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Afghanistan in September 2017

Peace and Politics

On the 18th, American Defence Secretary Jim Mattis confirmed the deployment of 3,000 additional troops to Afghanistan. This is part of President Trump's new strategy towards Afghanistan. Mattis also asked India to boost its role in the country. On the 26th, Indian Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman met with Mattis and said India would continue to support development in Afghanistan but will not be involved militarily in the country. Mattis and Sitharaman also discussed the issue of terrorist safe havens in Pakistan and agreed the sanctuaries should not be tolerated. President Trump's comments last month about Pakistan harbouring terrorists along the Afghan border offended Pakistan.

Chief Executive Abdullah met with Balkh Governor Atta Mohammad Noor in Mazer-e-Sharif in a closed door meeting, this meeting takes place following a period of negative relations between them. For the first time in recent months, Abdullah and Noor put away their differences and met behind closed doors in Balkh. The details of the meeting were not released but Abdullah later at a gathering stated "I would like to insist that we should solve problems by talking, accepting each other and listening to each other and we should not stop talking."

Security

There has been a significant increase in American military operations in Afghanistan since August, following President Donald Trump's announcement of his new strategy for the country. This month it was reported that the American military dropped 555 bombs in Afghanistan against the Taliban and Islamic State targets in August alone. This is the highest number of bombs dropped in Afghanistan by the American military in a single month since 2012.

On the 29th, a suicide bomber disguised as a shepherd killed six people and injured at least 30 near a Shia mosque in Qala-e-Fathullah area in Kabul. In an effort to ramp up protection of Shia mosques following last month's attacks, the government had given weapons to Shia civilians so they could defend their mosques during the mourning month of Moharram.

On the 17th, four civilians were killed and fourteen injured in a market in Khost. The blast took place in the underground section of Haman market in Khost. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack. In Kandahar the next day, six civilians were killed by a roadside bomb. The bomb was planted by the Taliban to target Afghan security forces but hit a civilian car instead.

On the 13th, a suicide bomber killed at least three people and injured seven near Kabul's main cricket ground while a major tournament was underway. Two of the victims killed were police officers while one was a civilian. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack. The terrorist activity did not stop the match or the tournament.

On the 27th, insurgents fired multiple rockets at the international airport in Kabul and also near the American embassy whilst leaders from the Pentagon and NATO were meeting with President Ghani. The attack forced the airport to suspend all flights and closed temporarily. Both the Taliban and Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack, saying they aimed to target the aircraft that was bringing US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis to Kabul. One civilian was killed and eleven wounded.

On the 6th, Bagram airbase was targeted by a Taliban suicide bomber who detonated his explosives at one of the entrances to the airbase. Three civilians were wounded in the blast - two of whom are in critical condition. The Taliban claimed the attack was in response to a US leaflet that was distributed in Parwan province which had an offensive message towards Islam. The attack occurred hours after a Senior US commander apologized for the offensive leaflet. However, the apology did not stop hundreds of Afghans from taking to the streets chanting anti-US slogans.

Rights

Afghan civilians continued to bear the brunt of conflict in September. Two American counterinsurgency airstrikes in Afghanistan killed at least 28 civilians and injured sixteen during the last week of August, all of whom were women and children. UNAMA released the initial findings of its probes into the attacks and called for appropriate steps to ensure accountability, compensation for the victims, and the prevention of such incidents in the future. There were also allegations that insurgents used civilians as human shields which was the cause of the civilian casualties.

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On the 4th, 2 people were killed and 3 others wounded in a foreign troops' air strike in Kabul's Qarabagh district. The incident happened in Jargi Village in the district when guests at the wedding ceremony fired into the air in celebration – foreign troops thought they were under attack and bombed the area. Other sources claim the numbers were much higher.

On the 21st, Human Rights Watch stated that President Ghani failed to address human rights concerns and the issue of detainee's torture at the United Nations General Assembly. According to the watchdog, President Ghani welcomed Trump's new strategy for Afghanistan but did not address the rising civilian casualties from fighting or human rights concerns his own government fails to address.

The Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force issued a public plea for information regarding rumours of possible war crimes by Australian troops in Afghanistan. On the 1st, the inspector-general of the Australian Defence Force released a statement saying it was conducting an inquiry "into rumours of possible breaches of the Laws of Armed Conflict" by Australian troops in Afghanistan between 2005 and 2016.

In 2015, a 106 year-old Afghan woman Bibihal Uzbeki made the perilous journey to Europe carried by her son and grandson. They travelled by foot and by trains before finally reaching Sweden. This month it was reported that Uzbeki now faces deportation back to Afghanistan by the Swedish government. Uzbeki is severely disabled and can barely speak, her family is attempting to appeal the deportation.

This month Afghanistan's only female Governor, Masooma Muradi, was replaced by a man. Muradi was the Governor of Daikundi and has withstood much resistance from religious leaders and political opponents since she took the post in 2015. A spokesperson for the Afghan Directorate of Local Governance said the decision was not against any kind of prejudice against women however, no other information was provided as to the reason for her replacement.

Humanitarian and Development

On the 5th, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) announced that its two abducted staff members have been released. In Jawzjan this past February, two staff members of ICRC were taken hostage after an armed group killed six of their colleagues. A Finnish aid worker kidnapped in May was also released this month.

A Spanish ICRC hospital physiotherapist was gunned down in Mazar-e-Sharif on the 10th. Two gunmen, one of whom is disabled and in a wheelchair, shot Lorena Enebral Perez, 38, at the hospital. The disabled suspect had been receiving treatment at the ICRC hospital for nineteen years. Both suspects have been arrested and no group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

The Independent Election Commission has said that the assessment of 7,000 polling stations has been completed in 34 provinces but centers in 33 districts were not assessed because the districts were deemed insecure. A member of the Election Watch Organization of Afghanistan (EWA) claimed that the number of insecure districts is actually much higher. Experts are concerned that the Taliban's control in a number of areas will result in extensive fraud. The parliamentary and district councils' elections are scheduled to be held next July.

On the 13th, the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries said that the kidnappings of businessmen in the private sector increased by five percent in the first six months of this year. These kidnappings have resulted in the decrease of investment in the country. More than 30 cases of kidnappings of businessmen have been recorded so far this year.

People and Culture

Films that were hidden from the Taliban during their rule in the 1990's are now being digitized. Habibullah Ali and his colleagues successfully hid about 7,000 films which showcase Afghanistan's beautiful culture and history. The Taliban banned the use and possession of all sorts of motion and still images, considering it against Islamic teachings. The process of digitisation of these films will soon begin and will provide a look into Afghanistan's more positive past and rich history.

Nancy Hatch Dupree, well-known American Historian died in Kabul at the age of 89 on the 10th. Dupree arrived to Afghanistan in 1962 and spent decades of her life attempting to preserve Afghanistan's heritage. She had written five books and more than 100 articles and pamphlets about Afghanistan. Dupree asked that she be buried on the Bagh-e-Bala hilltop in Kabul, close to where her husband was buried.

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