



Afghanistan Update

A twice-weekly, one-page situation report on the latest developments affecting U.S. policy and engagement in Afghanistan.

14 January
2010

Topic in Focus: Civilian Casualties

- The Taliban is responsible for causing the vast majority of civilian casualties in Afghanistan.
- Suicide bombs, IEDs and the placement of Taliban forces amidst civilian areas are the main reasons for civilians being killed and injured.
- Civilian casualties have long been a major source of difficulty for the international community, and continue to cause considerable anger and resentment amongst the Afghan public.
- Accurate figures of civilian casualties are often difficult to confirm in Afghanistan, and can often be exaggerated by the Taliban to foster anti-western sentiments.

In Quotes:

"Ensuring the safety and welfare of the civilian population must come first. Anti-Government elements must realize that they too have obligations under international law while pro-Government forces must step up efforts to ensure that every measure is taken to protect civilians during the conduct of military operations."

Norah Niland, UNAMA's Chief Human Rights Officer.
13 Jan 2010.

In Quotes:

"[I have] to campaign for an end to civilian casualties and for an end to the arrest of Afghans.... The Afghan people expect their government to protect them and to stand for them."

President Hamid Karzai,
February 2009.

Who's Who: Mullah Mohammed Omar is the spiritual and operational leader of the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

Born circa 1956 in southern Afghanistan, Mullah Omar was the head of state in Afghanistan under the Taliban from 1996 to 2001.

Ethic Pashtun from the Ghilazi branch, he lost an eye while fighting against the Soviets in the 1980s.

Taught at a radical madrassa (Islamic seminary) and formed the Taliban in 1994; unified majority of Afghanistan under strict Taliban Islamic law in 1996.

An associate of Bin Laden since 1996. Sheltered Bin Laden after 9/11 attacks.

Issued the "Taliban Code of Conduct" in 2006 to enforce discipline in the Taliban insurgency. His new version of the Code, issued in July 2009, calls on Taliban fighters to win over the civilian population and avoid civilian casualties, including by limiting the use of suicide attacks. According to the UN, this does not appear to have taken effect.

Key Issues and Developments:

- A UN survey published this week says that 2009 has proven to be the **worst year since the fall of the Taliban regime** for civilians caught up in the armed conflict.
- The U.N. mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said **2,412 civilians were killed in 2009** - a 14 percent increase over the 2,118 who died in 2008 - with a further 3566 injured.
- The survey blames nearly **70% of all civilian deaths in 2009 on Taliban insurgents**, an increase of 41% from 2008, whilst pro-government forces were responsible for about 25%, a reduction of 28% from 2008.
- **Suicide bombs and IED attacks** are the biggest causes of civilian casualties, responsible for killing 44% of the total civilian casualties in 2009.
- Nearly three-quarters (70%) of all civilian casualties in 2009 took place in the **southern and eastern regions of Afghanistan**.
- A survey for ABC News, the BBC and ARD German TV released this week found that **42 percent of Afghans now blame the violence on the Taliban** - up from 27 percent a year ago. Seventeen percent blame the U.S., NATO or the Afghan security forces, down from 36 percent a year ago.
- The sharp decline in the number of civilians killed by pro-government forces, including U.S. airstrikes, has been attributed to a **new ISAF tactical directive** issued by U.S. Gen. McChrystal to reign in the use of airstrikes fire cautiously to reduce the impact of the conflict on civilians.
- Airstrikes still remain a concern: they caused **61% of civilian deaths** attributed to pro-government forces in 2009, whilst Afghan public perceptions continue to amplify their impact.
- UNAMA noted a worrying trend of **recruiting children into armed groups**. In 2009 there were several cases of children being used to carry out suicide attacks or to plant explosives, often killing themselves as well as numerous civilians.

News Updates: 20 civilians have been killed and 13 wounded (14 Jan) when a suicide bomber blew himself up in a crowded market in Uruzgan province in southern Afghanistan, according to General Abdul Hameed, the commander of the Afghan National Army in Uruzgan province. (AFP)

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