000 troops ([The Hill](#)).

Peace Process

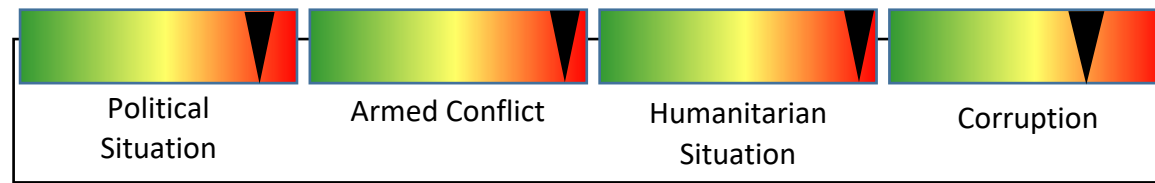
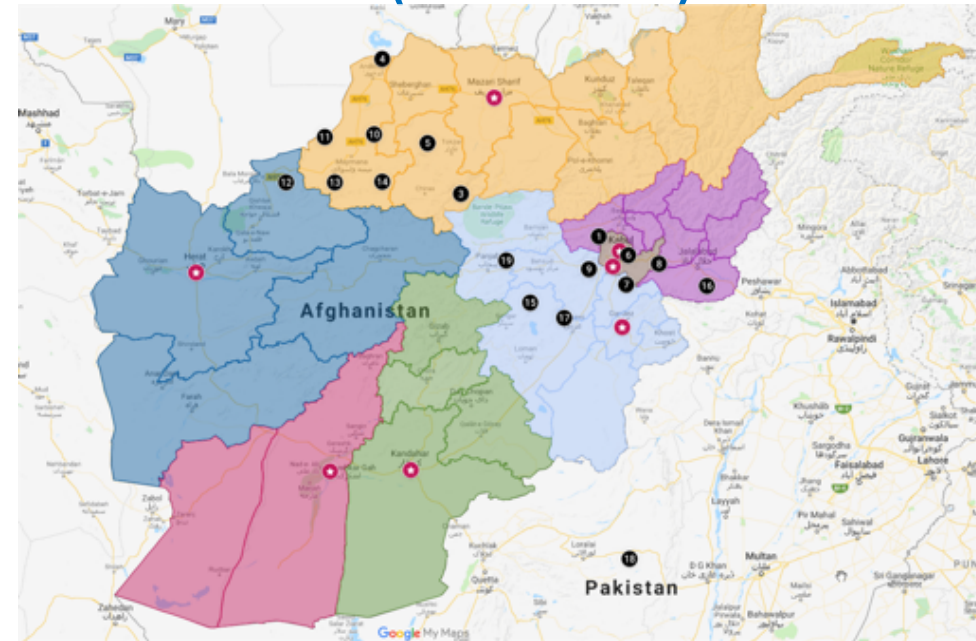
According to the Pakistan media, Pakistan has convinced the Afghan government and the Taliban to hold peace talks ([Ariana](#)). However, Taliban refuses to hold formal talks with the 'Western-backed' Afghan government next month in Saudi Arabia. The militants have insisted on first reaching an agreement with the United States, which the group sees as the main force in Afghanistan since U.S.-led forces toppled the Taliban government in 2001 ([Reuters](#)).

Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on Wednesday (26 December 2018) held a meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov on his trip to Moscow. The ministers held in-depth talks on various bilateral and regional issues, including recent developments concerning the Afghan peace process. The two sides "agreed to continue efforts, including through Moscow Format of Consultations, for supporting reconciliation under an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process" ([Dawn](#)).

Meanwhile, Iran has been holding talks with Afghanistan’s Taliban with the knowledge of the Afghan government, a senior Iranian security official was quoted by the official news agency IRNA as saying on Wednesday (26 December 2018) during a visit to Kabul. Talks between Iran and the Taliban were held “to help curb the security problems in Afghanistan,” Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, was quoted by IRNA as saying ([Reuters](#)).

AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(24-30 Dec 18)



ASSESSMENT:

- Despite harsh criticism, U.S. administration tries to convince Taliban that it is being seen as an interlocutor by publicly announcing its withdrawal intent which seems consistent with its peace process efforts.
- Recent developments might be seen as a success for Taliban in the short-term. However, with its current vision, rhetoric and practice, “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” has no room in international order.
- Afghanistan government has adjusted its election calendar taking into account latest developments. It is highly likely that the presidential elections will further be postponed if U.S./NATO forces begin redeployment within next 6 months. The problem is that Afghan Government will lose its legitimacy if it starts negotiating with Taliban without public support and legitimacy emanating from internationally monitored/recognized elections.
- Regional actors are increasingly involving in Afghan politics. Time will show whether their intervention do good more than harm or not.

Presidential candidates’ registration process	02 January 2019 (TBD after postponement)
NATO MC/CS	January 2019
Parliamentary elections results	January 2019 (?)
SIGAR 2018Q4 Report	~30 January 2019
NATO DEFMIN	February 2019
Presidential Elections	20 July 2019

Presidential Elections

As expected, Afghanistan’s upcoming presidential election will be delayed for three months, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) said on Wednesday (26 December 2018) ([Ariana](#)). Presidential polls will be held July 20, 2019. The elections were postponed to allow time to fix technical problems that surfaced during October’s parliamentary elections, ([Stars and Stripes](#)) argued.

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) says it has sent a draft of the budget required for the coming presidential elections to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and that the organization is yet to give a response in this regard. This comes a day after the IEC said that presidential elections will be delayed for three months in a bid to ensure transparency in the elections and bring necessary electoral reforms ([Ariana](#)).

Armed Conflict:

Casualties

At least 37 pro-zgovernment forces and 48 civilians were killed in different attacks this week. Afghanistan saw a decrease in both Taliban attacks and pro-government-force casualties due to freezing temperatures during the night in most parts of the country. Civilians suffered the highest casualties this week when militants stormed Afghan government offices in Kabul after setting off a car bomb, killing at least 43 people ([NYT](#)). According to the Afghan MOD 279 insurgents have been killed in action last week ([Afghan MOD](#)).

Afghan authorities on Tuesday (25 December 2018) collected 43 bodies from a government compound in the capital Kabul that was targeted by a suicide bomber and extremists armed with assault rifles on Monday (24 December 2018). No militant group has claimed responsibility for the complex attack that was identical to previous attacks by Taliban insurgents on government offices, foreign buildings, and military bases. However, the Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a statement that the group was not involved in the attack ([Reuters](#)).

Privatization of Afghanistan Campaign

Private Security Company Blackwater’s founder and former CEO Erik Prince engaged heavily with the media to promote the privatization of 17-year Afghan War which he argued has become too burdensome. The news of a leaning on a smaller number of privatized forces, instead of a larger U.S. military footprint may be welcomed by current U.S. military leadership on the ground including former Joint Special Operations Command chief, now COM RSM, Army Lt. Gen. Scott Miller. In an previous exclusive interview with Military Times, Prince said he would scrap the NATO mission there and replace the estimated 23,000 forces in country with a force of 6,000 contracted personnel and 2,000 active-duty special forces ([Zero Hedge](#)).



**Political Situation:**

**U.S. Withdrawal**

The Donald Trump administration has ordered the US military to start withdrawing roughly 7,000 troops from Afghanistan, a move that is likely to plunge the war-torn country further into chaos. President Trump made the decision to pull out the troops — about half the number the US has in Afghanistan now — at the same time he decided to pull American forces out of Syria ([The Sentinel](#)).

US President Donald J. Trump’s demand seems to have triggered the resignation of Secretary of Defense James Mattis—viewed by many as a seasoned strategist and supporter of a nuanced approach to the US missions in Syria and Afghanistan. Trump’s almost simultaneous decisions on Syria and Afghanistan could have been partly driven by short-term domestic as well as narrow foreign policy considerations ([Atlantic Council](#)).

Afghan officials and America’s Western partners reacted with unease to reports that the United States’ partial withdrawal, after tentative steps toward peace talks ([Reuters](#)).

Moscow prefers to wait patiently and analyze what is happening in actual fact. "The Kremlin is primarily interested in ensuring that the situation in Afghanistan remains stable, and that there is no place there for the proliferation of radical ideology and extremist influence, and that ISIL (ISIS or Daesh) and other fanatical organizations do not grow stronger there," Peskov stressed. "Since Afghanistan has a long border with our partners in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the CIS, it is crucial for us to make sure that everything that is done there does not result in the destabilization of the situation," he emphasized ([Fars News](#)).

**Peace Process**

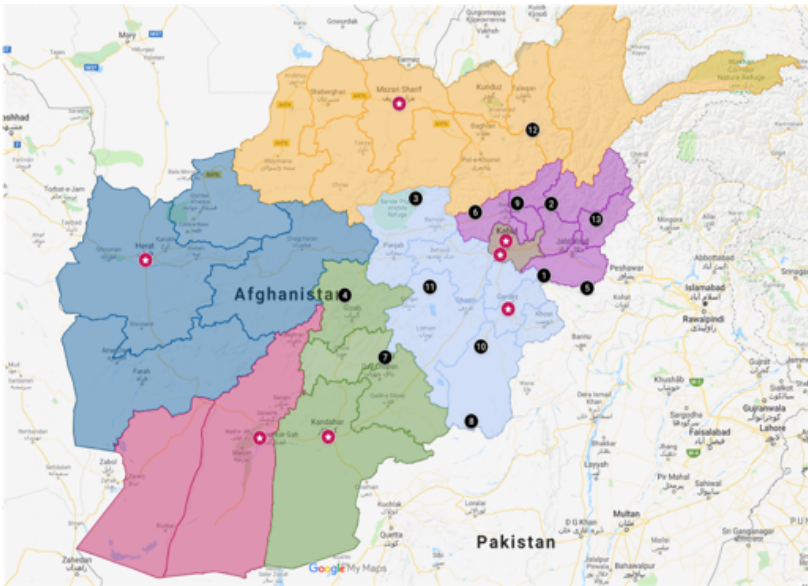
Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad arrived on 19 December in Kabul to update President Ghani and CEO Abdullah on is engagements with regional partners and other interested parties to reach a negotiated settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan. Special Representative Khalilzad arrives in Kabul after three days of meetings in Abu Dhabi, including the fourth round of quadrilateral meetings between the United States, Afghanistan, The United Arab Emerates and Saudi Arabia ([US Embassy in Afghanistan](#)).

Zalmay Khalilzad has told that they have talked in Abu Dhabi about a three-month ceasefire (UAE&Saudi proposal) for addressing the issues through joint intra-Afghans dialogues in the meeting with Taliban officials in UAE ([Ariana](#)).

A negotiated end to the 17-year conflict in Afghanistan “has never been more real...than it is now”, has said Mr. Yamamoto, who is the head of the United Nations peace mission in the country and also the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)).

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(17-23 Dec 18)



**ASSESSMENT:**

- Trump’s hasty decision to pull U.S. forces out of Afghanistan (and Syria) will certainly affect both political and military domains. On the political side, Taliban and other fractions will probably declare victory over Afghan government and International Forces, will have a stronger negotiation position in the peace talks (if they still wish to sit on the table) and will use their propaganda machine all over the world to resurge jihadi movements since they have a success story now. On the military side, ANDSF run the risk of collapse without U.S. enabler support. Allies and partners that contribute to NATO Resolute Support Mission will certainly reconsider their policies and most likely take a stance similar to U.S. which means a diminishing western support to Afghan Government in the coming days.
- Since it is not possible for Afghan Government to function without external support, it will desperately turn its face towards its neighbours. It goes without saying that China, Russia, India and Iran’s influence will grow in Afghanistan.
- As Afghan Government loses influence warlords will gain room to manoeuvre.

Presidential candidates’ registration process	02 January 2019
NATO MC/CS	January 2019
Parliamentary elections results	January 2019 (?)
SIGAR 2018Q4 Report	~30 January 2019
NATO DEFMIN	February 2019
Presidential Elections	20 April 2019

**Presidential Elections**

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) on Saturday officially began the registration process of candidates for coming presidential elections in the country. According to the timeline of IEC, the registration process of eligible candidates for the presidential vote will end on January 2, new year. IEC said that so far at least 22 individuals have received the candidacy information package for the April presidential elections. However President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah yet to get the package ([Ariana](#)).

According to the Afghan government sources, 262 insurgents have been killed between 10-16 December 2018 ([Afghan MOD](#)).

**Armed Conflict:**

**Casualties**

Afghan casualties finally dropped this week, with 45 security force deaths and 38 civilians killed, by rockets, airstrikes and an I.E.D. The reduced casualty rate reflected the normal reduction in the war’s tempo during the winter months, although that reduction had been much delayed. Once again, the preponderance of Taliban attacks was in the west and north of the country, typically with insurgents overrunning small outposts. Meanwhile, the Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan has been quiet for some time now ([NYT](#)).

**Humanitarian Situation:**

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the UN Migration Agency (IOM) launched Afghanistan’s National Referral Mechanism and Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Online Database in Kabul to strengthen counter trafficking protection measures of the Government of Afghanistan ([USAID](#)).

The People and Government of the Republic of Korea have donated around USD 2.2 million in support of most vulnerable children and women affected by displacement due to drought in Afghanistan. The contribution will protect 21,000 families, more than half are children, from the harsh winter season ([Ariana](#)).

**Corruption:**

In November 2018, a former Department contractor was sentenced to 5 months in prison followed by 3 years of supervised release and ordered to pay \$33,370 in restitution. In July 2018, the contractor, who worked in Kandahar, Afghanistan, was convicted of three counts of theft and unauthorized sale of government property and one count of interstate transportation of stolen property. OIG and Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction special agents determined that the former contractor stole and resold approximately \$48,900 worth of equipment that was meant for excess under the Foreign Excess Personal Property Program ([State OIG](#)).



# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

## (10-16 Dec 18)

### Political Situation:

#### Peace Process

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan arranged a meeting between U.S. and Taliban officials which will be held on Monday (17 Dec) in the United Arab Emirates to push a political settlement to the war in Afghanistan ([VOA](#)). The Afghan government will not have any representative in the U.S.-Taliban talks in Pakistan ([Ariana](#)).

#### Regional Cooperation

Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan held the 2nd Afghanistan-China-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue in Kabul, Afghanistan on 15th December 2018. The three sides agreed to promote China-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral cooperation under the framework of jointly building the Belt and Road Initiative. They reiterated their support to the Afghan-owned, and Afghan led inclusive peace process. China expressed its readiness to support Afghanistan and Pakistan in building immigration reception center and drinking water supply schemes at each side of the Ghulam Khan Khel crossing point. China supports enhanced coordination between Afghanistan and Pakistan on major energy and connectivity projects including the construction of Quetta-Kandahar railway and Kabul-Peshawar Motorway and Railway. To advance their cooperation in the fields of Counter-Terrorism, the three sides signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Counter-Terrorism ([Afghan MFA](#)).

India and Russia are exploring the possibility of setting up a joint mechanism to counter the increasing threats from the militant groups in Afghanistan. India had also participated in the multilateral meeting on Afghanistan hosted by Moscow last month at a non-official level. The Taliban also attended this key meeting for the first time. According to Indian officials, there could be more multilateral meets on Afghanistan in the coming weeks and months to find ways to stabilise the situation in the embattled nation ([The Statesman](#)).

#### Presidential Elections

According to the Independent Election Commission the registration process of candidates for presidential elections will begin 22nd of December 2018 and will end on January 2, 2019 ([Ariana](#)).

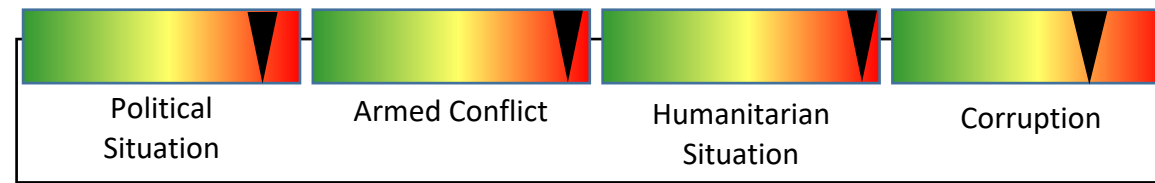
#### Geneva Conference

The Members of the U.N. Security Council welcomed the outcome of the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan on 27-28 November, co-hosted by the government of Afghanistan and the United Nations, which renewed the partnership and cooperation of the government of Afghanistan and the international community for Afghanistan's peace, prosperity and self-reliance midway through the Transformation Decade (2015-2024) ([UNAMA](#)).

### Armed Conflict:

#### Casualties

Afghan security force casualties greatly increased in the past week, with



### ASSESSMENT:

- Reinvigorated peace process enters into a new phase as U.S. and Taliban formally, directly and publicly meet in UAE.
- Regional actors are increasingly involving in Afghanistan as U.S. send signals of exit.
- Aging Russian equipment without decent logistics support hamper ANDSF efficiency on the ground.

### Event Calendar:

- NATO MC/CS  
January 2019
- Parliamentary elections results  
(?)  
January 2019
- SIGAR 2018Q4 Report  
~30 January 2019
- NATO DEFMIN  
February 2019

152 dead, despite the cold weather at a time when the fighting normally slows down. Instead of focusing on taking over government positions and looting bases, the insurgents appear to be focusing on maximizing casualties in hit-and-run attacks ([NYT](#)). According to the Afghan government sources, 320 insurgents have been killed between 10-16 December 2018 ([Afghan MOD](#)).

#### Helicopter Crashes

On 11 December 2018, a Mi 17 helicopter crash landed in Shege-Reg area, Panjwayee district of Kandahar, south west of airfield ([Afghan MOD](#)). Another Military Helicopter crashed in Faryab on December 12, the Taliban claimed. The helicopter was identified a Russian-made Mi-17. The AAF operates more than 50 Mi-8\17 helicopters in its “Special Mission Wing”. These helicopters are mainly used to support the special operations of the Afghan National Army (ANA) Commandos. The AAF lost ten helicopters in the last nine months, most of them were Mi-17s. During the last two years, the NATO signed several contracts with companies in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia [all members of the US-led pact] to maintain this type of helicopters without involving Russia. This may be the reason behind the bad technical condition of these of helicopters. Russian defense experts had warned the NATO from relying on inexperienced companies to maintain them ([Southfront](#)).

#### Afghan forces abandon Shebkoh district of Farah after Taliban pressure

Afghan forces abandoned a remote district in the west of the country, leaving the area to Taliban insurgents after the government failed to resupply dozens of troops stationed there. Local officials said the Shebkoh district of Farah province, bordering Iran, has been under Taliban siege for months, making it difficult for the government to send reinforcements ([Reuters](#)).

#### Australia delivers over 15,000 SILVERSHIELD systems to Afghan forces

The Australian defense officials have said more than 15,000 SILVERSHIELD systems have been delivered to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. SILVERSHIELD is the latest evolution in vehicle-mounted systems being developed under the REDWING program, which provides protection against radio controlled improvised explosive devices, according to the Department of Defense of Australia ([Khaama](#)).

### Humanitarian Situation:

The U.S. government's Promote: Women in Government (WIG) project, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) observed the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence yesterday at an event hosted in collaboration with the Ministry of Women's Affairs. The 16 Days of Activism is an international campaign from November 25 to December 10 to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls. Through WIG, USAID provides a year-long internship to more than 3,000 women to prepare them for government careers ([USAID](#)).



Political Situation:

Parliamentary Election Results

The Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan announced the initial results for Parliamentary Elections in Kunar, Nuristan, Samangan, Sari Pul, and Maidan Wardak provinces ([Khaama](#)). However, the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) announced that the results of voting at all polling centers in Kabul parliamentary elections have been invalidated. According to the complaints commission, evidence of widespread fraud is the main reason behind the decision ([Ariana](#)).

Reconciliation Process

Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad will travel to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Russia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Belgium, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar with an interagency delegation from December 2 – 20 ([US Department of State](#)). In Afghanistan Khalilzad met with President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah. The discussion centered on his regional engagement and Afghan preparations for negotiations to reach a political settlement to the conflict ([US Embassy in Afghanistan](#)). He emphasized that all war factions in Afghanistan including the Taliban insurgent group, the Afghan government, and the U.S. are seeking a political settlement. Khalilzad reiterated that it would be good if there is an agreement with the Taliban before the upcoming presidential elections. Regarding the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan, which is a key condition for the Taliban insurgent group to start peace negotiations, Khalilzad said that the U.S. want to be satisfied that Afghanistan will never become a platform to threaten West ([Ariana](#)). While Khalilzad was in Moscow to discuss the Afghan peace process with Russian officials, The adopted U.N. resolution (which Russia voted against) that pledge continued support to Afghanistan in rebuilding state, eliminating terrorism and narcotics and supporting Afghan peace process was approved by the United National General Assembly on December 6 ([TOLO](#)). Russian and Chinese interest in Afghanistan is understandable, along with Pakistan, Iran and Central Asian states. Though these countries supported US and its NATO allies after 9/11 events, now they express some doubts about the US interests and plans in Afghanistan ([Valdai](#)).

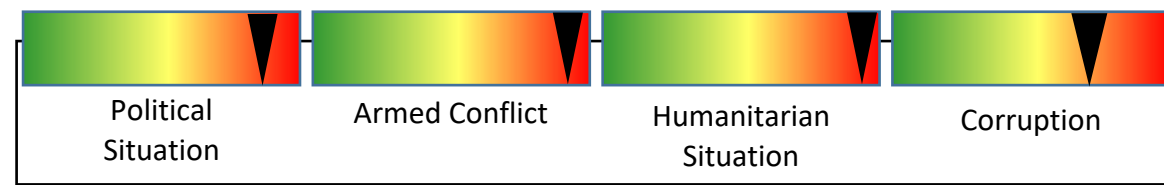
NATO Foreign Ministerial

Resolute Support Foreign Ministers gathered in Brussels last week. In the statement issued, ministers praised parliamentary election process which were the first to be completely led, administered and secured by Afghans and encouraged the parties towards a lasting peace. The statement reads that the future military role of the international community in Afghanistan will be among the issues to be discussed in an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process ([NATO](#)).

During the ministerial, the NATO Secretary General announced that he has appointed Sir Nicholas Kay of the United Kingdom as the next NATO

# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(29 Nov - 09 Dec 18)



ASSESSMENT:

- 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.

Event Calendar:

- NATO MC/CS  
January 2019
- Parliamentary elections results  
(?)  
January 2019
- SIGAR 2018Q4 Report  
~30 January 2019
- NATO DEFMIN  
February 2019

Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan. Sir Nicholas Kay is currently serving as UK Ambassador to Afghanistan and will replace Ambassador Cornelius Zimmermann of Germany in March 2019 ([NATO](#)).

Armed Conflict:

According to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo who addressed to the audience in German Marshall Fund (Brussels) when he came to Brussels to attend NATO FORMIN, the ICC’s Office of the Prosecutor is trying to open an investigation into U.S. personnel in connection with the war in Afghanistan ([U.S. Department of State](#)). Addressing an event organized by the Washington Post, Gen. Dunford said that the U.S. should remain in Afghanistan to contain the insurgent groups that pose threats not only to South Asia but to also to the American people ([Ariana](#)).

Casualties

Preliminary findings from the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) indicate that as many as 23 civilians were killed and three injured in an airstrike in Garmser district of Helmand province during operations conducted by pro-government forces against Taliban in the area ([UNAMA](#)). Russia demands the US-led coalition in Afghanistan probe into airstrikes and punish those responsible ([TASS](#)). According to the independent sources, the death toll in Afghanistan dropped this week, with 50 deaths confirmed for pro-government forces and 14 for civilians ([NYT](#)). Taliban militants have killed at least 14 Afghan army soldiers and have taken more than 10 hostages in western Herat province after launching a coordinated attack in Shindand district ([Ariana](#)). According to the Afghan MoD, 442 insurgents were killed between 29 November and 9 December 2018 ([Afghan MOD](#)).

Economic Developments/Corruption:

Geneva Conference Pledges

A financial package worth €474 million was concluded at the Geneva ministerial conference on Afghanistan on 27-28 November 2018. The country’s public sector will receive €311 million to sustain its reform program and for the fight against corruption. Afghanistan’s justice sector reform will be aided by €31 million of EU cooperation funds. €37 million will be used for the reintegration of people on the move and returnees in Afghanistan. For next year’s presidential and provincial council elections, support will amount to €15.5 million ([EEAS](#)).

Anti-Corruption Day

The United Nations marked International Anti-Corruption Day in Kabul by reaffirming its support to Afghanistan’s anti-corruption initiatives and by highlighting the ongoing need to accelerate reform in the interest of improving the lives of all Afghans ([UNAMA](#)).



### Political Situation:

#### Reconciliation Process

Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani on 28 November 2018 announced that a 12-member team was formed to enter into negotiations with the Taliban. Ghani announced this at UN-backed conference in Geneva. The announcement comes after US special envoy for Afghanistan reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, urged the Afghan government and the Taliban to form their negating teams ([TV1 News](#)). The National Unity Government (NUG) has also made clear its position ahead of the negotiations. The government seek a peace agreement in which the Afghan Taliban would be included in a democratic and inclusive society, respecting the following tenets:

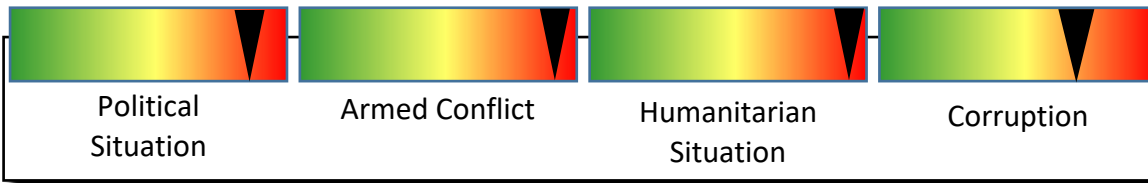
- The Constitutional rights and obligations, of all citizens, especially women, are ensured.
- The Constitution is accepted, or amendments proposed through the constitutional provision.
- The Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and civil service function according to law.
- No armed groups with ties to transnational terrorist networks or transnational criminal organizations, or with ties to state/non-state actors, seeking influence in Afghanistan will be allowed to join the political process and Afghan people need an elected government with a mandate to obtain ratification, implement the peace agreement, and lead the societal reconciliation process.

The government envisage a five-phase approach, commencing with an intra-Afghan dialogue, followed by discussions with Pakistan and the United States, followed by participation of regional actors, the Arab-Islamic world, and finally, NATO and non-NATO countries. It also stresses that presidential elections in spring 2019 are key to successful peace negotiations. Implementation of the peace process will minimally require a period of five years, according to the government ([TV1 News](#)).

#### Presidential Election Delay

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) on Sunday reported of a possible delay in the upcoming presidential elections. The original date for the presidential elections has been set for April next year ([Ariana](#)).

Election officials in Afghanistan are considering delaying next year's presidential election by several months, amid disarray in counting votes from last month's parliamentary balloting. Holding presidential elections by April 20 was previously one of international donors' red



### ASSESSMENT:

- 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,

#### Event Calendar:

●Geneva Conference on Afghanistan	27-28 November 2018
●NATO FORMIN	
4-5 December 2018	
●NATO MC/CS	
January 2019	
●Parliamentary elections results (?)	January 2019
●SIGAR 2018Q4 Report	~30 January 2019

lines in Afghanistan, especially after an embarrassing four-year delay in holding parliamentary elections.

The four elections scheduled for April 20 include the presidential vote, elections for provincial councils from the country's 34 provinces, and inaugural elections for councils in the country's 400 districts. In addition, the parliamentary elections that took place across the country on Oct. 20 were postponed in Ghazni Province until April 20 because of poor security.

Some politicians and observers are suggesting that the electoral fiasco might help encourage peace talks with the Taliban, who are unlikely to agree to a deal if a new president is about to be elected for a five-year term ([NYT](#)).

Meanwhile, Taliban confirmed that it met with a high-level delegation of US officials in Qatar, and quashed news reports that the group wanted the Afghan government to postpone the April 2019 presidential elections and establish an interim government. According to The Associated Press, "the Taliban pressed for a postponement of next year's presidential elections and the establishment of an interim government under a neutral leadership." ([LWJ](#)).

#### Armed Conflict:

The greatly decreased death toll among security forces (42) between 16-22 Nov 2018, indicated that clashes between the insurgents and the government decreased in the past week, but a larger number of civilians, 73, lost their lives — particularly due to a massive bombing in the capital, on the birthday of Prophet Mohammed, the first major attack in more than a month. Most of the reported attacks were small in scale, also unlike previous weeks, with few casualties ([NYT](#)). According to Afghan MOD, 307 insurgents killed between 19-26 Nov 2018.

Gen. Austin Scott Miller, the commander of Resolute Support Mission and U.S. forces in Afghanistan, visited Ghazni ([Khaama](#)) and Farah provinces. He has confirmed that some NATO troops will be deployed to Farah province in order to support Afghan forces and target the Taliban insurgents with airstrikes ([Ariana](#)). The day after his visit at least 18 policemen were killed after Taliban insurgents ambushed a convoy of Afghan forces in Farah ([Ariana](#)). An Afghan army helicopter has been crashed in southern Kandahar province of Afghanistan on 24 November 2018 ([Ariana](#)).

#### Economic Developments/Corruption:

The European Union announced 474 million euros (\$535 million) of financial aid for Afghanistan as top diplomats gathered for a U.N.-backed conference focusing on development, peace and security in the impoverished, rebellion-wracked country ([U.S. News](#)).



#### Political Situation:

##### Reconciliation Process

Pakistan has released two Taliban members from prison during reporting period, apparently as a part of U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad’s efforts for peace in Afghanistan. The new development comes after a delegation of Taliban attended an international conference on Afghanistan in Moscow ([Ariana](#)). To underline the U.S. position in reconciliation process, Karen Decker, the Deputy Chief of Mission of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul said that the step that the Afghan government has to take is to formulate an authoritative negotiating team for peace talks with the Taliban ([Ariana](#)). On 16 November 2018, The U.S. special representative for Afghanistan reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad has met with the Taliban delegation for the second time in Qatar ([Ariana](#)). One of the Afghanistan High Peace Council (HPC) representative said that the United States has probably reached on an agreement to set a timetable for withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan, following the peace talks with Taliban delegation in Qatar ([Ariana](#)).

##### Moscow Conference

On November 9, 2018 Russia finally convened its long-heralded peace conference on Afghanistan. Attending the conference were members of the Taliban as well as the governments of Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Iran and China. A representative of the Embassy of the United States in Moscow also attended as an observer, as did members of the Afghan government’s Peace Council, but no member of the formal government in Kabul. It epitomizes, among other things, Moscow’s expanding collaboration with the Taliban that began with intelligence sharing and consultations in 2013 and has continued up to the present ([Jamestown](#)). Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Friday voiced hope that a conference on Afghanistan taking place in Moscow could help pave the way for peace talks. Russia's first attempt to hold the meeting in September fell through after the Afghan authorities refused to attend ([Mail Online](#)). The Afghan government emphasized on peace process based on the accepted principles on Kabul and Tashkent summits which were accordance with national and international consensus and thus the government had not sent any representative to the sent, the statement added ([Pajhwok](#)). In his opening remarks on Moscow conference, Taliban representative said that the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan, the release of Taliban prisoners, and removal of some Taliban figures from the UN blacklist are the key conditions of the armed group for entering into peace talks ([LWJ](#)).

##### Geneva Conference

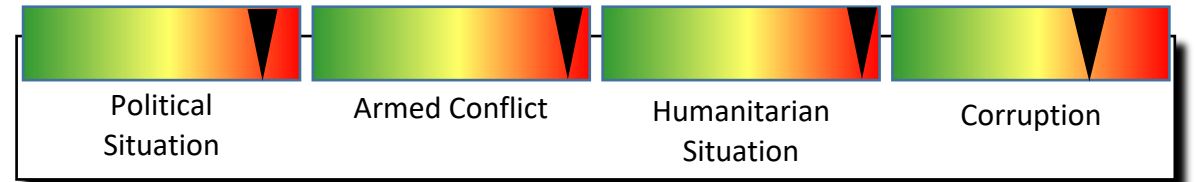
Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Cooperation of Afghanistan Adela Raz met in her office the Ambassador of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Mr. Huseyin Avni Botsali. Deputy Minister Raz and Ambassador Botsali discussed and exchanged views on matters of mutual relevance to Afghanistan and the mission, focusing mainly on the Geneva Conference which will be held between 27-28 November 2018 ([Afghanistan MOFA](#)).

##### Election Delay

The Wall Street Journal reported that the Trump administration is discussing whether to press the Afghan government to suspend coming presidential elections, as the U.S. seeks to engage the Taliban in talks to end the 17-year war ([WSJ](#)). The office of President Ashraf Ghani has rejected such plan, saying the election will be held as scheduled. The U.S. Ambassador in Kabul John Bass on 13 November 2018 denied WSJ and said that the United States is committed to helping the Afghan electoral commissions and the government to hold the presidential elections in April next year. Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah also said that presidential elections will be held on due time, adding that peace is a separate issue and is not related to election ([Ariana](#)). On the other hand, a number of political parties on 14 Nov 2018 welcomed delays in the upcoming presidential election and the idea about the establishment of an interim government. Politicians emphasize that they support any plan which can help to end the ongoing violence in Afghanistan. Former Taliban members also praise the proposed plan but emphasize on withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan ([Ariana](#)).

##### U.S. Sanctions Against Iran

The United States has exempted the Chabahar port along with an attached railway project and Iranian petroleum shipments to Afghanistan after re-imposing sanctions on Tehran. Chabahar port was inaugurated last year in the Indian Ocean. It enables India to trade with Central Asia and Africa and bypass rival Pakistan ([Ariana](#)).



#### ASSESSMENT:

- 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.

#### Event Calendar:

- Preliminary results of the parliamentary elections 23 November 2018
- Geneva Conference on Afghanistan 27-28 November 2018
- NATO FORMIN 4-5 December 2018
- NATO MC/CS January 2019
- SIGAR 2018Q4 Report ~30 January 2019
- NATO DEFMIN

#### Armed Conflict:

##### Casualties

17 years after U.S. forces and the Northern Alliance captured Kabul, half of Afghanistan has been retaken by the Taliban and the war is dragging on ([Forbes](#)). President Ashraf Ghani revealed that 28,529 members of the Afghan security forces have been killed in the past four years, since 2015. While he gave no breakdown of that number, previous government estimates put security force death tolls at 5,000 in 2015 and nearly 7,000 in 2016; after that, the Afghan government began classifying casualty totals. That means a total of about 16,500 this year and last year, about 25 a day or 175 a week — far more than Afghan government officials are usually willing to confirm. That average rate was exceeded between 9 – 15 November 2018 , despite the onset of cold weather in most of the country. The New York Times confirmed that at least 242 members of the security forces were killed, once again a significant increase over the previous week. Historically, fighting has greatly declined by this time in past years ([NYT](#)). According to Afghanistan MOD figures 634 insurgents KIA during the reporting period ([Afg MOD](#)).

Since President Trump announced a new Afghan strategy last August and committed more troops to the country, the number of bombs dropped by the U.S. coalition has surged dramatically. According to U.S. Air Forces Central Command data, manned and unmanned aircraft released 5,213 weapons between January and the end of September 2018. Previously, 2010 held the record for weapons dropped on Afghanistan with 5,101 releases recorded in total. That was a deadly year which saw 711 ISAF troops and 1,271 civilians killed. Towards the end of Obama's presidency, the number of bombs dropped declined with 947 instances in 2015 and 1,337 in 2016 ([Forbes](#)). Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at a security forum in Halifax said that the Taliban "are not losing" in Afghanistan, and much more needs to be done to bring peace to the war-torn country. Dunford said that while there would never be a "military solution" on its own to bring peace to Afghanistan, the United States and its NATO partners are working to leverage military, political and economic pressure to convince the Taliban it is in their interest to negotiate a political solution to the crisis with the government in Kabul ([CNN](#)).

In [Farah](#), reportedly, Afghan security forces have killed 34 Taliban militants and injured 17 others in an ambush in western Farah on 08 November 2018 ([Ariana](#)). The Afghan military forces drove the Taliban back to the outskirts of Farah City on 12 November 2018, after hours of battle to prevent the insurgents from seizing control of the western provincial capital. The Taliban attacked the city from different directions on Sunday night (11/12 November 2018), reportedly killing dozens of local policemen. The military analysts blamed Iran for the battle in Farah, saying the country is funding the militants to disrupt the construction process of water dams in the province ([Ariana](#)). In Bala Buluk/Pusht-e-Koh/Farah, Kabul govt lose another battalion in Farah province, Taliban attacked on 14 November 2018 the battalion with the help of 6 infiltrators and killed 30 ANDSF. The battalion was placed in Farah Rod district, Taliban seized all weapons and equipments and overrun the base completely ([Twitter @Zulmai\\_Afghan](#)).

In [Ghazni](#) (Sang-e-Masha/Jaghori), an elite ANDSF commando company of 50 soldiers was almost entirely destroyed by Taliban, a haven for an ethnic Hazara Shiite minority that has been persecuted by extremists ([NYT](#)).

In [Kunduz](#), at least 14 soldiers killed and several others injured in a Taliban attack over a military base in Dash-e-Archi district. Zabihullah Mujahid, a spokesman for the Taliban militant group has claimed that they have killed a total of 39 security personnel in three incidents in Kunduz and have seized weapons and ammunition ([Ariana](#)).

##### Economic Developments/Corruption:

##### Afghanistan Signs Landmark Energy Transmission MoU with Turkish Company

A MoU was signed between the Afghan government and a Turkish company Çalık Holding on Wednesday for TAP (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan) transmission line that will bring 1,000 MW of electricity and \$100 million yearly to Afghanistan. Çalık Holding invested in \$1.6 billion in the project ([Ariana](#)).

##### Ghani restricts the authorities of all govt institutions in procurement division

President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani has restricted the authorities of all governmental institutions in procurement division authorizing the national procurement department of taking charge of all procurement related issues of the ministries and institutions ([Khaama](#)).



# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(31 Oct - 06 Nov 18)

## Political Situation:

### Russia to Host Afghanistan Peace talks on Nov 9.

04.11.2018 Russia will host international talks on Afghanistan on November 9, with representatives of both the Afghan government and the Taliban, the foreign ministry said in a statement. Moscow said it had also invited representatives from the US as well as India, Iran, China, Pakistan and five former Soviet republics in Central Asia to take part. (The International News) <https://goo.gl/yV8BDx>

### NATO Secretary General and top military leaders visit Afghanistan.

06.11.2018 NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg paid an official visit to Kabul on Tuesday (6 November 2018), accompanied by the Chairman of the Military Committee, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach, and the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Curtis Scaparrotti. Mr. Stoltenberg underlined that NATO's support for Afghanistan will continue, saying: "NATO is determined to see Afghanistan succeed. That's why around 16,000 troops from 39 countries serve in our Resolute Support Mission". (NATO Hq) <https://goo.gl/ydvb8q>

### IEC Postpones Results of Parliamentary Election.

05.11.2018 The Independent Election Commission (IEC) has postponed the preliminary results of the last month's parliamentary elections. The results were expected to be announced on November 10, but it has been delayed to at least 10 days. The IEC cited issues in "filtration and transportation process" of ballots over the delay. "The preliminary results [from the vote] in all provinces except Kabul will be announced on November 23, and the results from Kabul will be revealed on the first day of next month," said Sayed Hafizullah Hashimi, a Spokesman for the IEC. (Ariana)

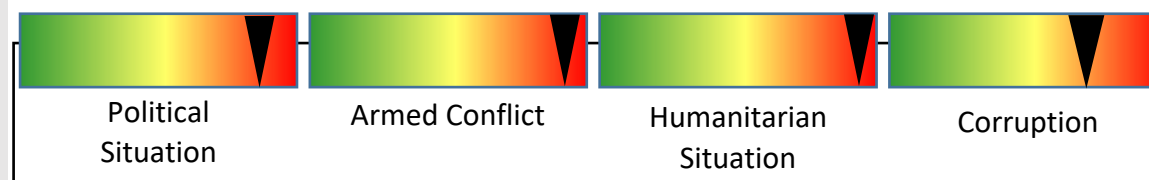
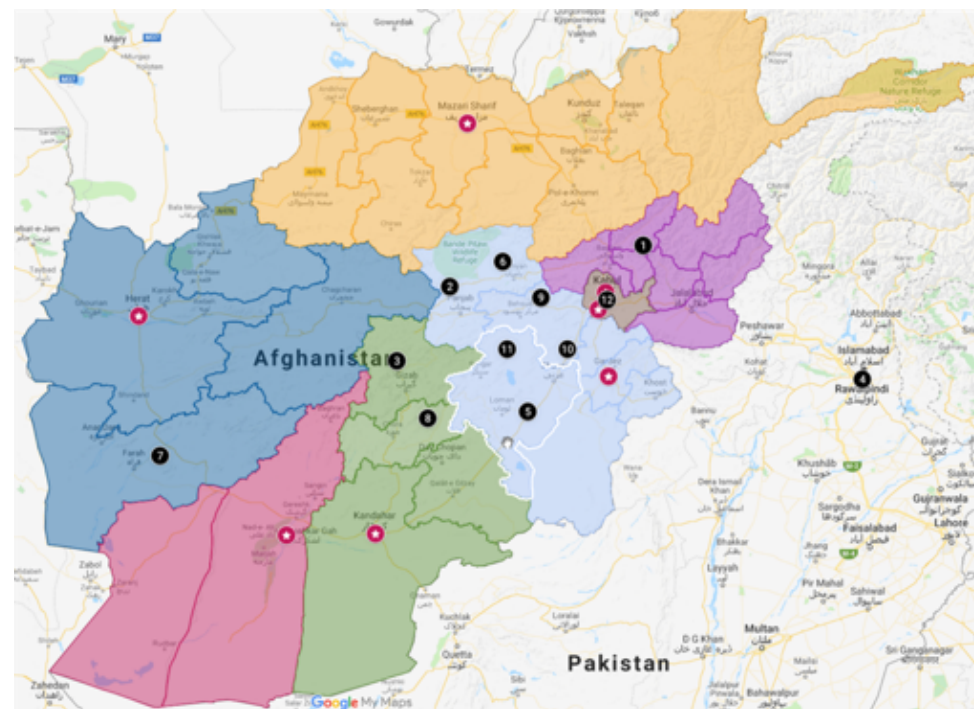
<https://goo.gl/Z38PYR>

### IEC Announces Timeline for Upcoming Presidential Election.

02.11.2018 The Independent Election Commission (IEC) on 02 Nov 2018 announced a timeline for the upcoming presidential election which is set for April next year. According to the IEC timeline, the presidential election will be held on April 20th and its final results will be announced on May 30th next year. If the candidates failed to earn required votes, the second round of the election will be held on June 13th. In addition, the voter registration drive for the presidential election will begin from 15th December until 30th. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/B4rBsZ>

### Ghani Seeks Second Term as President.

02.11.2018 President Ashraf Ghani has revealed that he is seeking re-election in the upcoming presidential election set for April 2019. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/BgVrAE>



## ASSESSMENT:

- 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.

## Armed Conflict:

### ANA Helicopter Crashes in Farah, Killing All 25 On Board.

31.10.2018 An Afghan army helicopter crashed in western Farah province on 31 Oct 2018. All 25 people on board were killed, including Farah provincial council chief, provincial council member and deputy commander of the 207th Zafar Corps. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/aHmPPA>

### 'Father of the Taliban' Assassinated in Pakistan's Rawalpindi.

03.11.2018 Maulana Samiul Haq, Chief of Jamiat Ulema Islam-Sami (JUI-S) who was also known as the 'Father of the Taliban', assassinated at his residence in Pakistan's Rawalpindi on 02 Nov 2018. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/vh941L>

### Afghan govt control of territory down to 55.5 percent: US watchdog.

01 Nov 2018 The quarterly report, published by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), said the area under Afghan government control or influence had decreased to 55.5 percent by the end of July from 56.3 percent in mid-May. SIGAR began receiving district-control data in November 2015, a year after international combat mission ended with most foreign troops leaving the country. Since then, the government has lost 16 percent of territory. (1 News)

<https://goo.gl/SrNHOr>

### 2018 Elections violence - Taliban campaign to disrupt parliamentary elections and its impact on civilians.

06 Nov 2018 The "2018 Elections Violence" report documents how on 20 October and subsequent days when delayed polling took place, UNAMA verified 435 civilian casualties (56 deaths and 379 injured). Most civilian casualties occurred on 20 October, with 388 civilian casualties (52 deaths and 339 injured) from election-related violence. This is the highest level of civilian harm compared to the four previous elections held in Afghanistan. (UNAMA) <https://goo.gl/i841sd>

### Afghan Shi'ite militia battles Taliban, raising sectarian fears.

03.11.2018 A week of fighting between Taliban militants and fighters loyal to a commander from the mainly Shi'ite Hazara minority has heightened fears of a dangerous new phase of sectarian violence in Afghanistan. The clashes in the central province of Uruzgan, which have killed at least 21 people, have highlighted concerns that Hazaras, members of a mainly Shi'ite Persian-speaking minority targeted by Islamic State attacks over recent years, may take up arms in frustration at a lack of action by the government. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/hwD1Sj>

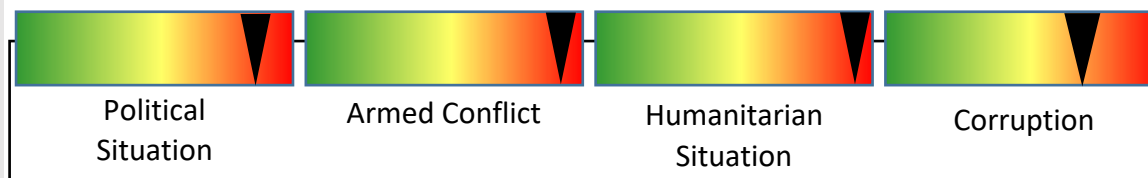
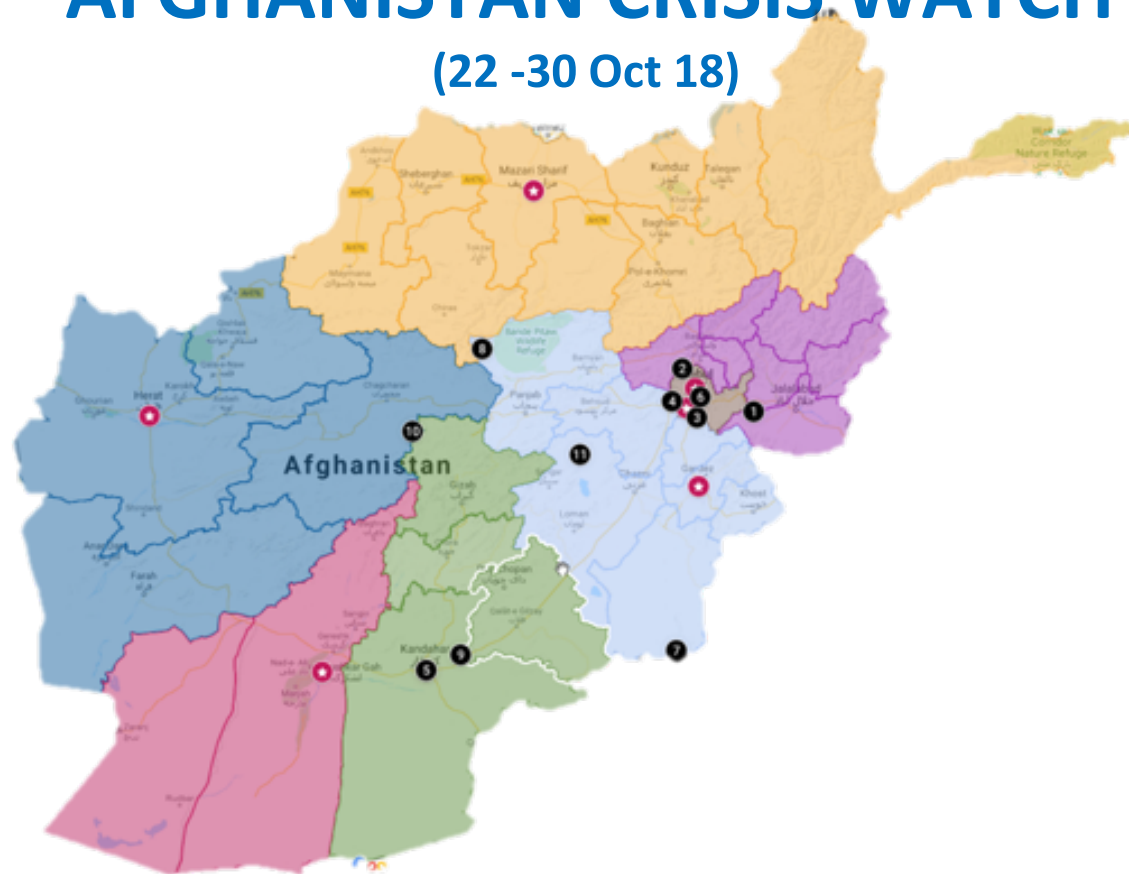
### Afghan War Casualty Report: Oct. 26-Nov. 01

02.11.2018 18 members of the security forces and 36 civilians were killed in Afghanistan as fighting spread to eight provinces. (NYT) <https://goo.gl/89GNQR>



# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(22 -30 Oct 18)



## ASSESSMENT:

- 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.

## Political Situation:

### Bahand Appointed Afghanistan’s Ambassador to Russia.

25.10.2018 President Ashraf Ghani has appointed Dr. Latif Bahand as Afghanistan ambassador to Russia on the recommendation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA). (Pajhwok) <https://goo.gl/WUTg5x>

### IEC to Announce Presidential Election Timeline Within Next Week.

30.10.2018 Officials from the Independent Election Commission (IEC) said that works are underway to outline a timeline for the upcoming presidential election which is scheduled to take place on April 20, next year. Timeline would be announced within next week. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/jH5Tiz>

### New Deputy Foreign Minister Introduced.

27.10.2018 Mr. Edris Zaman was officially introduced as the new Deputy Foreign Minister in Political Affairs. (MFA Afghanistan) <https://goo.gl/z4TCZ2>

### Kabul, Moscow Still Debating on Holding Afghan Peace Talks: MoFA.

28.10.2018 The Afghan government is yet to take a decision on whether to participate in the planned meeting on peace in Russia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) says Kabul and Moscow are debating on the issue. The Moscow multi-national meeting on Afghanistan was expected to take place in early September this year, but it was delayed after Kabul refused to send its delegation to the conference, reasoning lack of consultation. The Taliban had been also invited to the conference and the militant group had even confirmed it. Pakistan also confirmed that it would take part in the Moscow talks. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/2XLIj1>

### Afghanistan's Kandahar province votes a week late after police chief killed.

27.10.2018 Afghanistan held parliamentary elections in the southern province of Kandahar on Saturday, a week late because of the assassination of the provincial police chief by Taliban insurgents. No voting has been held in one other province, Ghazni, still reeling from having been taken over by the Taliban in August.

Kandahar is the birthplace of the Taliban and has long been a center of the insurgency that has been waged throughout years of international intervention since the strict Islamist movement was toppled during a U.S. bombing campaign in 2001. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/AyL1Cn>

### IECC Receives More Than 11,000 Complaints During Elections.

26.10.2018 Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) says it has registered more than 11,000 complaints during the parliamentary elections last Saturday (20 Oct 2018). The IECC said that it will take about a month to address them including 15 days for complaints lodged from Kabul and 15 days more for complaints received from other provinces. The election observers, however, said that the IECC was not capable of addressing the complaints in the set timetable.

Poor management, absence of voters’ list in voting stations, lack of biometric devices in polling centers, misuse of authority by IEC staff against voters and stopping observers to monitor the vote counting process were the issues according to people and watchdogs which have challenged the two days parliamentary elections. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/yeYhA9>

### Afghan Taliban founder Mullah Baradar 'released' by Pakistan.

25.10.2018 Pakistan has released the Afghan Taliban leader from prison, a spokesman for the Taliban announced on Thursday (25.10.2018). Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, also known as Mullah Baradar, is a co-founder of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan. He was arrested by Pakistani authorities in the southern port city of Karachi in 2010. (Al Jazeera) <https://goo.gl/JVWEkz>

### Treasury and the Terrorist Financing Targeting Center Partners Sanction Taliban Facilitators and their Iranian Supporters.

23.10.2018 Seven member nations (Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, UAE and U.S.) of the Terrorist Financing Targeting Center (TFTC) took significant actions to expose and disrupt Taliban actors and their Iranian sponsors that seek to undermine the security of the Afghan Government. (U.S. Dept. of the Treasury) <https://goo.gl/xzf2eK>

## Armed Conflict:

### An American Brigadier General Was Wounded in Last Week's Taliban Attack.

22.10.2018 The Pentagon has confirmed that U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Smiley was shot in a Taliban attack that killed two Afghan leaders inside the Kandahar governor’s compound last week. Smiley was assigned in the summer to lead a Kandahar-based command with a mission to train and advise Afghan security forces and help with counterterrorism operations in southern Afghanistan. (Time) <https://goo.gl/9zpzLn>

### Half of Afghan Population Living in Districts Outside Government Control.

29.10.2018 Using the military’s official population data, Long War Journal assessed that 41 percent of the population resides in a district contested by the Taliban, while more than nine percent resides in a Taliban controlled district. (Long War Journal) <https://goo.gl/328qwk>

### Afghan War Casualty Report: Oct. 19-25

26.10.2018 In the past week, more civilians were killed (93) than members of the Afghan security forces (65). Some 474 people were also wounded throughout Afghanistan on the day of parliamentary elections. (The New York Times) <https://goo.gl/oRY7Tg>



# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(15 -21 Oct 18)

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## Political Situation:

### Afghanistan's elections: All you need to know.

19.10.2018 The polls, which were originally scheduled for early 2015, were last pushed to 20 October 2018 due to security fears and reforms in the voter registration process. There are 21,000 polling stations in 5,100 polling centres in the country's 33 participating provinces. The Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced that 8,918,107 people have registered to vote in the elections. According to the IEC, there are 2,565 candidates running in the Wolesi Jirga elections, 417 of whom are women. A total of 205 - nearly eight percent - of candidates have registered as members of political parties. The rest are independent candidates. The IEC has not set a timeline for announcing official results, but preliminary results are expected within a month. (Al Jazeera) <https://goo.gl/vrdCET>

### 70,000 Afghan forces assigned to ensure security of parliamentary elections.

20.10.2018 Najib Danesh, Spokesperson of MoI said that 4,900 polling centers with more than 20,000 polling stations in 32 provinces of the country is open with the exception of Kandahar and Ghazni, and 70,000 Afghan forces are assigned to ensure the security of Elections. (Khaama) <https://goo.gl/rFXpMe>

### It's a 'religious duty' to oppose Afghan elections, Taliban says.

19.10.2018 In a series of statements this week, the Taliban has rejected Afghanistan's upcoming parliamentary elections on religious grounds, while also calling for operations to disrupt them. The Taliban argues that the elections are un-Islamic and that it is a "religious duty" to oppose them. (Long War Journal) <https://goo.gl/urWPba>

### 192 Attacks Throughout Afghanistan On Election Day.

21.10.2018 Afghanistan's Minister of Interior Wais Barmak told the TOLO TV that different armed groups had carried out 192 attacks throughout Afghanistan in an attempt to sabotage the long-awaited parliamentary elections. (Southfront) <https://goo.gl/po1xHp>

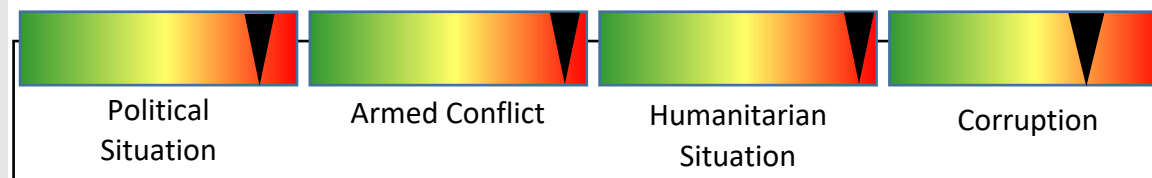
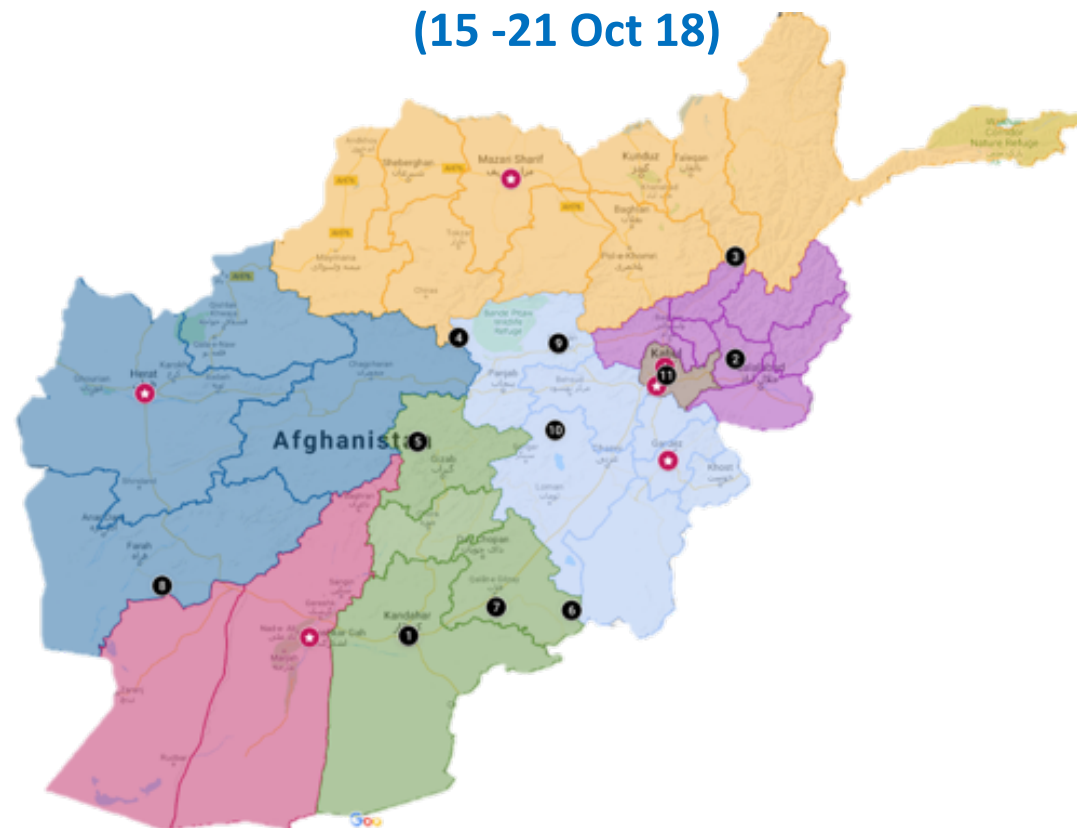
### 46 killed, 240 injured in nationwide poll violence.

20.10.2018 At least 44 people were killed and 238 others wounded in violent incidents across Afghanistan on Saturday as the country held the long due Wolesi Jirga elections. (Pajhwok) <https://goo.gl/HPZcm7>

## Armed Conflict:

### Afghan War Casualty Report: Oct. 12-18.

19.10.2018 Based on New York Times reporting, clashes between security forces and Taliban fighters spread to 14 provinces. An apparent insider attack at the governor's compound in Kandahar left two important Afghan leaders dead on 18 Oct 2018. Gen. Austin Scott Miller, was on the compound during the attack, but escaped without injury. The Times confirmed reports of 140 ANDSF and 56 civilians killed in the past week. (NYT) <https://goo.gl/AAZBc2>



## ASSESSMENT

- 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.
- 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.

## Police Arrest Three Suspects in Connection to Kandahar Deadly Incident.

19.10.2018 The Police Chief of Kandahar Gen. Abdul Raziq and Intelligence Chief of the province Gen. Abdul Momin Hussain Khail were killed on 18 October 2018 in a shooting during security meeting which was also attended by the commander of US and NATO forces Gen. Scott Miller, the provincial governor Zalamy Wesa and the commander of the 404th Zone. Zalmay Wesa and the commander of the 404th Zone have sustained injuries. But Gen. Miller has escaped the incident unhurt. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/Kwv87v>

## U.S. general says he may not have been target of Kandahar attack.

19.10.2018 The gunman assassinated the police chief of Kandahar province on Thursday along with a top Afghan intelligence agency officer, but the U.S. commander of Afghanistan's NATO-led force, General Scott Miller, who was standing nearby when the attack occurred, was not hurt. "My assessment is that I was not the target. It was a very close confined space. But I don't assess that I was the target," Miller told Afghanistan's Tolo News TV in an interview. The Taliban claimed the attack in a statement saying both Razeq and Miller were the targets, but the commander said they only knew very late that the U.S. general would be present at the talks with local security officials. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/Ab8EZo>

## Russia Accuses US of Transferring ISIL from Syria to Afghanistan, Iraq.

19.10.2018 Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused the US government of transferring the ISIL terrorists from Syria to neighboring Iraq and Afghanistan. "Moscow is concerned with Washington's transfer of Daesh (ISIL) militants to Iraq and Afghanistan," Lavrov said during a press conference, Interfax reported. Washington has repeatedly denied these allegations from Moscow. (Fars News) <https://goo.gl/9vJzVa>

## Corruption:

### Briefing Paper: The Taliban and Afghanistan's Mines | Antonio Giustozzi.

20.10.2018 The Afghan state is able to tax only a small part of the mining activity that is already on-going in Afghanistan. If anybody taxes this stream of profits if local strongmen and insurgents, mostly the Taliban. Within the Taliban's Central Financial Commission there is a department for mining, which as of mid-2018 was employing 725 staff between its headquarter in Quetta and the provinces of Afghanistan. The current 'official' rate charged by the Taliban to mining operations is 3%. The Mining Department (of Taliban) estimates that if all was right it should be receiving about \$100 million in revenue from mining all over Afghanistan. Tax evasion is punished with a penalty of 50,000 Afs, a modest amount if compared with the risk of death in IS-K areas. (CRPA) <https://goo.gl/yQ4K9C>



## 1. Thirty years after the Soviet Union's humiliating defeat in Afghanistan, Moscow wants back in.

12.10.2018 Russia has been cultivating ties with the Taliban to increase its influence in Afghanistan three decades after Moscow's humiliating defeat there helped hasten the Soviet Union's collapse. Russian engagement with the militants drew attention, and some flak, when the Kremlin invited Taliban representatives to Moscow for a meeting in September. That invitation was rescinded — at least temporarily — after the Afghan government objected, saying it must take the lead in any talks. (Washington Post) <https://goo.gl/GCA9vk>

## 2. US, Russian rivalry shifting to Afghanistan, warn lawmakers.

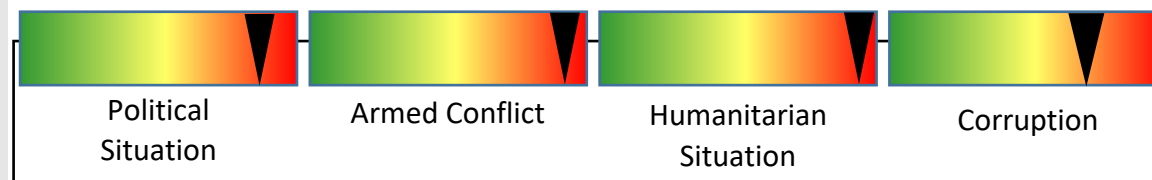
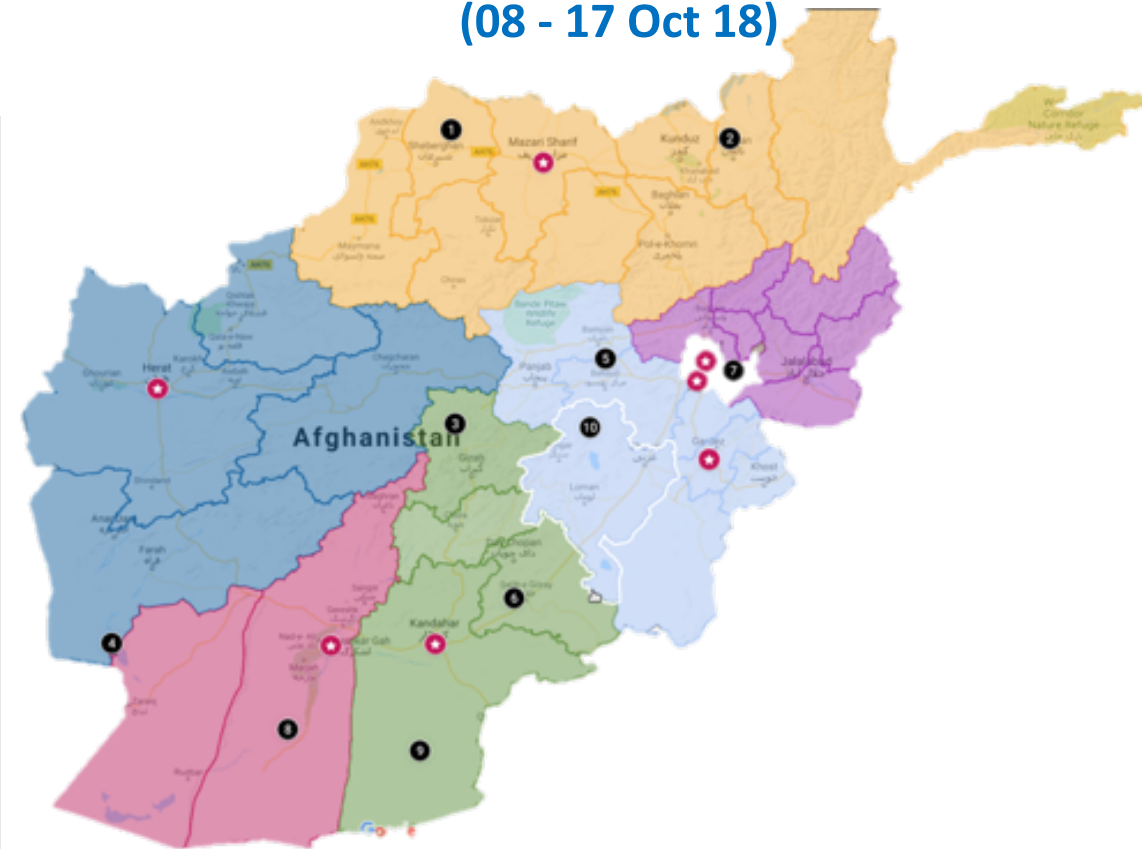
07.10.2018 Some members of the Mesharano Jirga on Sunday expressed concern over the growing insecurity and asked the government to take steps to prevent Afghanistan becoming second Syria. The lawmakers also warned the government against growing confrontation between Russian and the US which would badly affect the situation in Afghanistan. (Pajhwoh) <https://goo.gl/Atyoh2>

## 3. America's Disastrous Occupation of Afghanistan Turns 17.

12.10.2018 America has now passed the 17-year mark in Afghanistan. U.S. troops have been fighting there for longer than the Revolutionary War, Civil War, World War I, and World War II combined. More than 2,300 American military personnel and 3,500 contractors have died in Afghanistan. Another 1,100 allied soldiers have been killed, almost half of them from the United Kingdom. More than 20,000 Americans have been wounded. The direct financial cost has amounted to \$2 trillion, with another \$45 billion budgeted for this year. (Zero Hedge) <https://goo.gl/FEXero>

## 4. A US Official Reportedly Met With The Taliban For Peace Talks.

13.10.2018 The U.S. envoy on an Afghanistan peace initiative has met with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah in Kabul, a day after he held talks in Qatar with Taliban leaders. Zalmay Khalilzad, the Afghan-born U.S. adviser and former U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, briefed Ghani and Abdullah on October 13 about his meetings with senior ministers and top diplomats in four countries as part of a diplomatic mission aimed at bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table. A statement sent to journalists on October 13 by Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said Khalilzad met Taliban representatives on October 12 in Qatar's capital, Doha, to discuss ending the Afghan conflict. Another statement from the Afghan president's office on October 13 said Khalilzad told Ghani and Abdullah that the United States was "ready to do anything to help with the peace process," but insisted the process should be led by the Afghan government. (T&P) <https://goo.gl/7XjKuD>



## ASSESSMENT

- 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.

## 5. NATO in Afghanistan: Private military contractors are 'out of the question'.

09.10.2018 Spokesperson for NATO/RSM Hq. in Kabul said that "In recent days, the Afghan government has clearly rejected the use of private military contractors. It is out of the question for Kabul and therefore out of the question for NATO." (DW) <https://goo.gl/LpZZ8w>

## 6. India, China Jointly to Train Afghan Diplomats.

India and China launched a program to train Afghan diplomats. China's ambassador to India said the joint training of 10 Afghan diplomats at the Indian Foreign Service Institute was the first step in China-India-Afghanistan cooperation that was agreed at a summit between President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi this year. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/no9Q3K>

## 7. Mol Says Taliban Control 11 Districts.

14.10.2018 Ahead of the upcoming parliamentary polling which is set for next week, the Ministry of Interior Affairs (Mol) says the Taliban are controlling 11 districts in the country and that 19 other districts are under high-security threats. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/XevXMw>

## 8. Afghan War Casualty Report: Oct. 5-11.

12.10.2018 The number of casualties across Afghanistan increased compared to the previous week, occurring in 13 provinces, even as the weather has turned cold in many parts of the country. The week saw fewer attacks by Taliban fighters compared to last week, but more deaths among security forces. The Times confirmed reports of 96 security force members and 31 civilians killed in the past week. (NYT) <https://goo.gl/73jRzu>

## 9. Taliban restore Red Cross security guarantee in Afghanistan.

12.10.2018 The Taliban have reinstated a security guarantee in Afghanistan for the International Committee for Red Cross (ICRC), two months after withdrawing safe passage for the neutral humanitarian agency. A meeting in the Taliban's Qatar-based political office between its leaders and agency officials ended with the renewal of a pact allowing the agency to continue to provide, and expand, medical aid to all parties harmed by warfare. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/mo6Ztf>

## 10. Khalilzad Calls on Afghan Gov't, Taliban to Introduce Authorized Representatives.

08.10.2018 U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad has called on the Afghan government and Taliban group to introduce their authorized representatives for peace talks. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/A8CV1c>



# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(01 - 07 Oct 18)

## EVENTS:

### 1. Russia Jockeying for Influence in Afghanistan: Votel.

06.10.2018 The US Central Command chief has accused Russia of jockeying for influence in Afghanistan, where international reconciliation efforts are underway. Gen. Joseph Votel also hit out at Iran for playing both sides of the conflict in Afghanistan. (PAJHWOK) <https://goo.gl/22Scmr>

### 2. MoFA Fears of US-Russia ‘Confrontation’ in Afghanistan.

03.10.2018 The Deputy Foreign Minister said that the United States and Russia’s tensions on Ukraine are moving toward Afghanistan which according to him will have “negative repercussions” for the country if they begin here. (TOLO) <https://goo.gl/bfZzYR>

### 3. After 17 Years of War in Afghanistan, More Say U.S. has Failed than Succeeded in Achieving its Goals.

05.10.2018 17 years into the U.S. military mission in Afghanistan, Americans remain pessimistic about U.S. efforts in the country. About half of adults (49%) say the United States has mostly failed in achieving its goals there, while about a third (35%) say it has mostly succeeded, according to a new Pew Research Center survey. Another 16% say they do not know if the U.S. has succeeded or failed. (PEW) <https://goo.gl/2e9hTA>

### 4. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad Travel to Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.

03.10.2018 Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad will lead an interagency delegation to Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia from October 4-14. Special Representative Khalilzad’s mission is to coordinate and lead U.S. efforts to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table. He will do so in close coordination with the Afghan government and other stakeholders, exploring how best to reach a negotiated settlement to the conflict. (U.S. State Department) <https://goo.gl/5YmEFd>

### 5. Taliban Leadership Begins Bargaining to Hold Peace Primary Meetings: HPC.

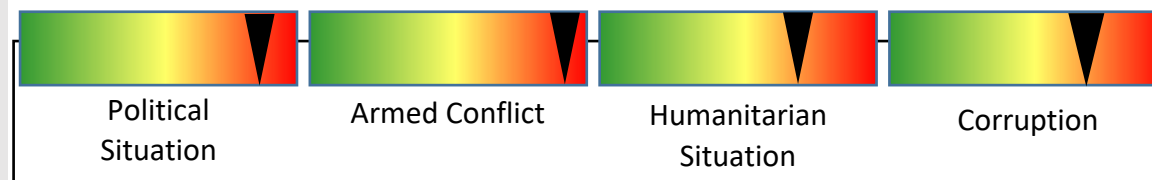
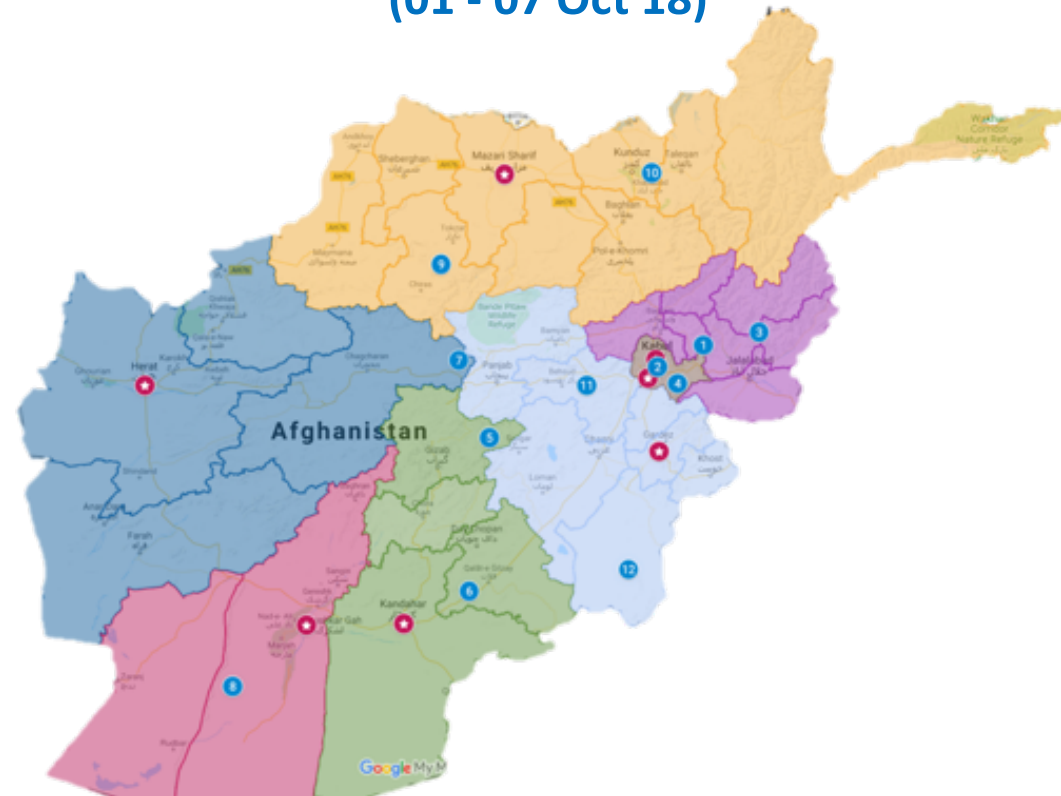
03.10.2018 The members of Taliban leadership have begun in-party bargaining to hold the peace preliminary meetings, the High Peace Council (HPC) said. Mawla Samiulhaq known as the spiritual father of Taliban announced his support from the peace process. Meanwhile, the members of HPC called the role of Pakistan and Iran essential in Afghanistan peace process, emphasizing on their cooperation with the country to reach a sustainable peace. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/wgTxeB>

### 6. U.S. Forces – Afghanistan September 2018 Strike Summary.

03.10.2018 U.S. Forces – Afghanistan engaged terror and security targets with 465 strikes consisting of 522 engagements in Afghanistan, September 1-30, 2018. (RSM) <https://goo.gl/cHcJjr>

### 7. Afghan War Casualty Report: Sept. 28-Oct. 4.

05.10.2018 The Times confirmed reports of 62 security force members and 37 civilians killed in the past week. (NYT) <https://goo.gl/7MmoEz>



## ASSESSMENT

- 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.

### 8. Privatizing War in Afghanistan Endangers Civilians.

02.10.2018 Erik Prince, founder of private military contractor Blackwater, a former U.S. Navy SEAL and brother of U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, pitched a plan to an Afghan audience to privatize the fighting. While Private contractors, including employees of Blackwater can be prosecuted for crimes in US courts under the Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act, they rarely are. Afghanistan already has a poor track record prosecuting members of its security forces implicated in serious human rights abuses, including killing civilians. Given the impunity already enjoyed by the security forces, placing them under the command of private security contractors could further undermine accountability. US Defense Secretary James Mattis rejected Prince’s proposal, as has Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. (HRW) <https://goo.gl/yXvchQ>

### 9. UNAMA Special Report on Increasing Harm to Civilians from IEDs.

07.10.2018 The special report – titled “Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices” – documents a sharp increase from 1 January - 30 September 2018 in the killing and aiming of Afghan civilians by IEDs, which have caused almost half of the civilian casualties from conflict-related violence. (UNAMA) <https://goo.gl/Kayfdt>

### 10. UN Concern around Level of Violence in Election Campaign Period.

02.10.2018 The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) expresses its concern around the level of violence early in the campaigning period for the 20 October parliamentary elections, including intimidation and attacks against candidates, their agents and supporters. (UNAMA) <https://goo.gl/KU2Uh7>

### 11. 17 Years to the Day the U.S. Invaded, 54 Are Killed Across Afghanistan.

07.10.2018 At least 54 people have been killed across Afghanistan in the past 24 hours, according to a tally based on interviews with officials on Sunday — 17 years to the day American forces invaded the country to topple the Taliban regime. On average, the conflict has taken the lives of 30 to 40 Afghan forces and at least 13 civilians a day. (NYT) <https://goo.gl/vp8WCH>

## OPINION:

### 12. Badness Personified.

01.10.2018 After the September 11 attacks, some claimed that the hijackings were blowback of America’s decision to work with Osama bin Laden and his men during the jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan. There is no publicly available evidence suggesting the CIA was ever in direct cahoots with bin Laden. Haqqani is a different story. The CIA, along with its Pakistani and Saudi allies, did back Haqqani and his followers against the Russians.

Haqqani and several other extremist commanders received the lion’s share of assistance from the American-Pakistani-Saudi coalition. The CIA relied on Pakistani intelligence—the ISI—to pick winners and losers in the Afghan jihad, and this was a mistake. The Pakistanis preferred extremists.

Haqqani “was seen by CIA officers in Islamabad and others as perhaps the most impressive Pashtun battlefield commander in the war,” a “proven commander who could put a lot of men under arms at short notice.” (The Weekly Standard) <https://goo.gl/M9dpHC>



# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(24 Sep - 30 Sep 18)

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## EVENTS:

### 1. Russia outraged at NATO's near daily 'erroneous' strikes in Afghanistan.

27.09.2018 Moscow is outraged at NATO's "errant" attacks in Afghanistan, which have become almost a daily reality, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Thursday. "We are outraged at the fact that NATO's 'errant' attacks in the country have become almost a daily reality, while no one has been held responsible," the statement reads. (TASS)

<https://goo.gl/5agNEg>

### 2. Russia Warns Daesh May Repeat Syrian Scenario in Afghanistan.

26.09.2018 Patrushev's press secretary Yevgeny Anoshin stated that the Russian Security Council secretary shared his view on the matter at the multilateral consultations on the settlement in Afghanistan which are taking place in Tehran and involve delegations from Russia, Afghanistan, India, Iran and China, TASS reported. "Today we can speak of the danger of repeating this scenario on Afghanistan's territory," the press secretary quoted Patrushev as saying. "Nikolai Patrushev noted that the situation in Afghanistan deteriorated due to the activity of the international terrorist organization ISIS. He reiterated that back in 2014 many regarded ISIS as not posing a serious threat to Iraq and Syria," he added. (Fars News)

<https://goo.gl/Hejh7n>

### 3. Rockets Hit Ghazni During President's Visit.

27.09.2018 Multiple rockets hit the Ghazni city on 27 September 2018, while President Ashraf Ghani was there for a visit to review the situation of the province. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the assault and No one was killed or wounded in the latest attack. (Ariana)

<https://goo.gl/rnZPEC>

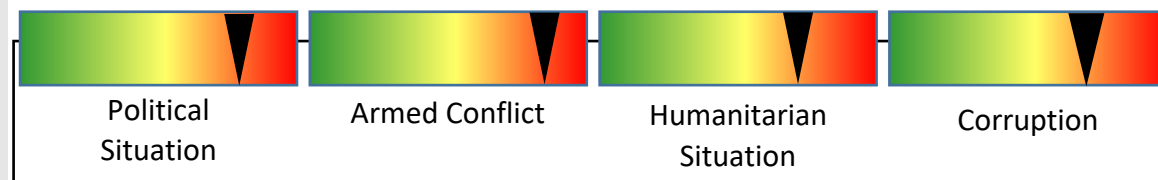
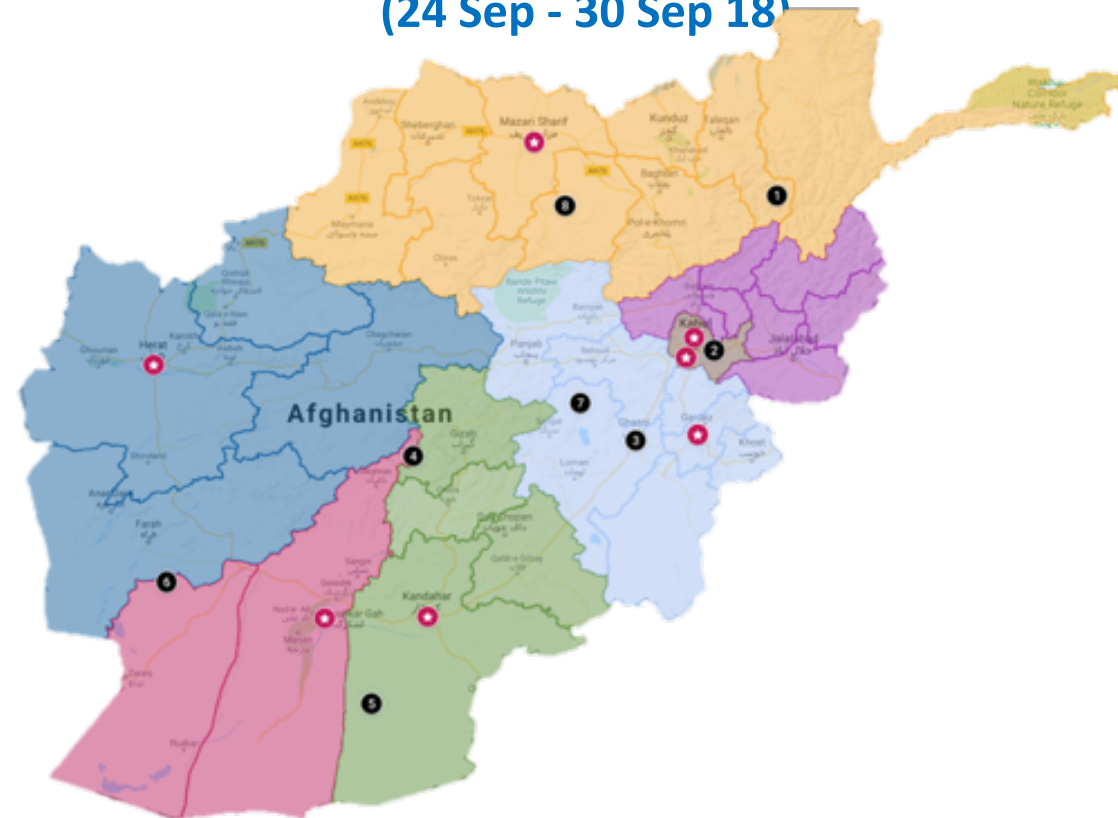
### 4. U.S. Secretary of State Criticizes Iran for Recruiting Afghans to Fight War in Syria.

26.09.2018 U.S. Secretary of State, Michael R. Pompeo has criticized the Iranian regime for recruiting Afghan youths to fight in Syria's war. Meanwhile, U.S. ambassador to United Nations, Nikki Haley has expressed deep concern over human trafficking, calling it contrary to the international principles. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/11mnt6>

### 5. Taliban denies meeting Afghan officials ahead of election

28.09.2018 A Taliban spokesman denied on Friday that representatives met an Afghan government delegation this week, after sources in the movement told Reuters that officials from both sides met in Saudi Arabia to discuss security ahead of elections next month. (Reuters)

<https://goo.gl/Yj5HDP>



## ASSESSMENT

- 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.

### 6. Marine Corps F-35 flies first combat mission in Afghanistan

28.09.2018 The U.S. Marine Corps F-35B joint strike fighter has successfully conducted its first combat mission over Afghanistan. The joint strike fighter is the most expensive program in the Pentagon's history, projected to cost about \$1 trillion to develop, produce, field and sustain over its lifetime, according to the Government Accountability Office. (Military Times) <https://goo.gl/yCFWaV>

### 7. UN says 21 Afghan civilians killed in separate air attacks

26.09.2018 Two separate air attacks over the weekend killed at least 21 civilians in Afghanistan, including 14 children, the UN said. Air attacks killed 149 people and wounded more than 200 other civilians in the first half of 2018, up 52 percent from the same period last year. The figure accounted for roughly seven percent of total civilian casualties for the six-month period. One of the worst incidents occurred in the northern province of Kunduz in April, when an Afghan air attack on a religious gathering killed or wounded 107 people, mostly children, a previous UNAMA report said. (Al Jazeera) <https://goo.gl/syE2i1>

## OPINION:

### 8. The Afghan government is failing to deliver on its promises.

25.09.2018 The Afghan National Unity Government (NUG) is failing to provide proper security to many of its citizens. Fighting has killed and maimed some 40,000 civilians. Over the past four years, the security situation has severely deteriorated in Afghanistan. Government forces have not only failed in containing the Taliban but have even lost ground to it. Currently, the Taliban threaten 70 percent of the country. Apart from the deteriorating security situation, the NUG has also grappled with a series of official resignations and international tensions.

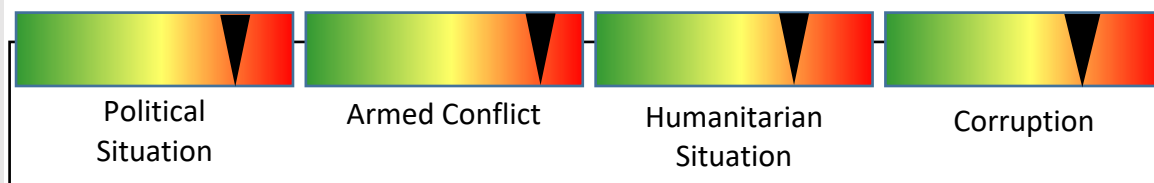
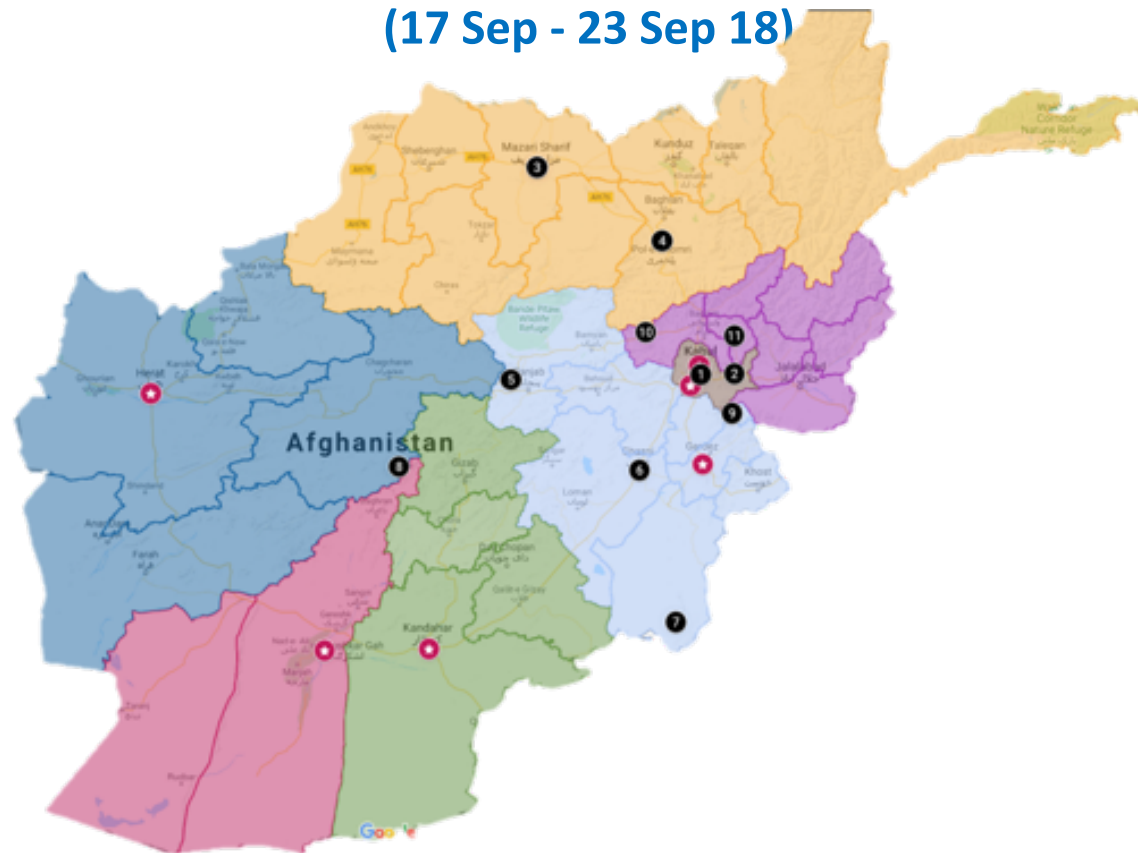
Amid the increasingly difficult political and security situation in Afghanistan, Ghani has only two trump cards to play. One is his long-term ally Zalmay Khalilzad who was appointed adviser to US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Afghanistan. It is expected that he will be lobbying on his behalf to get US backing for another term.

The second one is Imran Khan, who just won the elections in Pakistan. Khan is ethnically Pashtun and can potentially help the Afghan government with the peace talks. (Al Jazeera) <https://goo.gl/jDFo7M>



# AFGHANISTAN CRISIS WATCH

(17 Sep - 23 Sep 18)



## ASSESSMENT

- 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.

### 1. Pakistan Not Restricting Taliban And Haqqani Network: US.

21.09.2018 The US State Department says in a report that the Pakistani government vowed support to the peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban but did not restrict the group and Haqqani network from operating in Pakistan-based safe havens and threatening US and Afghan forces in Afghanistan. (Tolo News) <https://goo.gl/3vRcAC>

### 2. 26 ISIS-K Fighters Arrested in Kabul by Afghan Special Operations Forces

19.09.2018 Afghan Special Operations Forces have seized 26 Islamic State fighters in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, ahead of a religious observance in the country. (Warfare Today) <https://goo.gl/LTsSYg>

### 3. 'Lives in danger': Dozens of Afghan ex-workers block Bundeswehr base, demand asylum in Germany

23.09.2018 Camp Marmal, the German Army's largest overseas base, has reportedly been blocked by dozens of Afghan ex-workers, who say they fear for their lives after working for the Bundeswehr. They are demanding asylum in Germany. Afghans' applications have been rejected because the Defense Ministry identified "no specific danger" threatening the locally hired staff. (RT) <https://goo.gl/gMV8JT>

### 4. The Death Toll for Afghan Forces Is Secret. Here's Why.

21.09.2018 Taliban insurgents killed so many Afghan security forces in 2016, an average of 22 a day, that by the following year the Afghan and American governments decided to keep battlefield death tolls secret. It's much worse now. The daily fatalities among Afghan soldiers and policemen were more than double that last week: roughly 57 a day. Last week was especially bad, with more than 400 killed, according to an account by diplomats. In August, according to official government reports, their forces claimed to kill 42 Taliban militants a day, 1,300 a month. (NYT) <https://goo.gl/AVpb8r>

### 5. Ex-Blackwater CEO's plan to end the war in Afghanistan

18.09.2018 The founder and former head of the Blackwater private security firm, Erik Prince, has said he believes private security contractors are key to ending the war in Afghanistan. (BBC) <https://goo.gl/jnLvRc>

### 6. Forced to fight as soldiers, Afghan police demand reforms

17.09.2018 Afghanistan's poorly armed and underpaid police are usually on the frontlines against Taliban militants and they lost 90 men defending the strategic city of Ghazni last month, underlying chronic weaknesses that are likely to face further tests. An interior ministry report found that for over 28 hours policemen fought alone before the army launched counter-insurgency operations in Ghazni. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/b3AZSA>

### 7. Imran Khan pledges citizenship for 1.5m Afghan refugees

17.09.2018 Pakistan's Imran Khan has pledged to grant citizenship to 1.5 million Afghan refugees who have lived on the margins of Pakistan's society for decades. Pakistan has the largest refugee population in the world, mostly made up of 2.7 million refugees from Afghanistan. Many fled the Soviet invasion in 1979, while others came across the border due to violence and economic turmoil. About 60% of the Afghan refugee population was born in Pakistan, meaning almost 1.5 million people stand to benefit. (The Guardian) <https://goo.gl/yZJYqw>

### 8. More Than 500 Soldiers Killed During Last Month: MoD

23.09.2018 More than 500 Afghan National Army forces were killed and more than 700 others were wounded in the clashes with the opposition groups during the last month in the country, the defense minister told Senators at the Upper House. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/Yise4q>

### 9. Afghan Officials to Meet Taliban Representatives in Moscow

23.09.2018 Russia's Special Presidential Envoy for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov has said the Afghan officials and Taliban representatives reached an agreement to bargain peace in Moscow with the participation of twelve regional countries. The Afghan Foreign Ministry refused to comment on participating the Moscow summit but emphasized that no result has been found regarding the peace talks in Russia. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/Yise4q>

### 10. Opinion: Combating ISIS in Afghanistan requires new tactics, on and off the battlefield

17.09.2018 If terrorism is to be eradicated in Afghanistan in particular and the region in general, a de-radicalization drive must be carried out with full vigor. That includes schools, because ISIS knows a true resurgence will depend upon the next generation. People of South Asia dread the possibility of a mushroom cloud, but infiltrated young minds could be equally disastrous. Where to start? Curriculum and early education reforms. Start across the AF-PAK border, and cultivate the seeds for young receptive minds, the minds that could bring logic, wisdom, and rationality to the table. (The Hill) <https://goo.gl/EfUbwe>

### 11. Report: Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy In Brief

17.09.2018 While military officials profess greater optimism about the course of the war in 2018, other policymakers and analysts have described the war against the insurgency (which controls or contests nearly half of the country's territory, by Pentagon estimates) as a stalemate. Furthermore, the Afghan government faces broad public criticism for its ongoing inability to combat corruption, deliver security, alleviate rising ethnic tensions, and develop the economy. Contentious parliamentary and presidential elections, scheduled for October 2018 and April 2019, respectively, may further inflame political tensions. (Congressional Research Centre) <https://goo.gl/E2SzE4>



## 1. U.S. Aid Program Vowed to Help 75,000 Afghan Women. Watchdog Says It's a Flop.

13.09.2018 An American aid project in Afghanistan that was billed as the world's biggest program ever designed purely for female empowerment has been a failure and a waste of taxpayers' money, the head of a government watchdog agency has charged. The project by the United States Agency for International Development, which was named Promote, was originally budgeted at \$280 million and was supposed to help 75,000 Afghan women get jobs, promotions, apprenticeships and internships. However only 55 women promoted to better jobs.(New York Times) <https://goo.gl/8AM5Hi>

## 2. Afghan Taliban prepare for new peace talks with U.S.: sources.

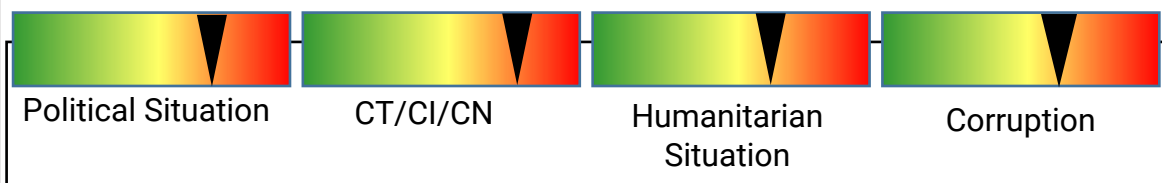
11.09.2018 The Taliban are preparing to send a delegation for further talks with U.S. officials about ending the conflict in Afghanistan. The meeting could address a possible prisoner swap. The Taliban, seeking to reimpose strict Islamic law after their 2001 ouster at the hands of U.S.-led troops, have maintained their refusal to negotiate directly with the internationally recognized Afghan government, which they consider an illegitimate regime put in place by foreign powers and say they will only talk to the United States. As the push for talks has picked up following the Eid ceasefire in June, the United States has agreed to participate directly and has appointed former U.S. ambassador to Kabul Zalmay Khalilzad as special envoy to reinforce the effort. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/G4Mmik>

## 3. 160 Killed, Wounded as Suicide Bombing Targets Protesters in Nangarhar

11.09.2018 At least 32 people were killed and 128 others wounded in a suicide bombing targeted a protest in Nangarhar province on Tuesday, officials said, the same day a series of explosions targeted schools in Jalalabad city and surrounding districts. There has been no claim of responsibility for any of the attacks, although ISIS and the Taliban are active in the province. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/ioJT91>

## 4. 140 Killed in Bloody Days for Afghan Security Forces

10.09.2018 Afghan government lost 140 security forces in fighting over the past 48 hours as Taliban insurgents launched sustained attacks on different parts of the country. According to sources, the Khamab district in Jawzjan, Daymirdad district in Maidan Wardak, a village in the capital of Sar-e Pul and a number of military bases in Baghlan and Kunduz provinces have been collapsed to Taliban so far. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/V4m>



### ASSESSMENT

- 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.

## 5. 53 Journalists Killed in Afghanistan since 2015: NAI

10.09.2018 Fifty-three journalists have been killed in Afghanistan since 2015, a media advocacy group, NAI said on Monday. However, he stressed that during former President Hamid Karzai's tenure (2001-2014), 42 journalists have been killed in the country. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/zAw8UG>

## 6. Afghans express doubts in democracy, fair elections ahead of parliamentary vote

13.09.2018 Millions of Afghans will go to polls next month to choose lawmakers in the first Afghan-organized and Afghan-run parliamentary election since the Taliban were ousted from power in 2001. But 17 years after a U.S.-led coalition drove the Islamist militants from the capital, many say they won't vote on Oct. 20 because of security concerns and doubts about the fairness and transparency of the electoral process. Taliban continue to hold broad swaths of the country beyond urban areas. In the first six months of the year, almost 1,700 civilians were killed, the highest number in a six-month period since the United Nations began recording a decade ago. (The Washington Times) <https://goo.gl/AYMbRF>

## 7. Russian envoy hits out at America over Afghan Taliban

16.09.2018 Russia says the United States prefers to act solely in the Taliban reconciliation process and does not take into account the interests of Afghanistan 's regional partners and neighbors. (Times of Islamabad) <https://goo.gl/yt819h>

## 8. Shuttle diplomacy focuses on Afghanistan

10.09.2018 This month, after the postponement of a multilateral conference in Russia on the Afghan issue, the region's foreign ministers are struggling to reschedule the event. The planned peace conference would be a very important step for the resolution of the years-old conflict in Afghanistan, which is a major hurdle to regional security and economic activities. Everyone is interested in having peace and stability in Afghanistan, but everyone is also hesitant over its process and potential outcomes. (Asia Times) <https://goo.gl/52Ed8A>

## 9. Nine Helicopters of Afghan Forces Crashed in Last Four Years

15.09.2018 The Defense Ministry says at least nine choppers of Afghan military forces have been crashed in the last four years, reasoning technical issues and the Taliban attacks for the cause. Afghan Air Force has over 40 MI-17 Russian helicopters along with some U.S. made Black Hawks choppers. The Russian helicopters are mostly used to carry in reinforcements and to provide equipment to ground forces. (Ariana) <https://goo.gl/UExun8>



## 1. Mapping Taliban Controlled and Contested Districts in Afghanistan.

08.09.2018 According to the U.S. Government Taliban controls or contests 44% of Afghan territory whereas independent military analysts argue that the figure is as high as 61%. (FDD's Long War Journal)

<https://goo.gl/Zr5ZFC>

## 2. Militants try to gain control of drug trafficking from Afghanistan.

03.09.2018 Russia's federal security service FSB believes that militants, including those affiliated with the terrorist organization Islamic State, outlawed in Russia, are trying to get control of drug trafficking from Afghanistan. (TASS) <https://goo.gl/M89xNQ>

## 3. Mattis Makes Surprise Visit to Kabul for Talks with Afghan Leaders on Taliban Peace Process

07.09.2018 Defense Secretary Jim Mattis made a surprise visit to Kabul on Friday and held talks with Afghan government leaders on a peace process with Taliban insurgents and the country's spiralling violence. (Washington Post) <https://goo.gl/AtJDr6>

## 4. Zalmay Khalilzad Appointed As U.S. Special Adviser To Afghanistan

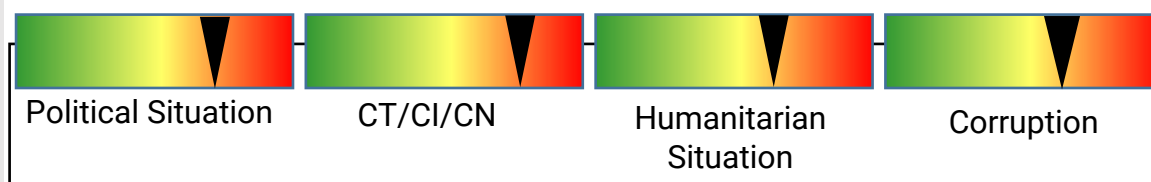
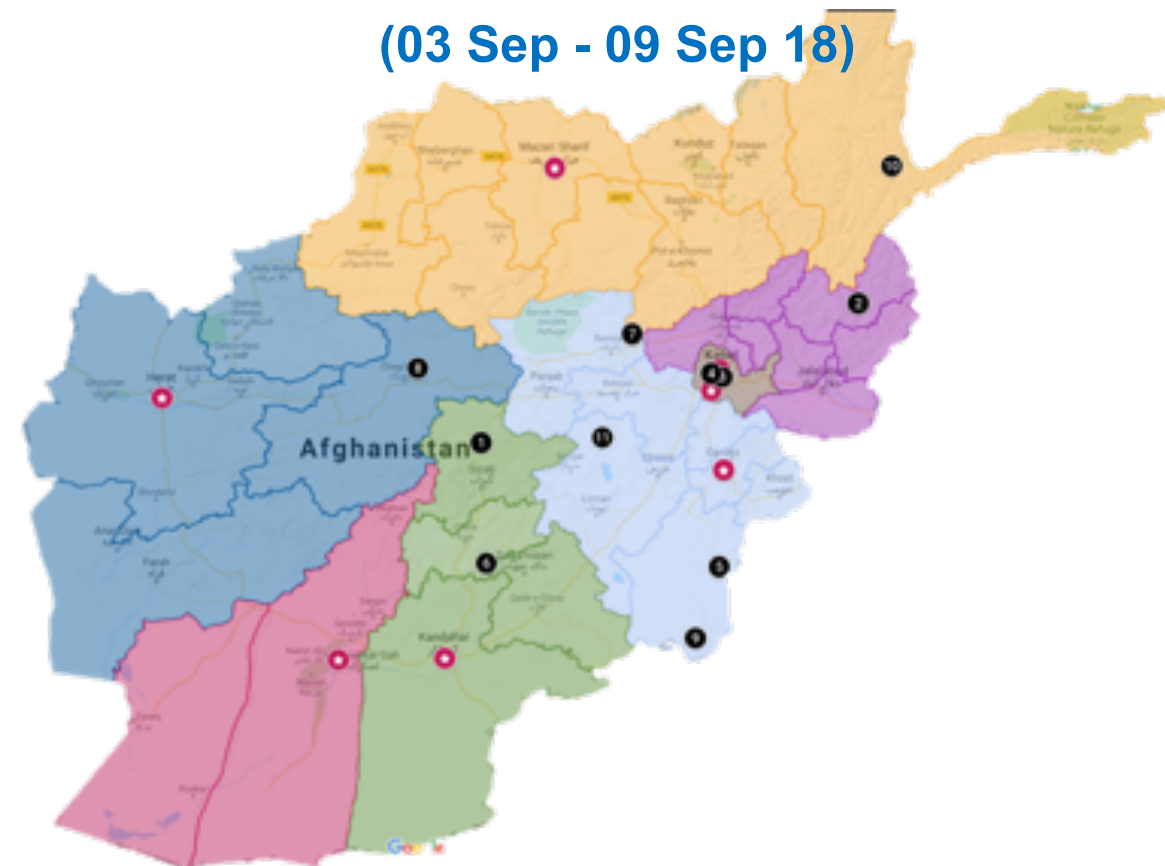
05.09.2018 Zalmay Khalilzad, who served as U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan and Iraq and as U.N. ambassador during the administration of President George W. Bush, has been named President Trump's special adviser to Afghanistan. His job will be to try to bring the Afghan government and the Taliban to a reconciliation. (NPR) <https://goo.gl/H1b4aB>

## 5. Former U.S. Ally Turned Implacable Foe Dies in Afghanistan, Taliban Announces

04.09.2018 Jalaluddin Haqqani, founder of the Haqqani network, who was once an ally of the United States and later became one of its fiercest opponents in Afghanistan, has died, the Taliban announced 4 September. (Washington Post) <https://goo.gl/Xr6Tvn>

## 6. Britain Deploys 440 more Troops to Afghanistan over the 'Real Threat' of a Manchester-Style Terror Attack being Plotted by IS Fanatics from the Country

03.09.2018 Britain has deployed 440 more troops to Afghanistan amid concerns about a 'Manchester-style' terror attack plotted from the country. Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said he is 'consistently' receiving intelligence showing that terrorist groups in Afghanistan have links back to Britain. The extra 440 British troops will take the total in the country to around 1,100. (Daily Mail) <https://goo.gl/8aU89x>



## ASSESSMENT

- 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.

## 7. New Contract Worth \$1.8 Billion Awarded in Support of Afghan Air Force

05.09.2018 The Pentagon has awarded a new contract worth \$1.8 billion to Sierra Nevada Corporation in support of the Afghan Air Force. "Sierra Nevada Corp., Centennial, Colorado, has been awarded a ceiling \$1,808,000,000 indefinite-delivery/indefinite quantity contract for potential procurement, sustainment, modifications, ferry, and related equipment for the A-29," Pentagon said in a statement. (Khaama Press) <https://goo.gl/3jJj5e>

## 8. Killing Time in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Afghan migrants try a new route into the EU

04.09.2018 Since January, around 800 Afghans have arrived in the non-EU country of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in an attempt to find a new route into the European Union. (Aghanistan Analysts Network) <https://goo.gl/p83G9B>

## 9. The US and Pakistan Agreed to Re-engage with Each Other on Peace in Afghanistan

05.09.2018 The US and Pakistan on Wednesday agreed to re-engage with each other on peace in Afghanistan in a high-level diplomatic interaction in Islamabad, but stopped short of announcing any tangible steps for the re-engagement. (Pajhwok) <https://bit.ly/2QhvKjp>

## OPINION - Why Russia and China Are Expanding Their Roles in Afghanistan

05.09.2018 The shared threat of an Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan will drive Pakistan and Russia into a closer partnership as Moscow strengthens its leverage over the Afghan negotiations. China's expanding diplomatic and economic profile make it likely that Beijing will establish a limited and localized military presence in Afghanistan. (Stratfor) <https://goo.gl/t76kLU>

## OPINION - A Cheer for Trump's Outreach to the Taliban

07.09.2018 The administration's current policy-keeping American troops in Afghanistan without any time limit-has increased pressure on the Taliban, but military and civilian experts generally agree that there is no military solution to the Afghan war. To be sure, the Taliban are nowhere near defeated, having attacked Kabul and other major Afghan cities in recent months. But the Taliban have internal political challenges that threaten their cohesion. Taliban leaders sit in the relative calm and safety of Pakistan, far from battlefield hardships and beholden more to the demands of Pakistan's intelligence service than to their Afghan brothers' desires. It is also clear that the emergence of the Islamic State in Afghanistan threatens both the Afghan government and the Taliban, giving them a common enemy. (NYT) <https://goo.gl/y4azwQ>



## 1. Afghan Commandos Defeat Taliban in Faryab.

28.08.2018 Commandos from 5th Special Operations Kandak (SOK) and National Mission Brigade (NMB) recaptured Kohistan district center from Taliban after completing offensive operations in Faryab province, August 24. (RSM) <https://goo.gl/SiZDXv>

## 2. Afghanistan's Security Posture Strengthens with Recent Military Graduates.

31.08.2018 Over 200 soldiers of the newly established Afghan National Army-Territorial Force graduated from a four-week basic training course. The graduates will be stationed in the province and districts where they currently live. The Afghan National Army-Territorial Force, designed as a nationally-led professional and disciplined force to free the Afghan National Army to conduct increased offensive operations, must meet the same criteria as the Afghan National Army. (RSM) <https://goo.gl/G4ZyXW>

## 3. Russia postpones Afghanistan peace conference.

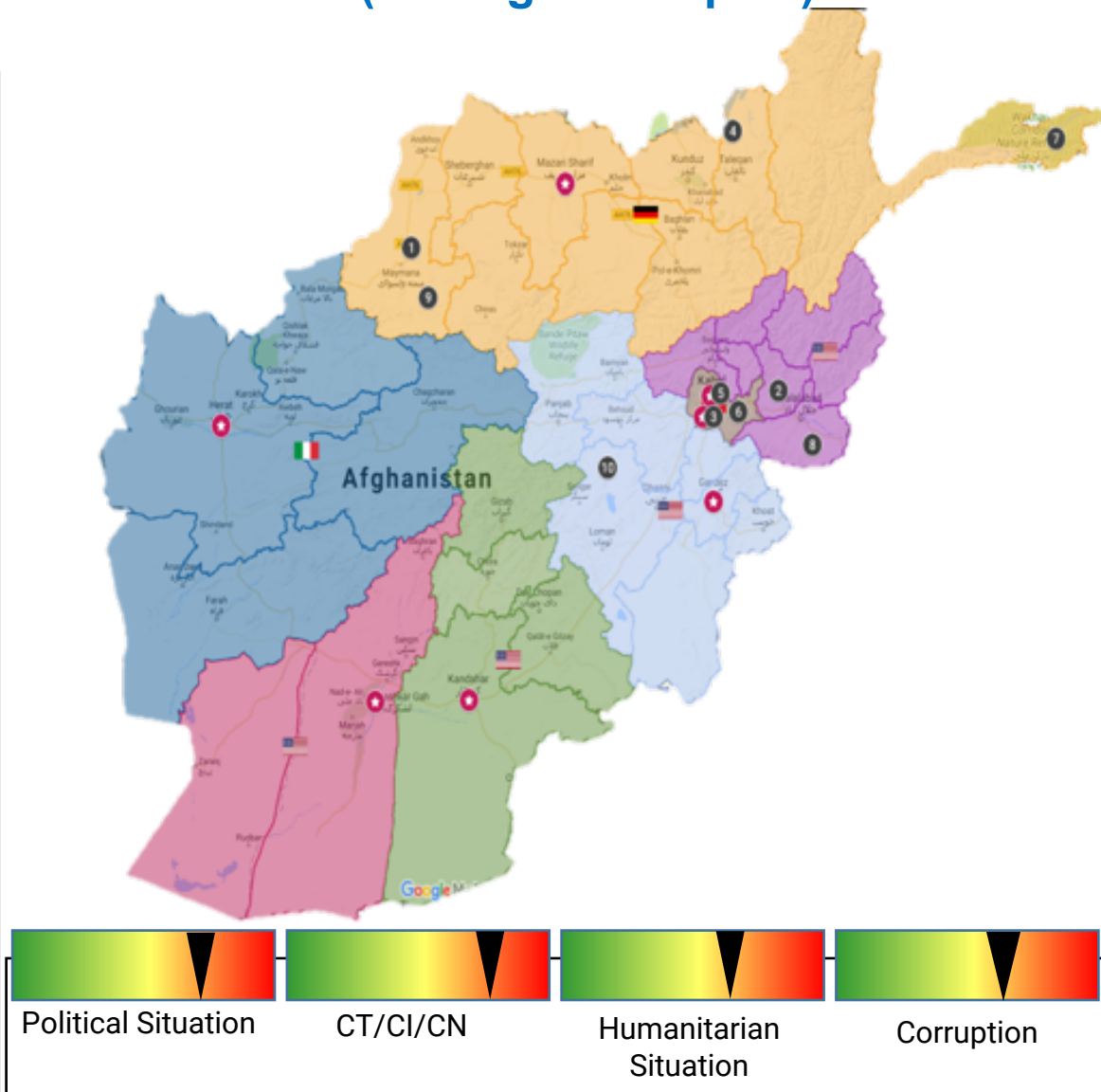
28.08.2018 Afghanistan and the US turned down invitations for the meeting but Taliban were willing to attend. Russia has postponed a multilateral Afghanistan peace conference that was scheduled to take place in Moscow next month. While Kabul and the US turned down the invitation, the Taliban said they were willing to attend. (Al Jazeera) <https://goo.gl/yVScP7>

## 4. Russia says it was not behind air strike in northern Afghanistan.

27.08.2018 Russia was not behind an air strike in northern Afghanistan and its military aircraft have not been conducting any operations near Afghanistan's border with Tajikistan, the RIA news agency cited the Russian Defence Ministry as saying on Monday. Two Afghan government officials said earlier on Monday that a Tajik or Russian plane had bombed a north-eastern Afghan border district during a clash between gunmen and Tajik border guards. (Reuters) <https://goo.gl/zTuewK>

## 5. New General takes over in Afghanistan amid Questions about the U.S. Military's Future There.

01.09.2018 Army Lt. Gen. Austin "Scott" Miller becomes the United States' newest commander in Afghanistan. Miller will be the first commander whose mission is as much diplomatic as military, as the Taliban's resilience fuels a new drive to secure a peace deal allowing for a dignified U.S. drawdown. (Washington Post) <https://goo.gl/9hDuXe>



## ASSESSMENT

- 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.

## 6. Military Believes Trump's Afghan War Plan Is Working, but Spy Agencies Are Pessimistic.

31.08.2018 People familiar with the debate over the classified National Intelligence Estimate of Afghanistan said there is broad consensus that the trajectory of the 17-year-old war hasn't significantly shifted over the year that Mr. Trump's strategy has been in effect. While the official military view of Afghanistan is "cautiously optimistic," some of these people said the intelligence view is "cautiously pessimistic." (WSJ) <https://goo.gl/ZuLGt4>

## 7. China 'building military base in Afghanistan' as increasingly active army grows in influence abroad.

29.08.2018 China is to build its first military base in Afghanistan for hundreds of troops carrying out counter-terrorism training missions across the border from its western Xinjiang region, according to reports. The base will be only the second overseas site for the increasingly active Chinese military, coming a year after a base was opened in Djibouti on the Horn of Africa. China is particularly worried about Chinese nationals, including separatist militants from Xinjiang's Uighurs, fighting and training inside Afghanistan. (Daily Telegraph) <https://goo.gl/Xi4UVA>

## 8. U.S. Forces in Afghanistan Strike Islamic State Leader; Maintain Pressure on Terror Network.

02.09.2018 US forces in Afghanistan conducted a strike against the leader of the IS-KP. The strike resulted in his death. This is the third time U.S. forces have successfully targeted a self-proclaimed emir of IS-KP since July 2016. (RSM) <https://goo.gl/QQJXEZ>

## 9. Army Soldiers Desert Bases Without Any Fight: Officials.

28.08.2018 The Ministry of Defense says the army forces have left their bases under the four-year security plan. On the other hand, local officials in Faryab province on Tuesday confirmed that in the last two weeks the Afghan National Army (ANA) deserted their bases in parts of the province without defending themselves against insurgents. (TOLONEWS) <https://bit.ly/2wCYqdQ>

## 10. Number of Afghan Return Refugees has Doubled Following the New US Sanctions on Tehran

31.08.2018 IOM said this week that the number of Afghan refugees returning home from Iran has doubled recently as Iranian currency loses its value against dollar unprecedentedly. IOM statistics show that between 8,000 to 10,000 undocumented Afghan return home from Iran every day. (TOLONEWS) <https://bit.ly/2N4NFeD>