



Afghanistan in September 2018

Peace and Politics

Peace remained elusive in September. An anonymous Taliban official told Reuters that they met with Afghan government representatives in Saudi Arabia in during the last week of September to discuss a prisoner swap and security of the forthcoming parliamentary elections. Later, Afghan officials and a spokesperson of the Taliban denied such talks. The Taliban had earlier discussed a larger prisoner swap with the US that would have included the release of Anas Haqqani, son of the Haqqani network's founder who died earlier this month.

The discussion over Moscow peace talks also continued in September. On the 21st, Russian officials confirmed that work is ongoing on the content of the meeting. Moscow announced the intention of hosting peace talks last month and initially received a cold shoulder from the Afghan government because the Russians had also invited representatives of the Taliban.

Protests and turmoil continued ahead of the upcoming parliamentary elections scheduled for the 20th of October. Major political parties threatened to boycott the elections if necessary measures are not taken to avoid electoral fraud. They also closed electoral offices in at least four provinces. Chief among their demands are the use of biometric verification of voters. On the 20th, Chief Executive Abdullah announced that the government accepted using biometric technology in the elections. Watchdog groups think this change in electoral plans is too much too late and will delay the process. To make elections more manageable, the Independent Elections Commission announced that the district council elections, originally scheduled to take place on the 20th October, will be held with the Presidential elections next year.

Parliamentary candidates started their campaign on the 26th, amid new fears of insecurity. A vast poll of about 2500 candidates, including 400 women are competing for 249 seats.

Security

Violence continued in most parts of the country and intensified in three provinces: Jawzjan, Sar-e-Pul, and Faryab. The US and Afghan air force conducted several air strikes that inflicted heavy losses on Taliban fighters. However, the UN reported a surge of civilian casualties from airstrikes. On the 22nd, aerial ordnance hit a civilian home in Kapisa during an operation led by pro-government forces and killed 12 people, including 4 children and 3 women from the same family. Another operation in Wardak killed several civilians the following day.

Daesh attacks on civilians continued in September. On the 5th, two suicide bombers attacked a sports club in Kabul attended by Hazara Shias, killing 20 and wounding 70. Among the victims were many first responders and two Tolo News journalists. Reporters Without Borders stated that Afghanistan was the deadliest country for journalists. Following the attack, the Afghan government divided Kabul city into four security zones in an effort to better manage safety. Attacks on civilians also continued in Nangharhar province where a suicide bomber targeted three schools and several protesters, killing 20 and injuring at least 60 people.

On the 9th, during the commemoration day for Ahmad Shah Massoud, supporters patrolled the streets while shooting celebratory fire in the air. The spree wounded at least 25 people and killed seven. Following the mayhem, 200 people were arrested. A Daesh suicide bomber also targeted the supporters and detonated his explosive while on a scooter.

Daesh also underwent attacks by international and government forces in Kunar and Kabul. On the 17th, Daesh hideouts were attacked in Kunar while the following day at least 26 fighters were arrested in Kabul after allegedly entering the city to carry out terrorist attacks during the Shia mourning proceedings.

This report is developed based on media reports. Although BAAG has taken necessary precautions to include only credible sources, it does not take responsibility for incorrect content.

On the 6th, the Times reported that a record of 400 Afghan soldiers and police were killed in the last thirty days. Officials say the average in 2018 is between 30-40 deaths a day, a significant upswing since 2016.

Rights

On the 22nd, gunmen in Ghor killed Noqra Mah, a young woman who had refused to marry her cousin. Noqra Mah's fate was tied to her cousin after her birth through a customary practice called "nomination". She was enroute to seek medical treatment at a local clinic when gunmen allegedly linked to her cousin kidnapped her. She was brutally tortured for more than a month before being killed. Her cousin who had been treating her like his property was against her seeking medical treatment. The police haven't arrested anyone in connection to the crime.

On the 17th, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan announced his intentions to grant citizenship to Afghan and Bengali refugee children born in Pakistan. The new Prime Minister affirmed that the children's lack of identity documents prevented them from getting jobs and pushed them into crime. According to the UN Refugee Agency, Pakistan hosts 2.7 million Afghans, including 1.5 million registered refugees.

Humanitarian & Development

120,000 people were newly displaced from rural areas of Badghis to Qala-e-Naw in September. The number of people displaced due to the drought is currently more than 275,000, which is 52,000 people more than those displaced by conflict in 2018. According to World Vision, a charity, the drought is also contributing to an increase in child marriage. In Baghdis, over fifty percent of surveyed households cited child marriage as a coping strategy for food insecurity and low income. To address the drought, the European Union announced its plan to contribute Euros 25 million to the United Nations to help Afghan children on the move and to eradicate polio.

On the 4th, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) announced an investment of \$110 million in the agriculture sector over the next five years. This will help create jobs and support key actors along value chains. Despite recent investments, a new report by the Afghan Ministry of Economy indicates a decrease in NGOs and private institutions' investments in agriculture and social safety in Afghanistan.

Promote, a USAID project to improve gender equity in Afghanistan came under heavy criticism by the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) for failing to meet its targets. The \$280 million dollar program aimed at creating employment for 75,000 Afghan women by 2020, has only helped 60 women so far. Afghanistan's First Lady Rula Ghani had in the past complained that a big part of the Promote project's budget was spent on foreign employees of the program and that "women don't need workshops and certificates. They need real, hard skills."

On the 17th, The UN opened Awaaz Afghanistan, the first inter-agency countrywide call centre to offer information about humanitarian assistance to people affected by conflict and natural disasters. The helpline is toll-free and confidential and gives callers the possibility to register their feedback.

People & Culture

27-year-old Safiya Wazir, a former Afghan refugee in the US, won the Democratic primary in New Hampshire. She has unseated Dick Patten, a four-term incumbent in the primary, who had said her lack of experience and status as a refugee would hurt her campaign.

Afghan-American novelist Khaled Hosseini, launched his new book Sea Prayer in London on the 6th. The book is inspired by Alan Kurdi, a three-year old Syrian boy who drowned in the Mediterranean trying to reach Greece. A former refugee himself, Hosseini urged world leaders to "act with compassion" towards refugees.

This report is developed based on media reports. Although BAAG has taken necessary precautions to include only credible sources, it does not take responsibility for incorrect content.