



Afghanistan in December 2015

Politics and Peace

A decision to renew peace talks between the Taliban, Pakistan and Afghanistan came this month, after the Heart of Asia conference took place in Pakistan. After much controversy over his possible attendance, Afghanistan's President Ghani was present, and received an unexpected welcome to the country. He spoke on peace talks and connected with other regional leaders.

Following the visit, Afghanistan's intelligence chief Rahmatullah Nabil resigned. In a resignation letter posted to Facebook on the 10th, Nabil warned against trusting Pakistan and criticized the country for supporting anti-government elements in Afghanistan. On the 11th, Massoud Andarabi was introduced as acting chief of the National Directorate of Security.

On the 29th, the Afghan Foreign Ministry announced a key January meeting on peace talks between Afghanistan, Pakistan, United States and China. Also on the 29th, a number of Nangarhar residents and civil society activists rallied in Jalalabad city, urging the government to expedite the peace process. This followed a march in Kabul by civil rights activists on the 3rd, calling on the government to deliver more inclusive measures to bring peace and security to the country.

The third Afghanistan-Central Asia Dialogue took place on the 17th in Mazar-e-Sharif. 120 representatives from Asia, America and Europe participated. Panellists spoke on the needs to combat terrorism and promote further integration in the region. On the 25th, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Kabul for the opening of a new Afghan parliament constructed by India. Days before, India delivered the first of four Mi 25 attack helicopters to the Afghan national security forces.

On the 29th, Ghani and Abdullah met with the Electoral Reform Commission, welcoming their second package of recommendations on electoral reforms. Ghani has stated that elections will take place next year.

Security

The security situation in Afghanistan once again worsened as the Taliban fought for control of several districts in Helmand. Heavy clashes between security forces and the Taliban are on-going in the province. Reportedly, the Taliban control the districts of Musa Qala, Nawzad, Baghran and Disho. The districts of Sangin, Marja, Khanishin, Nad Ali and Kajaki have also experienced sustained fighting. Mohammad Jan Rasulyar, the deputy governor of Helmand province, made a public plea to the president on Facebook, asking for help in fighting the Taliban. He said that 90 soldiers had been killed in just two days in Helmand.

The Interior Minister Noorulhaq Olomi reported concerns about Taliban and Daesh (Islamic State) fighters being trained in Pakistan and then sent to Afghanistan to fight security forces. Local officials in Baghlan raised concerns over reports that Daesh militants are trying to recruit in the area. In mid-December, Daesh militants in Nangarhar launched an anti-government radio station called "Voice of the Caliphate" for self-promotion and recruiting. Local authorities say the station has since stopped broadcasting.

Fighting between insurgents and Afghan security forces broke out at Kandahar Airport on the 8th lasting for more than 24 hours. UNAMA stated that the death toll from the attack reached 54, some 38 of whom were civilians. Six NATO soldiers were killed in a suicide attack on a military patrol near Bagram air base. Meanwhile, residents of Maidan Wardak province gathered at the provincial governor's office calling for justice after nine children were killed in a government forces attack.

Kabul suffered various attacks this month. On the 11th, a car bomb exploded near the Spanish embassy. One Afghan and one Spanish policeman were killed and seven civilians wounded. According to Afghan authorities, on the 27th at least one person was killed and four others wounded in a car bombing near Kabul International Airport. On the 21st, reports indicate that at least three rockets were fired within the Kabul city limits.

In-fighting within Taliban factions continued in December, causing Herat residents to flee from their homes. The New York Times reported that a collection of religious leaders in Quetta, Pakistan, issued a letter refusing religious legitimacy of Mullah Mansour's Taliban leadership. The collective also condemned his recent crackdowns, saying he lacked the authority to declare that dissenters were outlaws.

The Afghan National Army gained an additional 1,400 troops as they graduated from the Kabul Military Training Academy. Eight Afghan Air Force pilots also graduated this month from a program hosted in the United States.

Rights

On the 3rd, The New York Times stated that in Khost a series of home raids last month, by CIA-trained Afghan counterterrorism forces, resulted in the deaths of at least six innocent civilians.

Since November's massive Kabul protest condemning the murder of seven Zabul residents, it has been reported that the Council of Ministers has ordered government organizations to identify and question military and non-military officials who attended the protest. This led to rights activists protesting the Council of Ministers' decision.

Médecins Sans Frontiers (Doctors Without Borders) submitted a petition to the White House. The petition, signed by more than 545,000 people worldwide, calls on President Barack Obama to approve an International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission investigation into the deadly October air-strike on their hospital in Kunduz.

On the 16th, activists called on the government to implement the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 to improve women's lives, as promised by the National Unity Government's leaders during their election campaigns. On the 29th, youth activists called on the government to also implement resolution 2250 to increase representation of youth in decision-making processes at all levels

Humanitarian and Development

A magnitude-6.3 earthquake shook the north of the country on the 25th, its epicentre in Badakhshan province. At least 13 people were injured and hundreds of homes were damaged.

Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Health claimed that 2015 saw the lowest number of reported polio cases to date. However, two polio drive campaigners were reportedly targeted by unidentified gunmen in Kandahar city, killing one and injuring the other. Meanwhile, an [analysis paper](#) by British charity HealthProm and BAAG, found that Millenium Development Goal 5a, to massively reduce maternal mortality, is unlikely to have been reached in Afghanistan. This despite claims of such success by a survey quoted by the Afghan government and international donors.

Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission claims 1.2 million Afghans were displaced in 2015, a result of the volatile security situation in the country.

On the 13th, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project was officially inaugurated by all four countries. The pipeline is said to be a ground-breaking economic project that will carry billions of cubic metres of natural gas per year from Turkmenistan to India. Passing through some of the most insecure Afghan provinces, various actors in Afghanistan demanded that the government ensures security for the pipeline.

On the 7th, the Asian Development Bank approved a \$1.2bn grant for Afghanistan to improve its energy sector. Meanwhile on the 17th, the World Trade Organization formally approved Afghanistan's membership.

People and Culture

The American filmmaker and humanitarian, Angelina Jolie, will donate all the proceeds from her work on the Afghanistan-based film 'The Breadwinner' to the education of Afghan girls.

Horia Mosadiq, Amnesty International's Afghanistan Researcher, was awarded the Afghanistan Simurgh Human Rights Award by the Arman Shahr Foundation.