The attacks during the Ashura observations on the 6th of December garnered the most attention this period. Almost simultaneous attacks in Kabul and Mazar lead to much speculation concerning both the responsible party and the possibility of further sectarian violence, in part due the rarity of such events and the significant number of civilian casualties incurred as a result. While the Kabul incident accounted for the worst casualty figure from a suicide attack recorded in the Central Region thus far, Shia community leaders prudently urged calm in the aftermath. The IEA was also quick to deny responsibility, a denial that is likely legitimate. While other instances of denial have appeared less sincere, particularly when popular reproach has followed an attack, in this case fomenting sectarian violence is counter to the IEA’s strategic goals and falls well outside their overall strategic messaging campaign this year.

While unclear if these were threshold events or merely outliers to the existing targeting array, the latter seems likeliest due to this country’s historical dearth of purely sectarian violence and the likelihood that AOG elements will labour to implement stricter controls in targeting, as seen after the attack which took place in the Finest Supermarket.

The ongoing tensions between the ANP and ALP in Daykundi serve as a stark reminder the impact this program can have on local dynamics. While in some areas these irregular forces have had positive impacts on the security context (for example the CIP program in the North) in Daykundi, and lesser extent Kapisa, it provides the stimulus for inflaming existing tensions, be they economic, tribal or otherwise, and in the worst cases, lead to open conflict. This is of particular concern for NGOs as it can result in a shift in the balance of power and have a sustained impact on their operational environment.

Theft was a prominent feature in the NGO incidents recorded this period, particularly for the Central Region. In Kabul, cases of purse snatching and car theft were purely criminal in nature while in Logar there was the forcible removal of demining equipment by AOG, a common enough occurrence countrywide this year. Also in Logar, there were 2 cases of collateral damage at NGO clinics, with one instance resulting in a follow up search by IMF. There were also 2 cases of NGO interactions at illegal checkpoints. The first, in Ghor, resulted in the temporary detention of staff while the second, this time in Badakhshan, was considerably more benign. Overall however, NGO incident volumes are tending downwards as the year concludes, in line with the abating conflict.

While the targeted killings of government associated personnel is a well established feature of the conflict within the South, particularly Kandahar City, this trend also came to the fore within Nangarhar in the East this period; the 2 cases of targeting District Governors arguably the highest profile. These attacks typically utilise a variety of tactics, including IED, suicide vectors, and the ever popular mobile hit teams and are related to how ‘hardened’ the target is. Jalalabad City has also recorded a recent upsurge in conflict activity, due in part to a recent change in AOG leadership for the area though also likely related to the seasonal restrictions in many other of their standard operational areas.
KABUL

In late November, two criminal incidents impacted NGOs in the capital. Shortly before mid-day on the 28th, an NGO expat member had her bag snatched from her shoulder on street 5 in Karte Seh in a ‘purse snatch’ style robbery by two men on a motorcycle. In the evening of the 30th, an unattended Toyota Corolla used by an NGO was stolen from the main street in Share Naw, opposite the Cinema Park.

While low-risk criminality is an established part of the NGO environment in the capital, deliberate suicide attacks on civilians aren’t. Yet on the 6th of December, a single attacker detonated his charge amid Ashura worshippers in front of the Abul Fazel Shrine in PD 2. Selecting a popular spot for the commemoration, the attacker also opted for a busy hour during which the pilgrims were heavily amassed in front of the mosque, a group that include families with children. The resultant strike inflicted massive casualties with the most moderate estimates include nearly 60 civilians killed and the number of injured amounting to an approximate 170, many with life-threatening injuries. Of note, minutes later an IED fixed on a bicycle detonated nearby an Ashura procession in Mazar City (North) killing 4 and injuring 20. While it remains unclear whether the two attacks were connected both sparked an immediate condemnation by the public. However, the Shiite elites were quick in urging their constituencies for calm, and a conscious moderation actually became the mainstream reaction to the event. Whilst cases of sectarian violence have occurred in recent Afghan history (generally related to broader dynamics), the local context is not one in which mobilization along the Sunni/Shia divide would constitute any major driver. For instance, with the exception of minor clashes in Herat in 2006, the Ashura celebrations have not attracted violence since. Hence, the hypothesis of an AOG element genuinely attempting to ignite sectarian hostilities by striking the crowd of Shiite worshippers proves quite implausible.

Looking at the main opposition player, the IEA, the Ashura attacks fall far away from its target groups as well as its strategic objectives. Indeed, the IEA came up quickly with a strong condemnation of the attack in several statements. The latest one, released on the 11th, reiterated the IEA claim of non-involvement. This non-involvement appears genuine although a degree of collusion and visibility cannot be excluded, in particular on the field level. Either out of self-interest or out of ignorance, the IEA did not disclose the identity of the attackers. Neither did the IEA offer any assurance of investigation or punitive action. This is conspicuous as the attack is in blatant breach of the leadership’s ban on indiscriminate attacks on civilians.

In the mean time, speculation arose in the media that the attack was claimed by a splinter group of Lashkare Jhangwi, an anti-Shia extremist formation responsible for a series of spectacular sectarian attacks in Pakistan. The linkage came to light thru a single uncorroborated source and does not appear very convincing at this time. The formation is not reckoned to have any developed capacities in Afghanistan nor has it claimed any significant attack here in the past. Similarly to the logistics, the implications of the attacks are yet to be fully assessed. The strike obviously discredited the IEA in its self-image as a coherent organization with effective rules of engagement in place and the ability to control its area of operations. By the same token, the strike also demonstrated what the potential scenario of ‘a fragmented opposition’ would look like – a situation in which not one but a wide range of different anti-GOA groups develop their capacities for independent action whilst pursuing antagonistic agendas and interests. In the best case, the Ashura attack was a one-off attack initiated by an independent extremist group or even a rogue element and as such does not reflect any major change in the current context. In the worst case, the attack was facilitated by a mixture of domestic & exogenous elements with a tacit acquiescence of foreign institutional players and marks a transition towards the post-2014 context and beyond the IMF withdrawal. The attack indeed overlapped with ‘Bonn 2’ conference and followed shortly after the US-Pakistan fallout linked to the cross-border incident in Kunar/Mohmand, both events attesting that the current regional alliances as well as the agreement as to the way forward in Afghanistan remain extremely fragile. An ill-fitting outlier at this stage, the Ashura strike has nonetheless established the precedent of deliberate targeting of civilians as a part of the AOG landscape, a reality which needs to be recognized by NGOs.
**WARDAK**

A sharp downward trend in incident volumes defined this cycle in Wardak. The downscale was mainly driven by the AOG side. The number of escalations authored by the opposition fell by 50% against the previous period. Of note, a significant drop also appears in the inter-annual comparison. The monthly volumes of AOG initiated attacks for November fell by 32% compared to the same month last year.

Whereas the IMF-ANSF kept scrutinizing AOG access and command structures in Maydan Shahr and along the highway in Saydabad, the AOG initiatives primarily ascribed to infrequent IED placement. The IEDs were mainly dedicated to the highway in Saydabad (Salar, Sultan Khel) though two devices also detonated against ANP in Chaki Wardak (Dewalak) and IMF in Jaghatu (Osman Khel). The detonations were on the mark on every occasion and created multiple IMF/ANP casualties. In the night of the 13th, the activity took a different turn for an IEA IED cell in process of planting IEDs in Tokarak, and as with the majority of such attacks in the past, encountered a superior fire-power which led to retreat. The attackers inflicted several casualties on the HIG side, but suffered the loss of their commander.

So far this year, the IEA have clashed with HIG on 12 different occasions in Nirkh. Throughout these encounters, IEA celebrated some success with targeted killings and ambushes although the escalations were not sufficient to ensure any territorial gains. At the first glance, the recurrent infighting is strongly reminiscent of the IEA/HIG dynamics in Kapisa which had seen local IEA re-emerge as the dominant actor in Tagab two years ago though the conflict drivers in Nirkh are more closely anchored in local tribal politics. HIG remains popular with the major tribe in the area while IEA continuously attempts to expand from their foothold within a minority tribe. Whilst this perspective makes the escalations likely to persist, the political fragmentation will remain secondary to tribal agendas.

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**DAYKUNDI**

Weather conditions dominated the current NGO operational picture in Daykundi. An exception to this, the Tamazan Valley, in the confines of Nili and Gizab, witnessed continued tensions between the ANP units from Daykundi and Gizab ALP, both forces manning checkpoints on the main road on each side of the valley. The latter continue to be accused of incursions into their opponents’ territory whilst anecdotal evidence suggests that the ALP also keep pressurizing companies and individual truck drivers who ensure food and cargo transportation between Nili and Tirin Kot/Kandahar. On the 3rd, ANP Daykundi signalled a van occupied by Gizab ALP to pull over at an ANP checkpoint in Woshak. In a sequence of events which has not been fully elucidated, ALP engaged the checkpoint personnel with SAF injuring one policeman. The infighting in Tamazan has a strong regional and tribal undercurrent and remains unresolved since this summer. The issue also gained further prominence during this cycle in anticipation of the announced security transition. In a situation when the negotiations between the local parties failed however meagre they were, it is yet to be seen whether the involvement of top government and military officials brings better prospects for peace.

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KAPISA

The combined incident volumes fell by 40% against the previous period with AOG authoring a minor part of the actual events, though south-eastern Kapisa remains a focal area for AOG activity in Central along with Logar and Wardak.

In line with the previous cycle, AOG dedicated attention to ‘soft’ targets. In Nijrab, an AOG unit set ablaze a telecom mast and the adjacent fuel storage, injuring two guards in process. Bahadur Khel in Tagab witnessed a lethal case on the 3rd when an artillery round impacted a private residence. The projectile struck at a time when a Quran-reciting ceremony to celebrate the return of the household head from Hajj was taking place. 7 attendants including the host were killed and an additional 4 individuals sustained injuries. At a later stage, the community asserted that the gathering might have been mistakenly taken for preparations for a security meeting with ANSF-IMF, as such are occasionally organized in the area. The strike provided the impetus for the community to stage a protest against AOG violence in the DAC area the next day with the demonstration ironically turning violent. In the consequent skirmishes with ANP, one local was killed and an additional 5 individuals sustained injuries. It appears likely that the crowd also included outsiders who protested against another event, an IMF air-strike in Jangalak, Alasay also on the 3rd. The local authorities reacted quite flexibly and brokered negotiations with the elders from Bahadur Khel, which were further supported by a GOA delegation from Kabul, and helped to deescalate the tensions.

As for IMF-ANSF activity, the mentioned air-strike in Alasay on the 3rd killed 4 and injured a further 2 AOG fighters. In Qalai Saleh on the Nijrab – Tagab section of the main road, another air-strike killed 2 AOG members in process of planting IEDs on the 5th. ANSF & IMF also continued their efforts to expand the ALP program. ALP effectives in Tagab have already reached the target number (300 men) while the recruitment in Nijrab is 60% beyond the same target. A possible case of collusion also came to light with the arrest of a local ALP commander in Dara Ghain, Nijrab last month. The commander, in charge of less than 20 men, was accused of maintaining AOG connections. The current tensions in neighboring Surobi, and reminiscent of the HIG-Jamiat rivalries in Alasay, are a reminder for NGOs to maintain their awareness about the program in the localities where they work, as the ALP may become a catalyst of local factional tensions.

PARWAN

Parwan remained quiet this period although an atypical case of kidnappping & targeted killing was reported from Kohi Safi. On the 7th in Baba Gumbakay, an armed group ambushed the vehicle of a local malik and took him into custody along with his driver and a bodyguard. At a later stage, the victims were found murdered. The malik had a jihadi background and was a member of Jamiat and while originally from Chim, he was based in Kabul but travelled to the district on a regular basis. Locally, the official enjoyed a degree of influence and was seen as a prominent GOA supporter. Though a criminal motivation cannot be entirely excluded, the killing bore signs typical for AOG intimidation campaigns elsewhere.

When it comes to the AOG landscape, the district remains quite isolated from the overall developments in Parwan and its relevance lies mainly as an occasional safe haven for AOG units active in Tagab & Surobi, as well as for the networks involved in the IDF activity encompassing a wide-range area from Bagram towards Deh Sabz and Kabul. Although typical for neighboring Tagab, targeted killings and direct AOG attacks remain rare in Kohi Safi. Since 2006, the area witnessed 40 AOG escalations incl. 14 in 2010 and 10 so far this year. Of these, abductions, targeted killings and close-range SAF combined with heavy-weapons fire jointly consti-
As part of the overall picture, the series of 3 NGO incidents this cycle provides evidence that Logar as a province may be destined to be increasingly affected by the shift (at least from an ISAF perspective) of the conflicts center of gravity from the South towards the frontier provinces in the East.

On the 2nd, an NGO clinic in Mohammad Agha was hit by the blast wave created by the SVBIED attack off the entrance towards the IMF base in the DAC area. While the number of critical injuries remained rather low given the potent charge – the IED was rigged in a long truck, over 70 patients sought treatment for wounds inflicted by flying glass debris and other particles propelled by the blast. The victims included patients and visitors present in the NGO clinic. As such, the attack highlights the inherent risks of proximity to key target areas, such as IMF bases and DACs, as was the case here.

On the 7th, a local IEA group visited a demining NGO camp in Dado Khel and requested a mine detector from the staff. When the NGO refused, the gunmen confiscated one by force and left without expressing any reservations or personal enmities towards the staff members or the NGO programming. Out of 28 incidents which involved NGO/IO de-miners this year, 13 took place in Central, including 5 in Logar. Of the latter, 3 cases were ascribed to a spate of AOG-authored robberies of assets from demining projects between May and July. During the summer months, various demining NGOs reported thefts of vehicles, medical drugs, technical and communication equipment in Chahar Asyab, Logar, Loya Paktya and Nangarhar. The same camp in Dado Khel for instance witnessed an AOG visit in June during which the AOG took away a large assortment of VHF equipment.

Lastly, on the 10th, an IMF-ANA element searched an NGO health center at the entry to the Garmababa Valley in Charkh. Earlier that day, the facility received a degree of damage following the blast of a mortar or an RPG during a contact between AOG and a mixed IMF-ANA patrol.

Unlike in Wardak and Kapisa, where seasonal conflict patterns have already came to the fore, the incident volumes in Logar remained in line with the previous period. Whilst the AOG escalations encompassed an element of an ‘economy of force’, such as a greater emphasis on more asymmetric tactics, there are strong indicators that Logar is increasingly explored by exogenous AOG units along the access corridor from North Waziristan and Kurram towards Jaji, Azra & Khushi. Despite their low volume, the statistics on suicide attacks are indicative in this regard. The Mohammad Agha SVBIED on the 2nd of December marked the 9th suicide attack in Logar since 2006. Of these, 4 occurred this year with the 2 most recent cases taking place within the span of 2 weeks with all the strikes this year concentrated in the district/provincial centers (Azra, Khushi, Puli Alam, Mohammad Agha). With the exception of the attack on Azra district hospital, the remaining cases targeted security forces or GOA installations. Whereas the core of documented ANSF-IMF activity continues to be concentrated on securing the Kabul – Gardez Highway and the road network in Baraki Barak – those two areas for instance accounted for 70% of ANSF-IMF operations this cycle - it appears that the doors into the province from the east remain wide open and are increasingly explored by AOG.

### NOTICE:
The graphs provided in the report are accurate as of the 14th of December 2011.
A RCIED detonation that occurred near the Alkozai intersection in Mazar city during the commemoration of Ashura—killing 4 civilians and injuring an additional 27—secured international headlines and constituted the most noteworthy incident recorded in Balkh Province this period.

IED explosions are extremely rare in Mazar City, although it is noteworthy that this marks the 5th this year (a significantly higher volume than the solitary IED explosion which occurred in the city over all of 2010). In this most recent occurrence, the explosive device was attached to a bicycle and detonated in a crowded area while the majority of Ashura observers were in the process of moving towards the Blue Mosque.

The detonation in Mazar city was almost immediately linked by open media sources to a suicide blast that occurred practically simultaneously in Kabul. Although there were numerous similarities, most notably that fact that there was no presence of security or VIPs targets in the vicinity at the time of the detonation, and the targeted population appeared to be Ashura observers, it remains unclear whether there was any actual link between the two attacks. Also similar to the attack in Kabul, and rare amongst targeted IED attacks such as these, all the victims of the attack in Mazar were civilians, marking a rarely seen tactic in non-vehicle based IED attacks in the North (or

country wide). Further to this incident, shortly after the detonation another explosive device placed in a bag was located and defused by ANSF in the immediate vicinity of the initial strike, suggesting that the incident was intended to be part of a larger attack. As noted, this marked the 5th IED detonation to occur in Mazar this year, but it was the first significant event ever reported during the usually peaceful day of Ashura.

Of further interest to the above, prior to this attack, the observance of Ashura was troubled by tensions that arose at Balkh University when a group of Shia individuals (mostly consisting of students) attempted to enter a mosque located inside the university compound and were subsequently blocked by Sunni students. A physical altercation ensued and ANP units were deployed to the area to control the situation. Upon arrival of ANP, some of the individuals involved threw stones at the security forces and the ANP responded with warning shots. It has been reported that 2 ANP were slightly wounded and 6 students sustained injuries as a result of the initial physical altercation. Despite the handful of events demarcating Shia-Sunni tensions, such incidents remain a strong outlier to the existing security paradigm both region and countrywide, and further information will be necessary to determine the authors and precise reasons for the IED attack. It is worth noting that besides these incidents, no further escalations were reported, and Shiite and Sunni leaders have focused their efforts to ensure that these incidents, although dramatic, remain outliers rather than the sign of any new dynamic going forward.

Most of the other districts remained relatively calm, although notable incidents took place in the traditional hotspots (Chimtal and Chahar Bolak Districts), both of which have been relatively quiet since the initiation of the CIP project combined with Operation Ebtekar 3 and the coming of winter weather. These included an IMF arrest operation in Chimtal (Baburyha Village), where 2 suspects accused of having links to AOG were arrested during a night raid on 3 December, while Chahar Bolak saw an IED discovery in the area of Soryan Village. Of relevance to NGOs moving throughout the region, the main Mazar – Shibirghan road continued to be generally quiet. Finally, GOA efforts to secure the area through the various militia/CIP/ALP programs may have been partially responsible for the reintegration of 11 individuals from the Alburz Mountains area, which has traditionally been an AOG stronghold, but is one of the focal points of current Operation Ebtekar 3 activities. More surrenders are likely to arise as the winter comes on and low level fighters are drawn to the financial benefits of IMF and GOA based programs such as these, but the longevity of such results remains to be seen.
FARYAB

Over the last two weeks Faryab witnessed no NGO direct incidents; however, on the night of December 2nd, reports indicate that an explosive device—likely a hand grenade—was hurled into an IO national staff member’s private residential compound in Maymana city. The attack resulted in no casualties, but the compound sustained some structural damages. Although the exact circumstances of the incident have not been elucidated, anecdotal reporting suggests the attack was criminally motivated (suggesting a grievance with the individual or organization) rather than ideologically so. Region-wide, grenade attacks such as these have been used relatively frequently to intimidate “targets” and/or ‘send a message’, rather than to cause direct/significant harm. As in other major cities in the country, criminality is present in Maymana, with this marking the fourth such attack to occur in the city this year (with 1 other that involved an IO compound taking place on 18 August). Although attacks on IOs do not necessarily suggest any security shifts towards the NGO community, the safety paradigm in Faryab has been closely observed recently due to a string of NGO abductions and other violence that occurred late October and into November.

This cycle, AOG activity continued to be focused primarily on Qaysar (and to a lesser extent on Qaramqol and Dawlatabad). A civilian abduction occurred on 7 December when an AOG attacked a road construction company compound in Qaysar, killing 1 worker and injuring another, before abducting 1 employee as they left the area. Also on the last day of the previous period (on the 30th), the ANP found the corpse of a local male in Pashtun Kot. Reportedly, the victim had been abducted and killed by an AOG. Abductions remain a strong concern to humanitarian actors in the province.

Beside these incidents, an additional 6 AOG authored incidents were reported from Qaysar, with 3 of them targeting the ANP (patrols or checkpoints). Outside of these, an AOG opened fire with small arms on a private truck which was transporting sand to the District ANP headquarters, injuring the driver, in Zohori village an elementary school was set on fire, and the district notched 1 of the 2 AOG attacks on telecommunication towers that took place this cycle (with the other occurring in Dawlatabad).

Lastly, on 11 December in Khwaja Qushri area along Maymana – Shibirghan Road, armed men – believed to be members of an ACG – stopped and robbed a private vehicle. Although the incident took place at around 0530 hrs. (and outside of recommended NGO travel time) it underlines the increasing risk of roadside robberies as different groups prepare for the onset of winter.

SAMANGAN

Despite the generally low volume of overall incident reporting (4 incidents total), a couple of incidents stood out in the quietest province in the North. The most notable amongst these, and one marking a strong outlier to the existing security paradigm, was the discovery of an IED in the District Center of Feroz Nakhchir District on the December 9th. This marked the first security incident in the district since may 2009, and the first IED discovery ever.

Otherwise, the sighting of 15 armed men along the Dara-I Suf Payin – Aybak road was of interest to NGOs operating in the area, as Dara-I Suf Payin has been relatively quiet recently despite it’s history of being the most volatile district in the province, as was the decision to transition authority for security in the province. Although anecdotal sources say this transition has already occurred, a ceremony was scheduled to take place on December 5th, but it had been pushed back at the writing of this report.
**Badakhshan**

Keeping generally in line with seasonal trends, Badakhshan saw little insecurity this reporting period, but that which did occur was focused almost exclusively on the eastern district of Warduj, and included the stopping of an NGO vehicle at an illegal checkpoint.

Warduj district—which is located along the main drug trafficking road linking Badakhshan to Tajikistan—has often had issues this year (along with neighbouring Baharak). Anecdotal sources suggested that during the last days of the previous reporting period an AOG was seen conducting numerous vehicle searches along the main Warduj – Ishkashim road. One of these was reported on 27 November, when the AOG established a daytime illegal checkpoint along this road between Zoo and Bashund Bridge area. A few days later, on the 1st of December, another daytime checkpoint was reported between Qasibagh and Azaqcha areas on the Warduj – Baharak road, with several armed individuals reportedly searching the vehicles for ANSF/GOA employees. Over the course of the checkpoint a rental NGO vehicle with 3 NGO staff members was briefly stopped in the area. After performing only a visual check of the passengers the gunmen allowed the vehicle to proceed without questioning.

The freedom of movement that the AOG enjoyed in the area and its impact on the main road forced security forces to launch an operation in an attempt to retake control of the area, and on the evening of the 5th, ANSF sent a large number of elements to the area to initiate a protracted engagement with the AOG.

The initial fire fight that ensured resulted in reported death of 3 ANP and caused injuries to an additional 7. 8 ANP Ranger vehicles were burned and the AOG was able to capture 11 ANP servicemen. Following this failed operation ANSF reinforcements were deployed to the area, however military actions were put on hold as security forces began the process of negotiation with the AOG (through local intermediaries) to ensure the safe release of the abducted ANP. Over the next weeks, a total of 26 arrests of alleged AOG were made (including 18 in the Yakh Chehra area on the 13th, where the attack occurred), and the 11 detained ANP were released on the morning of the 15th. Over the course of the engagement, anecdotal reports suggested that the AOG was able to gain influence in the local community.

On a distinctly different note, 7 districts (Yaftali Sufla, Shahri Buzurg, Baharak, Tishkan, Kishim, Argo & Arghanj Khwa) and Fayzabad City have been scheduled to transition to Afghan security during the second tier of the “transition” process.

**Baghlan**

Baghlan saw a relatively active cycle, with 10 security incidents reported, half of them taking place in Baghlan Jadir (Bij), which continues to witness the most insecurity in the province (although who these are attributed to swings strongly between GOA/IMF and AOGs depending on the level of AOG and/or IMF/ANSF operations ongoing at any given time). Perhaps most notable to NGOs that often travel between Kunduz and Puli Khumri was the arrest of 1 criminal as he attempted to abduct 3 civilians along the main Kunduz – PeK road on December 11th. The arrest was more notable due to the fact that it took place at 1000 hours, during normal NGO travel hours.

Other incidents in Bij included 3 IED related incidents, including 2 detonations (1 on a Pro-Government Militia vehicle and 1 on an ANP vehicle) and the civilian discovery, and subsequent EOD disarming, of another IED.

Most notable outside of these 5 incidents was the abduction of 3 civilians from Da Marda village in Nahrain District on the 11th, also at 1000 hours, marking the second abduction related incident in the province, both of them occurring during NGO movement times.
In Jawzjan the previously observed lull in activity continued into the current period. Further in line with existing trends, one of the incidents that did occur took place along a main district road. On 7 December, in Aqcha District, members of an ACG opened fire on a private vehicle when the driver refused to stop for them, causing no casualties. The incident occurred in the area of Komak Hakim Village along the Aqcha – Komak Hakim road. Aqcha District has historically witnessed relatively little insecurity this year, with this marking only the 16th security incident recorded (of which this marks the 6th attributed to criminal activity). However, despite this relatively low volume, it is worth noting that this total actually represents twice the volume recorded the entire previous year (8 in 2010).

Although more rare since the initiation of the CIP projects, sporadic AOG attacks on Pro-Government Militia (PGM) checkpoints have been documented in Qush Tepa throughout the past, making the one that occurred this period (on 5 December) when a PGM checkpoint came under AOG fire in the area of Salanga somewhat unsurprising. The area remains an AOG stronghold though this attack - like in the incident above - caused no casualties.

Lastly (in a period that recorded only 3 security incidents of any kind), an IED was discovered in Fayzabad District, Qabchaq Village. This marks the first IED discovery to occur in the district since 21 September, when 2 IEDs were located in Gurjak and Miyan Darak Villages.

Of some interest to the community, Shibirghan was announced as one of the cities that will undergo the transition from IMF to Afghan led security, but no timeline had been released as of the writing of this report. The tangible results of the transition remain to be assessed though Shibirghan has typically been regarded one of the more operable working environments in the North.

The overall volume of incident reporting in Kunduz approximately doubled that of the previous period, as early December witnessed a total of 25 incidents, although only 3 of these were AOG initiated.

After a temporary lull in insecurity, Kunduz City witnessed an RCIED strike that occurred on 10 December in PD#2. The explosive device, which was attached to a bicycle, detonated against the vehicle of a former Jihadi commander. The detonation occurred in the late morning in a crowded area and caused 2 fatalities, 1 of which was the targeted Jihadi commander, as well as injuring an additional 17 civilians. At this stage it is unclear whether the attack was related to a personal issue or, as some sources suggest, due to the victim’s involvement in the reconciliation process making it a premeditated political act. However, the targeting of commanders in the Northeast remains consistent with existing security trends.

In fact, over the last two weeks IED/RCIED emplacement accounted for the majority of incidents recorded across the province with 9 reported events (both detonations and discoveries). Besides Kunduz, these incidents were focused on Chahar Dara, Khanabad, Aliabad and Imam Sahib. In the latter district a premature detonation killed 1 local civilian (also on December 10th).

Documented ANSF/IMF activity was focused on Kunduz city where 4 suspected AOG members were detained and in the neighbouring area of Chahar Dara a joint operation conducted during the first week of the present period in the northern areas of the district resulted in the arrest of 7 AOG members.

In Aliabad, where violence between local commanders remains a relatively common occurrence, an armed clash over an interpersonal dispute between 2 Pro-Government Militia (PGM) commanders, resulted in 1 PGM member killed and another injured (on December 5th around Mirshikh Village).
**Sar-e Pul**

The potential for AOG activity along the main roads remains one of the main concerns for vehicular movement in Sar-e Pul. Unlike the previous period, which experienced 2 illegal checkpoints, insecurity along the main Shibirghan – Sar-e Pul road in early December consisted solely of one AOG armed attack. On the 6th, several armed men attacked an ANP checkpoint located in Imam Jaffar area on the main Sar-e Pul – Shibirghan Road at approximately 1615 hours. The fire fight lasted for 30 minutes before the AOG withdrew with no resulting casualties to either side. The Imam Jaffar area is known to host a certain level of insecurity, and a similar (albeit night time) AOG attack was reported on June 15th.

Elsewhere, Sangcharak experienced its second IED related incident this year on December 7th, with the first one reported the previous cycle, and consisting of an attack on the District Chief of Police along the Sangcharak – Sozma Qala road. In the more recent incident, NDS employees discovered an IED which was emplaced on the road between Archatu and Tokzar villages. Further assessment will be required to determine whether these 2 incidents will remain relative outliers or mark the beginning of some level of slightly more sustained insecurity in the area, although the generally low level of activity does not suggest that such a development will necessarily occur.

Another usually quiet district—Gosfandi—witnessed insecurity this period. On the night of December 9th, AOG members fired RPG rounds towards 2 telecommunication towers around the District Center, damaging both structures. Although anecdotal reports have surfaced in the past suggesting a significant AOG presence in the district, thus far the level of reported incident volumes has been very low, with this marking only the 3rd security event to occur this year (and the second related to AOG activity).

Lastly, political tensions were reported from the provincial capital where, on 11 December, a large number of individuals staged a demonstration requesting the Provincial Governor to step down. It appears that outside of the political reasons, rumours about the alleged involvement of one of the Governor’s relatives in an assault played an important role in the demonstration, and a large audience gathered and temporarily blocked road traffic along the main road. It is unclear at this time whether the rumour was created by individuals in order to further their own political agenda, or whether it was based on actual circumstances, but multiple reports point to the latter. Sources have also suggested that it is likely that the protesters will try to continue similar protests in the area in order to see their demands met.

Looking more broadly at the province, Sar-e Pul (with the exception of Sayyed District, which is part of the much contested Tri-Provincial Area) will transition its security to Afghan authority as part of the second tranche of transition, but despite this coming development, security in Sar-e Pul has recently been temporarily transitioned to US forces.

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**Takhar**

Takhar continued to show an extremely low level of insecurity, with 5 incidents of little note, 2 of those occurring in Taluqan.

At the time of writing, none of the reported incidents were expected to have an effect on the existing security paradigm, other than to further enforce the existence of a temporary lull in security reporting.

While not denoting anything of immediate import, Takhar has also been chosen to be transitioned over to Afghan security. The results of said transition are yet to be assessed, but thus far, province by province transitions have not necessarily implied any immediate change in conflict dynamics or the existing security paradigm though further assessment may be required.
While Badghis remained the hotspot of the Western Region, with a BBIED incident taking place there this period (the second BBIED incident this year), the volume of AOG incidents continued to decrease in line with seasonal trends, with 11 in total this reporting period (dropping from 15 compared to the PRP). It is also worth noting that the volume of incidents initiated by ANSF/IMF sharply decreased from 14 to 5 and the pointed reduction of ANSF/IMF activity most likely complimenting AOGs’ lower operational tempo during the winter season.

From a district perspective Muqur, the district most heavily affected by the conflict for the past 2 months, noted a district drop in both the number of ANSF/IMF and AOG initiated incidents (from 7 ANSF/IMF and 6 AOG to 0 ANSF/IMF and 3 AOG). As for Murghab, another place which traditionally has a concentration of AOG activity, the volume of overall security incidents also demonstrated some decline (from 7 ANSF/IMF and 5 AOG to 5 ANSF/IMF and 2 AOG).

Besides the reduction of ANSF/IMF activity and standard seasonal trends, the mounting of the APRP in the province appears to have played a role in reducing AOG activity; 377 reconciled AOG members from Qadis and Muqur received a transitional assistance package from the GoA this reporting period alone with a further 44 from Qadis currently on a waiting list. Furthermore, an additional 250 AOG members along with 15 commanders from Qadis joined APRP. While the long term positive effects of this program is questionable, due to a limited budget for programs to ensure sustainability (as noted in APRP efforts in Qadis which appear to have resulted in no significant long term reduction in AOG activity levels), the recent volumes of reconciled fighters will surely have had a short-term impact on local conflict dynamics in the province.

The volume of AOG activity in Farah noted a further downturn this reporting period (dropping from 9 to 6 when compared to the PRP). ANSF/IMF efforts to crack down on AOG elements in anticipation of future transition plans, particularly while AOG has limited mobility and capability during the winter, manifested in an increase in their operational intensity (from 4 to 13), killing 12 AOG members, wounding 2, and arresting 20 others, and seizing a quantity of heavy and small weapons and explosive devices.

ANSF/IMF operations were heavily concentrated in Bala Buluk (60% of the province’s overall number) where the center of gravity of AOG activity lies, particularly the Shiwan area along the main road connecting Farah City and the Herat-Kandahar Highway. Since major commanders from this area have already reportedly left for the winter break, and other commanders have recently been facing difficulties garnering local support, the AOG showed little resistance against these operations (only 2 AOG initiated incidents were recorded).

As for Bakwa, another place where AOG activity continued despite the winter season, both the volume of AOG incidents and tactical trends (disruption of military logistic supply for example) remained unchanged: 3 IED detonations on ANP vehicles and one direct attack on a convoy of several PSC vehicles.
HERAT

This reporting period in Herat only 4 AOG incidents were recorded in total, consistent with nationwide seasonal trends. Ongoing ANSF operations also contributed to this downturn; maintaining a large amount of operations to secure strategic areas such as the eastern districts along the Herat-Chaghcharan City Highway. In particular, the events in which 21 AOG members and their prominent commander from Chishti Sharif joined the APRP and the arrest by ANSF of a prominent commander and his son from Pashtun Zargar in Herat City, also contributed to the recent stability along the highway. While these 45 day long clearing operations along the highway (which had ended in the PRP) were fully owned by the ANSF, perhaps demonstrating an increased confidence, Chishti Sharif was nonetheless one of two districts of Herat excluded in the second tranche of transition. As well, most of the major local AOG commanders still have a presence in mountainous areas south of the highway, and thus may reorganize themselves in time for the spring offensive.

In Gulran, another hotspot of Herat, the mounting pressure from ANSF operations which had begun shortly after Eid resulted in the killing of the District Shadow Governor and four of his core supporters. Also, though relatively small in number, 10 AOG members and their commander from Adraskan—where AOG activity is concentrated in the south—joined the APRP. Further, apart from one IED attack targeting PSC vehicles (working for IMF logistic supply), most AOG incidents appeared inconclusive (as seen in the low yield explosive device detonation in Herat City and the indirect fire attacks on the airport in Guzara and an ANP checkpoint in Kohsan). While the possibility significant incidents cannot be ruled out, the deepening winter as well as the ongoing ANSF operations is likely to continue to hold AOG activity low through the month.

GHOR

Ghor experienced one direct NGO incident this reporting period. AOG members working for the Deputy Shadow Governor of the province temporarily detained an NGO staff member in Charsada while in transit and confiscated medicines destined for a clinic project in Charsada City. A positive development, the individual was released shortly afterward due to the AOG’s acknowledgement of the NGO’s position of neutrality. Of note, this AOG is reportedly responsible for the other two NGO incidents that happened in Charsada this year. In both cases, AOG searched and released both the staff and vehicles unharmed, though there was some property loss, after the AOG confirmed they were unaffiliated with the GoA. Therefore, this last event further reinforces the assessment that the DPSG has maintained some degree of control over this ideological AOG in the north of the province.

As for general trends this reporting period, the number of total AOG incidents increased from 3 to 8 compared to the PRP. This irregular increase in the volume of AOG incidents during the winter season can be ascribed to the GoA’s attempt to reportedly negotiate with several local commanders to join the APRP in Pasaband, the stronghold of exogenous AOG from Helmand. There were two incidents which involved anti-personnel landmines emplaced by these outside AOG, which resulted in the death of two locals in Pasaband. In Taywara, an escalating dispute between two local commanders, one who has recently become an MP and the other a local AOG commander who allied with Helmandi AOGs in response to his rival gaining a seat in parliament, is the likely cause of the increase in AOG incidents in the district. These incidents took the form of armed attacks on an ANP vehicle, an ANP convoy, and a food supply convoy under ANP escort, and were all reported carried out by the second commander. While he had recently not been active in siding with either the GoA or the Helmandi AOGs, it appears a number of factors, including the perception of biased food distribution in favour of the MP’s local allies, was likely to increase the local AOG commander’s willingness to actively conduct operations against the GoA in the district – particularly as ANP in the district are known to be close to the MP.
The most significant developments in Nangarhar related to a substantial, province-wide escalation in lethal targeting of notable individuals by AOG cadres, which also led to the province’s only NGO incident. On 13th December, an ex-jihadi commander and his son were ambushed and killed by gunmen as they emerged from Bati Kot's Takia village onto a secondary road, with an NGO nurse one of the 3 rear passengers collaterally involved in the incident; that he was not targeted, even when the gunmen came to search the bodies and the vehicle after the ambush, was indicative of the collateral nature of the NGO involvement. The commander had been the target of a previous IED strike during 2010, as it was felt by local AOGs that he was in some way actively supporting the GOA, although all that could be confirmed was that he ran a small clothing shop in the Bati Kot bazaar.

A number of further such incidents were also recorded across the province. Two of these took place in Shinwar, each targeting a District Governor. On the 2nd, the vehicle of the Dur Baba DG, a popular target for the opposition given his strong anti-AOG stance and strategic position on the border, was hit with an IED, only injuring one of his ANP guards. Shortly after, ANSF conducted a search in the same area, and found a stash of weapons, ammunition and military uniforms. Two days later, the vehicle of the Shinwar DG was hit with an IED in Marko Bazaar, injuring two of his bodyguards. In Chaparhar on the 3rd, the Nangarhar chief prosecutor was ambushed by gunmen as he drove through the Sra Kala area, a focal point for such attacks; and just two days later on the 5th, the prosecutor was again targeted, this time with an IED detonating inside the grounds of his house in Jalalabad’s Zone 4, summing to a strong indication that the province’s senior judicial figure is a marked man.

In all then, there has been a clear increase in such targeted operations in the past 2 weeks, a trend highly likely to be a consequence of a change in the AOG leadership in the provincial capital in early November, with a more active and aggressive AOG operational commander replacing his reportedly corrupt predecessor. Consistent with this, further elevated threat reporting has been seen concerning AOG intentions to conduct complex and/or suicide attacks against the city’s leading IMF and GOA facilities – notably JAF and the offices of the provincial governor. As such, while security in the city is certainly better than this time last year, there is a moderate probability that such a high-profile attack will take place in the coming winter months. So far, though, just two rocket attacks were seen against JAF – which does signify an escalation – but nothing unmanageable for the IMF.

Other notable incidents in the provincial capital included the attempted robbery of a UN staff member’s house in Zone 3, Jalalabad, who managed to detain the thief until the ANP arrived. Also, a car mechanic and 4 family members were fatally ambushed by gunmen as they left their house just outside Farm-e Adda, in an incident of unclear motivations. In Khalis Family Colony, gunmen similarly shot and killed a man, and two others, again for unknown reasons. These final two incidents, as with many others on a month-to-month basis, indicate the prevalence of a certain level of generalised violence in the province that is often of a criminal, personal or criminal nature. But what is different in the past two weeks is that the armed opposition has clearly begun to re-energise their campaign in Nangarhar.
THE ANSO REPORT

KUNAR

The region’s most serious NGO incident occurred in Kunar’s provincial capital during this period, in an unusual event that is unlikely to be repeated. On December 4th, a flashbang-like IED was discovered in the NGO-administered public health hospital in Asadabad, in what was confirmed as an attempt to rescue 2 AOG fighters that had been severely injured and hospitalised that day after fighting with ANSF in the Pech. The IED, which consisted only of gas and was designed to make noise rather than cause material damage, was discovered by hospital cleaners, before being removed and control detonated by ANSF. A number of details from the incident clearly indicate it was an outlier, and does not in any way represent changes in AOG perceptions to NGO medical work in the province and region, which continues to enjoy high levels of acceptance.

This was, in fact, just the first of a number of significant security incidents during the first half of December. A second took the form of a BBIED attack, targeting GOA officials attending Friday prayer in a mosque in Ghaziabad; in the blast, the District Chief of Police, an NDS employee, 2 other ANP policemen and 3 civilians were killed. This second BBIED in Kunar this year looks much more akin to the type of suicide attack that is registered in Pakistan – the first being the BBIED assassination of the powerful Mashwani tribal elder Malik Zarin in a jirga in Asmar in April. Moreover, this is the fourth successful suicide attack in the province this year, the highest annual figure yet in Kunar, which is relatively new to the suicide attack game – mirrored by a longer term trend over the past 6 months of elevated threat reporting concerning persistent efforts of AOGs operating out of Bajaur and Mohmand Agencies to infiltrate BBIEDs into Kunar, mostly via Marawara.

Indeed, in Sirkanay, which like Marawara is the terrain of one of Kunar’s most senior AOG military commanders, a substantial escalation in AOG operations were seen over the past fortnight. Most significantly, the CPs of a new Afghan Local Police unit, 350 men strong and primarily focused on the aforementioned AOG commander, came under repeated attack from AOG fighters, evidence of the seriousness with which those AOG cadres consider these new ALP forces. Such consideration would indeed be justified, moreover, as a similar programme in Khas Kunar, which has been operational since late 2010, has reportedly been quite successful in its objective of holding back cross-border AOG penetration. With the Sirkanay ALP operating particularly around the Nawa pass, a key infiltration point from Bajaur Agency, it will be interesting to see if it can replicate the success of its neighbour.

While Ghaziabad saw significant ANSF casualties in the BBIED strike, the armed opposition also lost a notable figure during the fortnight, with the Manogai District Shadow Governor (DSG) dying in an IMF airstrike in the Showraik area on the 7th alongside 3 others. IMF had conducted another lethal airstrike in Manogai a few days previously, killing 10 fighters in that strike, cumulatively leading to a particularly lethal fortnight in the Pech. The only other notable IMF operation took place in Narang, in which 3 AOG fighters were killed and 3 injured, while in Ghaziabad, an ANSF operation the day after the BBIED in the same area netted 4 AOG fighters and a cache of automatic weapons.

In terms of security along the JAA-ASD highway, the first notable security incident in the past 2 months took place on the 12th, when before sunrise (c. 0500 hrs) a local man carrying food supplies for IMF was abducted by gunmen in the Spin Jumaat area of Chawkay District, a focal point for the most brazen roadside operations by AOG units along the highway. Due to on-going concerns over AOG presence along the highway, a further increase in ANSF and IMF presence along the road, both static and roving, is likely to be seen in the short term, but the close proximity of AOG-saturated valleys to the highway will continue to pose a significant challenge to security forces. However, it’s important to note that the security risk along the highway has not worsened for NGOs, as long as they travel during daylight hours and maintain appropriate distance from security forces.

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NURISTAN

Developments in Nuristan during this period continued along the line of the trends established and described during the previous period, which set the tone for the winter period. Starting with access to the province itself, the Chapa Dara-based armed blockade of the road to Parun, which had been started as a result of a commercial conflict, was finally lifted on the 12th, although it was only lifted for civilian vehicle traffic. The armed individuals who were enforcing the blockade are reported to remain in the area (including local Pashtun AOGs that exploited the issue) and have let it be known that they will not allow GOA vehicles or officials pass – summing to a partial solution beneficial to NGOs, but problematic for government reach and access into the centre of the remote province.

In Kamdesh, the ANSF clearing operation from mid-November finished and moved back to Nari, with no further arrests or clashes in Kamdesh before its end. As if by clockwork, two weeks after the operational forces had moved out of the Gawardesh area into central Kamdesh, the cross-border IDF began again – whether from AOGs or PakMil forces remaining unclear, and likely in practice ambiguous. The first rocket attacks into the valley, on the 11th, did not cause any damage, but after two days of shelling, on the afternoon of the 13th artillery shells struck a local residence, killing a woman and injuring at least 2, but up to 4, further male family members. At the time of writing, this tactic looks set to continue in the short term.

To the west, in Nurgaram there was a further rocket attack on the old PRT facility, consistent with the emergent trend from last period. In Waygal, finally, in a development reflecting the high levels of hostility to the GOA, both in terms of AOG presence and the disposition of its local communities, an NDS employee was shot and killed by AOG fighters in the Gada Mountain area.

LAGHMAN

Laghman saw a number of noteworthy developments during the period, marking successes for both security forces and the opposition. In Alingar, IMF established a new base in the Sheikh Sahib area towards the end of the previous period with AOGs inaugurating it with attacks on the 2nd and 7th. More substantially, to the north of the district, an IED struck an IMF vehicle travelling on the main district road and killed one soldier, in one of the rarer instances where such strikes have a lethal impact. In Alishing, a similar strike against an ANP vehicle on the main road killed one and injured 3, marking a particularly effective pair of IEDs, the only recorded in the period.

Prior to the operation though, an incident did take place in the Tor Ghar itself, which serves as a warning to those interested in outdoor excursions in remote terrains: on the 1st, 13 local men out hunting in the hills were kidnapped by the same AOG units that had been operating there over the past months and killing 10 along the way. An immediate result of this was that, on the 4th, locals in Sorkh Rod’s Kakrak area were treated to the highly unusual sight of more than 100 AOG fighters descending from the Tor Ghar, seemingly fleeing to Kurram Agency or dispersing into Khogyani and Hesarak. More substantially, this has meant that there have not been any registered security incidents along the district’s stretch of the KBL-JAA Highway, which was of course the intention.
**KHOST**

Much more so than Paktya, Khost continued to see significant amounts of conflict activity during the past fortnight, although the city itself continued to be relatively calm. While a small number of IED discoveries took place across the provincial capital, the only detonation took place in the Bilan Manzal area just east of the city centre, where an IED detonated outside a local girls’ school - female education of course being a sensitive socio-cultural issue for a significant subsection of the population in the eastern region. Beyond this, the only IED detonations took place in Murdikhel east of the city, where one struck an ASG vehicle, causing no recorded injuries, while another detonated prematurely, with the responding ANSF discovering 5 further IEDs, in what appears to have been an attempt to conduct a multiple-stage IED strike against an unknown target. Finally for the city area, two motorcycle-bound AOG operatives conducted a non-fatal drive-by shooting of local labourers as they were entering Salerno; they were quickly detained by IMF. In the same area, moreover, there was some threat reporting concerning potential BBIED operations, which appeared to be targeted towards the city centre. As such, it’s important to note that AOGs operating in the Khost plain are highly likely to continue to attempt to penetrate the city for such complex/spectacular attacks; with the last big attack taking place in May, it is also increasingly a matter of reputation that they do so.

A little further east from these incidents, gunmen ambushed and shot dead 5 tribal elders in the Spinki Bori area of Lakan, in what is suspected to be related to the land dispute which was reported to have been resolved in November, although these killings strongly suggests otherwise. Along the border in Matun, as well as in Tani and Tere Zayi, AOG fighters attacked multiple ABP CPs with SAF and RPG attacks, none leading to casualties. What is worth noting, though, is that PakMil forces along the Khost-North Waziristan border have recently received additional weaponry, including anti-aircraft capabilities, meaning that more consequential clashes may well be the result in coming months, particularly given the recent rapid deterioration in IMF-PakMil border cooperation.

Sabari and Bak accounted for almost all other developments, consistent with their positions as the most kinetic of all areas in the province. In the former district, given its still heavy AOG-saturated countryside, most AOG-initiated incidents concentrated in the ANSF- and IMF-held district centre; multiple rocket and direct attacks were recorded, of no major consequence. IMF also conducted a number of operations in the district, in total killing 3 and arresting 16. In Bak, the DAC was also the site of all AOG-initiated incidents, including 1 IED against an ANP vehicle, while a small number of IMF operations netted 3 AOG fighters and some explosives cache.

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**PAKTYA**

Paktya’s conflict intensity dropped further during the period as AOG cadres decreased in advance of the snows expected around the new year. Things were quiet in the northern border districts, where there had been a spike in security incidents due to the re-routing of FATA-based AOG cadres to this area after Khost’s IMF border operations; the most serious incident was an accidental detonation of an ANP’s RPG rounds in Chamkanay DAC, which killed him and injured 12 of his colleagues. Jani Khel, however, did see a particularly active fortnight, with attacks on the DAC – the only GOA presence in the AOG-aligned district – on three consecutive days. Two IMF operations also took place there, the first in Jeda arresting 8, and the second in the DAC area netting a mid-level commander. Conflict continued in Zurmat, primarily SAF assaults on security forces, with one leading to IMF air strikes killing 2 – while an IMF operation on the 14th arrested an IED cell operative. In Gardez, NDS arrested another IED cell operative, with the provincial capital remaining quiet otherwise.
HELMAND

In Helmand, IED deployment remained a significant portion of the recorded incidents this reporting period. Amongst at least 9 IED effective strikes that affected Nahri Sarraj, Sangin and Marja, 5 involved civilian casualties. These incidents resulted in the reported death of 29 civilians and caused injuries to an additional 12. This significantly high civilian death toll was mainly due to one particular incident, when a pressure-plate IED detonated against a mini-bus in Sangin District on December 7th, killing 19 civilians (including 7 women and 5 children) and wounding 5 others (including 3 children). Although the area where the incident occurred is located near an IMF base, suggesting that the civilian vehicle was not the primary target, the attacks underlines the threat to the local population from victim operated IEDs (which are commonly deployed across the province). In Sangin this incident marked the 7th IED strike involving civilian casualties, and unfortunately the most deadly.

Another high-profile incident occurred on 14 December in Dishu District, when an IED detonated against the vehicle of the District Governor of Khanashin, who was returning from a poppy eradication campaign. As a result, the official, 1 ANP and 1 NDS were killed, with 2 ANP and 1 NDS wounded.

IED data from Helmand reveals that despite the fact that 50% of reported IED related incidents consist of IED discoveries/disposals, the province still experienced at least 893 effective IED strikes thus far this year. The geographical distribution of these incidents indicates that Nahri Sarraj accounted for more than 20% of all effective IED strikes, followed by Sangin with 16% and Naw Zad 13%.

In the last fortnight ANSF/IMF were active with at least 27 documented operations, reported mainly in Nahri Sarraj, Nad Ali, Sangin, and Marja districts. IMF air assets were used on 5 separate occasions in Sangin, Nad Ali and Nahri Sarraj, resulting in 15 AOG killed and 1 AOG wounded/arrested.

Similar to the previous report, security forces continued their efforts of disrupting the drug business across the province. This reporting period anti-narcotics forces were successful in Baghran, which had already witnessed a series of anti-drug operation in late September, and on December the 3rd, an operation conducted in the district resulted in seizure of a quantity of drugs. In addition, 10 AOG members were reported to have been killed. Further to this, in Nahri Sarraj, the eradication campaign led to the detention of 16 locals accused of cultivating poppy fields while in Naw Zad 42 individuals were arrested for the same motive.

Lashkar Gah city was fairly quite over the last two weeks, however a noteworthy incident occurred on 9 December, also related to narcotics trade, when 9 drug dealers escaped from ANP custody. The circumstances of the incident, as well as the subsequent detention of 4 ANP officials, strongly indicate the existence of accomplices within security forces facilitating the evasion.

NOTICE: Your input is invaluable for the production of this report. While we appreciate information on incidents, we also need general information on the security situation and context in your area. So please remember to call or email us regularly.

Contact details of ANSO staff are provided on the last page.

ANSO: “by NGOs for NGOs.”
Combining both a high level of AOG initiated incidents on one hand, and numerous ANSF/IMF pre-emptive operations on the other; Ghazni remains a focal point for insecurity in the Southern Region.

In early December AOGs were responsible for authoring 43 events out of the at least 74 that were recorded across the province. These incidents particularly affected Andar District - a consistent ‘hot spot’ within this troubled province – followed afterwards by Giro and Muqur. The AOGs operating throughout the province did not show signs of changing their favoured TTP as direct attacks were once again predominant this period.

In the last fortnight at least 27 AOG initiated direct attacks, mainly involving the use of SAF, were reported targeting ANSF/IMF mobile patrols, IMF contracted logistical convoys and district centres. Despite this volume, the majority of attacks were inconclusive engagements, however, a complex attack was reported this period in which an IED was used to trigger an ambush. On 5 December, an IED detonated against an IMF vehicle in the area of the Muqur DAC. Before withdrawing from the area, the AOG opened fire on the military convoy engaged with small arms. Although there were no reports of casualties following the small arms fire, 3 IMF soldiers were wounded as a result of the IED blast. Furthermore, in 3 separate AOG direct attacks, 1 ANP was killed and 4 ANP and 1 civilian were wounded while a single attack that took place in the area of Andar DAC caused injuries to 3 IMF soldiers.

Consistent with the previous cycle 9 indirect fire attacks against district centres and IMF bases took place this period. Although the majority of these attacks were ineffective, 1 ANP was killed and another 2 were wounded following one mortar strike in Muqur. These frequently inaccurate attacks remain a significant threat to the local population, in particular those living in the proximity of potential targets. This was highlighted on 9 December when an AOG fired 5 mortar rounds towards the Muqur DAC. The projectiles impacted in a residential area wounding 8 civilians, including 2 children. In addition to this, further civilian casualties arose from a mortar round which was fired in Khogyani (injuring 2 children).

ANSF/IMF maintained a high tempo of operations in Andar, Dih Yak and Khogyani. These operations netted a variety of weapons, ammunition and explosive materials, as well as resulting in the death of an AOG commander believed to be the Shadow Governor of Dih Yak District. Further to this, a significant quantity of assorted rocket, mortar ammunition and mines were discovered and seized in Bahlol area of Ghazni. In addition, 2 IMF air strikes were reported from Khwaja Umari and Waghaz where 3 AOG VHF repeaters were destroyed.

Incident reporting from Nimroz remains limited, with the majority of incidents occurring in the northern district of Khash Rod. In the last two weeks a total of 6 security incidents were reported from the area, with 2 of them attributed to AOG actors. Worth noting, all AOG initiated incidents this period were related to IED emplacement, and occurred in the area of Posht-e-Hassan Village during the first week of the reporting period. The most notable event consisted of an IED strike targeting an ANP foot patrol on 1 December that resulted in 1 ANP fatality and injuries to another 2 ANP. Two days later ANSF carried out an operation in an attempt to clear the area and located 9 IEDs. However this success was dampened by an IED detonation that killed a member of an ANA EOD team the same day.

IMF activity reported over the second week of this reporting period completed the picture of the security situation in Khash Rod. On 7 December, an IMF operation targeted the area of Rezayi and managed to detain 7 AOG members, including a mid-level AOG commander. An additional 2 operations involved the use of air assets and resulted in the destruction of an AOG VHF repeater, the death of 2 AOG commanders and the arrest of 4 AOG fighters. These operations will most likely result in maintaining the already low level of AOG activity in Nimroz in the weeks to come.
**URUZGAN**

In Uruzgan, the overall level of security incidents decreased in comparison to the previous period, with a limited number of AOG authored incidents reported in the last fortnight. In the first two weeks of December the province saw a total of 20 incidents, of which 5 incidents were attributed to AOGs.

The threat picture within the province has not changed significantly this period, as the majority of incidents continue to be related to IED emplacement while AOG direct attacks have been—as per usual—less of a factor in the area (with only 1 direct attack recorded in Chora).

Although limited in number, the reported incidents illustrated once again that AOGs operating within the province have been less reluctant to risk important civilian casualties in order to reach their targets by staging IED attacks in high density areas such as the main bazaar area or crowded markets. Illustrating this, on 2 December an IED detonated in Ganj area of Dihrawud District, in the proximity of an animal market, wounding 3 civilians and 2 ALP members. Another explosive device (an RCIED attached to a motorbike) detonated in the Bazaar area of Dihrawud on 7 December. The target of the attack was an NDS vehicle carrying the District NDS Chief. The explosion, which also occurred in a crowded area, caused injuries to 3 NDS officials, including the District Chief, and 5 civilians. Besides security targets, IED emplacement remains a constant threat to the local population. On 5 December, a roadside IED detonated on a local Townace vehicle in the Sarab area of Chora, resulting in five civilians including a woman and four children killed and another six, including a woman and two children wounded.

The small amount of ANSF/IMF documented activity was limited to several IED discoveries and disposals in Tirin Kot, Dihrawud and Khas Uruzgan. Further prevalence of IEDs across the province was highlighted as security forces located and seized a large quantity of IED/RCIEDs during 2 separate operations in Wali Muhammad Shahid (Bakhshi Village) and Tirin Kot (Sarkhuliz area).

**ZABUL**

In the first two weeks of December security incidents dropped in Zabul, with AOG focusing their efforts on IED initiated attacks. In contrast - with 66% of the total number of reported security incidents - IMF strongly outpaced AOG activity in the province.

This period Shahjoy and Tarnak Wa Jaldak experienced AOG activity consisting of IED strikes, and although they were limited in number, these incidents caused a significant number of casualties. A notable incident occurred on 2 December, when a Zaranj motorcycle that was rigged as a VBIED detonated against an ANA convoy that was passing through the area of Shahjoy Bazaar. The blast injured two ANA soldiers and 10 civilians.

The following day in Qarabaghi Village of Shahjoy, 1 IMF soldier was wounded as a result of a roadside IED. The third IED detonation targeting also an IMF vehicle was reported in Tarnak Wa Jaldak, but this time it did not cause any casualties.

IED emplacement across the province remains robust. In terms of placement, general data shows that amongst at least 160 recorded IED effective detonations recorded this year, the large majority of these incidents occurring in Qalat District (46%), than Shinkay (13%) and Shahjoy (11%). Although the main targets remain security forces, as in other southern areas, collateral involvement of local civilians is unfortunately frequent. For instance, on the district level, prior to this incident there had been 5 reported IED strikes targeting civilians, which resulted in a total of 4 fatalities this year.

ANSF/IMF conducted a total of 8 documented operations in Qalat and Shahjoy. These appeared very effective, resulting in the detainment of 24 suspected AOG members, including a mid-level commander and an AOG weapons facilitator. In addition, these operations netted a variety of weapons, ammunition and explosives along with a quantity of drugs.
During the first two weeks of December incident volumes recorded throughout Kandahar Province have decreased compared with the previous cycle. Nonetheless, the distribution pattern in incidents, especially those attributed to AOG activity, has not changed significantly. In the last two weeks AOG activities were focused on Zhari, Maywand and Kandahar City, and involved IEDs and direct attacks as the AOG tactic of choice. Yet, in a shift, for the first time since the October 31 attack on the UN compound in Kandahar city, the use of suicide vectors was recorded in the province. This reporting period 2 attempted suicide attacks took place in Shah Wali Kot, a district which had previously recorded only 1 similar incident (February 2008). On the morning of 8 December, a suicide attacker detonated prematurely before reaching its target (believed to be a local gathering) in Bakhto area. Also on the 8th, another attacker attempted to gain entry into the residence of the District Chief of Police, but was identified and shot in Qala Sima area. Nevertheless, in this latter incident, the BBIED vest detonated, killing the attacker and wounding two women and one ANP. As mentioned in previous reports, AOG initiated attacks on GOA or ANSF officials remain a common occurrence in Kandahar. Of note, another attack on a GOA official occurred this period, although involving a different TTP. On 11 December in Zhari, an AOG attacked a convoy of the Shorabak District Commissioner with SAF. The official escaped the attack unharmed but 2 ANP were wounded.

In the last fortnight Kandahar saw at least 10 IED strikes. Noteworthy amongst these, an RCIED attached to a motorbike detonated in District 2 of Kandahar city targeting a passing ANP vehicle on 6 December. Although the incident occurred on the day of Ashura and caused the death of 1 civilian (injuring 3 others as well as 3 ANP), the presence of an obvious security target in the vicinity seems to indicate that the event was unconnected with other attacks targeting Ashura observers that occurred earlier that day in Mazar and Kabul (which were themselves not clearly connected). Another 6 IED strikes were reported against security targets, with a total result of 1 ANP killed and 2 ANP, 2 ANA and 1 IMF soldier wounded, while a further 3 IED detonations affected primarily civilians, killing 6 people and injuring 4 in Maywand, Khakrez and Shah Wali Kot. This already heavy casualty count further increased when 4 labourers were wounded in an UXO detonation in District 4 of Kandahar city.

The AOG campaign of targeted killings continued this period as well, particularly in Kandahar City. In the last two weeks, 3 separate AOG initiated targeted killings occurred in District 7 and 2, resulting in the deaths of 3 civilians and injuries to another 2. Although all the victims were civilians and none of them were active members of security forces, their profiles suggest that they were targeted because of their general association with GOA and/or IMF. Further to this, another civilian was killed by a mobile ‘hit team’ in District 9, however the exact motives have not been elucidated.

The above observed main trends i.e. a continuing campaign of targeted killings and confluences of sporadic spectacular/media attracting attacks, will most likely become the main characteristics of the winter season in Kandahar.
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**MISSING THIS PERIOD.?**
ANSO did not provide analysis for the following areas:
- Barmyan, Panjshir & Paktika

These areas will be included in subsequent reports. If you have any information that would help us better understand the dynamics, please contact your local ANSO office.

**ANSO is overseen by an NGO Advisory Board. If you have any questions or feedback, good or bad, let them know on:**
Advisoryboard.afg@ngosafety.org

**NGO can register up to five persons to each of ANSO mailing lists. For a registration form please contact:**
Registration.afg@ngosafety.org

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**COMMON ACRONYMS**
- ACG: Armed Criminal Group
- AEF: Afghan Eradication Forces
- ANA: Afghan National Army
- ANBP: Afghan National Border Police
- ANP: Afghan National Police
- AOG: Armed Opposition Group
- APPF: Afghan Public Protection Forces (local deputised militias)
- DC: District Centre
- GOA: Government of Afghanistan
- IDF: Indirect Fire (ex: mortars)
- IED: Improvised Explosive Device
- IMF: International Military Forces
- NDS: National Directorate of Security (Intelligence)
- PRP: Previous Reporting Period
- PSC: Private Security Company
- RPG: Rocket Propelled Grenade
- SAF: Small Arms Fire
- VBIED: Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device
- PDO: Private Development Organisation
- ALP: Afghan Local Police
- LDI: Local Defence Initiative
- IEA: Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Taliban)
- PSG: Provincial Shadow Governor
- DSG: District Shadow Governor