



مركز الجزيرة للدراسات  
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Report

## Insurgents in Afghanistan



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A recent series of attacks has struck at the seeming core of the international military strategy in Afghanistan. The mistrust generated by these so-called 'green-on-blue' incidents has forced a rethink of some operational procedures, but the transition process will remain largely unaffected on account of the relatively low numbers of casualties being inflicted.

ISAF international military forces have been attacked on their own bases by Afghan troops or individuals working together with them in relatively significant numbers since 2011. These attacks were taking place in previous years, but in far less significant numbers; 2009 and 2010 each saw five such attacks committed, for example, whereas 2011 saw 15 and 2012 had seen 33 as of September 29.<sup>1</sup> These have resulted in 116 deaths of ISAF troops and 94 wounded since January 1, 2008.

The spread of these attacks has been quite large, although the bulk of the attacks have taken place in southern Afghanistan. Out of all the attacks 2008-2012, over half (31 out of 60) took place in Kandahar, Farah, Helmand, Uruzgan and Zabul. The extension of these incidents into places like Faryab, Herat and Balkh provinces, would seem to challenge the recent claim that the Haqqanis are behind the campaign (such as there is a 'campaign').<sup>2</sup> If there were a significant Haqqani involvement, one would presume a far larger proportion of these attacks in south-eastern Afghanistan, an observation not reflected in the data.

Moreover, as a proportion of the whole, green-on-blue attacks are not a leading cause of casualties. In August 2012, for example, there were 53 ISAF deaths, but of those, only 15 happened in green-on-blue type incidents (around 28%).<sup>3</sup> The most significant tactic used against ISAF forces continues to be improvised explosive devices or IEDs; as of August 31, 2012, there had been 110 deaths caused by IEDs, just under 45% of the total number of deaths for that year.<sup>4</sup>

The exact mechanics and motivating forces behind the green-on-blue attacks remain unclear, both to outside observers as well as ISAF. General Allen, commander of ISAF forces, has stated that he believed roughly 25% of these green-on-blue attacks (dating back to 2007) could be linked to the Taliban, and that for 2012 the proportion dropped to just 10%.<sup>5</sup> It is difficult to be able to judge this internal ISAF assessment without seeing the precise data and methodology of assessment, but these numbers seem low. The very fact of a significant leap from one year to the next would seem to indicate (at the very least) encouragement of these kinds of attacks from a senior level within the armed opposition forces. Moreover, the Taliban have mentioned these kinds of attacks numerous times in their media output (both video and written), which is a clear endorsement, regardless of whether they are actually pulling the strings behind the scenes.

If ISAF's analysis -- that the majority of attacks are not carried out at Taliban instigation -- is correct, this is potentially of even greater concern. It would imply that disagreements leading to the death or wounding of ISAF soldiers have significantly increased *independently of any Taliban interference or plan* to infiltrate or recruit members of the Afghan armed forces. This, in turn, implies broader structural failings of

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<sup>1</sup> All data on these attacks comes from [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/08/green-on-blue\\_attack.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/08/green-on-blue_attack.php).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.military.com/daily-news/2012/10/06/us-suspects-haqqani-tie-to-green-on-blue.html?comp=700001075741&rank=1>

<sup>3</sup> [https://csis.org/files/publication/120904\\_Afghan\\_Iraq\\_Casualties.pdf](https://csis.org/files/publication/120904_Afghan_Iraq_Casualties.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>5</sup> <http://news.yahoo.com/general-ramadan-factor-afghan-insider-attacks-141709721.html>

ISAF's attempts to work together with Afghans, although, again, it is important to remember that the numbers of these attacks are relatively low. While 35 ISAF soldiers were killed in green-on-blue attacks in 2011 (out of a total of 566), there were an estimated 1950 Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police fatalities during the same time.<sup>6</sup>

The Taliban have sought to encourage the perception that they are behind these attacks. This has included statements by official spokesmen, official statements on the movement's website, and even recent video productions.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of whether they are actually behind the recent uptick in these attacks, the perception among many Afghans is that they are (to a large extent).<sup>8</sup> For the Taliban, the attacks are said to show the frustration felt by Afghans serving together with international forces.

The implications in the short-term will be most closely felt by ISAF troops in terms of their ability to interact with Afghans that they are mentoring and/or with whom they are interacting. An initial order to reduce the numbers of joint operations in September 2012 was in part motivated by a desire to reexamine the vetting procedure of Afghans joining the ANA or ANP.<sup>9</sup> It would be unsustainable (not to mention look bad) for ISAF to permanently reduce the number of joint operations, especially given the small numbers of individuals involved in these attacks.<sup>10</sup>

The Taliban will make a consolidated effort to increase the number of these attacks, having seen the serious effects that they are having on ISAF's campaign. Moreover, it seems unlikely that the significant increase from 2010-2011 was organic or spontaneous; combined with official endorsements of these kinds of attacks -- published by international and local media outlets -- the Taliban appear to seek to increase the use of the tactic as part of their ongoing military campaign. This is a largely asymmetric military campaign, employing IEDs and these insider attacks to strike at international and Afghan military forces without causing significant casualties for their own forces.

## Implications for Transition

As of May 2012, ISAF had 'transitioned' in three separate 'tranches' of territory across Afghanistan; the area contained in these tranches, they stated, holds 75% of the country's population.<sup>11</sup> It is unclear when the fourth and fifth tranches will be handed over, but the Chicago Summit declaration states that by mid-2013 "all parts of Afghanistan will have begun transition and the Afghan forces will be in the lead for security nation-wide."<sup>12</sup>

The handovers to Afghan national security forces have proceeded with fewer difficulties than many analysts had predicted. There have been no glaring losses of territory in key urban centres. Moreover, in certain areas like Kabul, Afghan troops have taken the lead in day-to-day operations and in the event of significant so-called 'complex attacks'.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Programs/foreign%20policy/afghanistan%20index/index20120930.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> See [http://articles.cnn.com/2012-08-13/asia/world\\_asia\\_afghanistan-violence\\_1\\_isaf-spokesman-zabiullah-mujahid-afghan-intelligence](http://articles.cnn.com/2012-08-13/asia/world_asia_afghanistan-violence_1_isaf-spokesman-zabiullah-mujahid-afghan-intelligence), [http://shahamat-english.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=17204:message-of-felicitatation-of-the-esteemed-amir-ul-momineen-may-allah-protect-him-on-the-occasion-of&catid=4:statements&Itemid=4](http://shahamat-english.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17204:message-of-felicitatation-of-the-esteemed-amir-ul-momineen-may-allah-protect-him-on-the-occasion-of&catid=4:statements&Itemid=4) and <http://jihadology.net/2012/09/30/al-imarrah-studio-presents-a-new-video-message-from-the-islamic-emirate-of-afghanistan-the-raid-of-sangin/>.

<sup>8</sup> Interviews, phone (October 2012) and in Kabul/Herat (June-July 2012).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iqHaRetwFZSpKxdDeqz4v1iKxA4Q?docId=CNG.bc159ef39c1f7a8b6c202ad.aeb86af84.541>

<sup>10</sup> On paper, there are over 300,000 Afghan police and army forces serving around the country.

(<http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Programs/foreign%20policy/afghanistan%20index/index20120930.pdf>).

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.nato.int/nato\\_static/assets/pictures/stock\\_2012/120517-ISAF\\_Transition\\_T3-highres.jpg](http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pictures/stock_2012/120517-ISAF_Transition_T3-highres.jpg) and <http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=2751>.

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_87595.htm?](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87595.htm?)

There have been problems, though. The logistics capacity of the Afghan national army and police does not seem to have caught up along with everyday operational capacity.<sup>13</sup> This is somewhat understandable given that logistics were not prioritised for many years, but it calls into question the sustainability of continued funding to the ANSF post-2014, when American logistics capacity will be heavily curtailed as a result of their own scaling-down; thus, even if money continues to be provided, it will be difficult for Afghan security forces to ensure the continued flow of supplies around the country without the air capacities (for example) that the current international troop levels facilitate. Moreover, the patches of stability that have appeared across the country do not appear to have meant an overall decline in the armed opposition's ability to carry out attacks.<sup>14</sup>

In terms of whether the present strategy is working or not, it is worrying that military and political strategies often seem to work in contradiction to each other, or are not synchronised to work together. Efforts to target the armed opposition's mid-level leadership, for example, have had the effect of exacerbating fragmentation within their ranks, making political engagement increasingly difficult.<sup>15</sup>

In the end, the departure of most international military forces by the end of 2014 is inevitable. It is difficult to conceive of a scenario in which more than 20 or 30,000 international troops remain in Afghanistan after that date. As such, the plan is on track. The 33,000 extra troops that were sent to Afghanistan as part of the 'surge' have now all left, and there is little reason to suspect that most of the rest will not also leave (as is currently planned).<sup>16</sup>

It is impossible to predict the exact contours of a post-2015 Afghanistan, however it does seem that Afghan security forces (in combination with the remaining international military trainers) will be able to continue to hold the de facto stalemate. This includes the use of militia forces around the country which, so long as they continue to receive payment, will likely be effective in preventing significant losses of territory or urban centres not already effectively abandoned to the armed opposition.

The political transition is harder to envisage, mainly because so much depends on what happens during the 2014 Presidential election (both before and after). If, as seems will be the case, Karzai manages to install a preferred candidate with the acquiescence (however grudging) of non-Pashtun and northern groups/strongmen, it is possible that the turmoil will be minimised.

Two recently posited scenarios of Afghanistan's post-2015 future invoke the possibility of "civil war."<sup>17</sup> While this is certainly a possibility, it seems more likely that (assuming continued international funding for Afghan security institutions) the short- to medium-term future of Afghanistan lies in more of the current kind of environment and dynamics. Political instability will continue, just as an uneasy military stalemate will be punctuated by headline-grabbing attacks in urban centres. But these would have happened even were the military and political scenario far more advanced than they are at present. This is not to suggest that the future for Afghans living out in the provinces is going to be easy, or that it might not be preferable for many (particularly young people) to try to

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/months-after-americans-leave-an-afghan-base-in-disrepair/2012/08/02/gJQApMfzSX\\_print.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/months-after-americans-leave-an-afghan-base-in-disrepair/2012/08/02/gJQApMfzSX_print.html).

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/09/analysis\\_the\\_taliban.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/09/analysis_the_taliban.php).

<sup>15</sup> [www.cic.nyu.edu/afghanistan/docs/gregg\\_sep\\_tal\\_alqaeda.pdf](http://www.cic.nyu.edu/afghanistan/docs/gregg_sep_tal_alqaeda.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> <http://news.yahoo.com/apnewsbreak-us-surge-troops-afghanistan-233948316.html>.

<sup>17</sup> See [http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/waiting\\_for\\_taliban2.pdf](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/waiting_for_taliban2.pdf) and [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/07/09/120709fa\\_fact\\_filkins?printable=true](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/07/09/120709fa_fact_filkins?printable=true).

leave for neighbouring countries or further afield.<sup>18</sup> A dramatically scaled-down international presence, however, might allow for Afghans to take more responsibility for their own political futures and a reduction in the amount of money being spent inside the country might bode well for anti-corruption initiatives.

## Conclusion

Transition is proceeding more or less as planned because political realities in the United States and Europe dictate that it does so. Building more or less on the plan implemented by the Soviet Union to bring its troops out of the country -- replacing them with a combination of militia and regular forces -- at the end of the 1980s, the international military effort will most likely draw down according to the schedule already specified. As such, the ongoing spate of so-called 'green-on-blue' attacks will not prevent this, even though the prominent media coverage of such incidents make it difficult for ISAF to proceed without some difficulty. Afghanistan post-2015 will not see an immediate security crisis or collapse, although the seeds have been planted for such an eventuality in the medium-term, especially if regional powers become involved and if the United States and Europe curtail their political involvement at that point.

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<sup>18</sup> Large numbers of Afghans continue to leave the country, and are taking their money and assets out as well. (See figure 1.27 of <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Programs/foreign%20policy/afghanistan%20index/index20120930.pdf>).