

3.3.4.2. Indiscriminate violence in Afghanistan



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COMMON ANALYSIS

Last updated: December 2020

[Main COI references: [Security situation 2020](#), 1.3, 1.4.1] [\[43\]](#)

In this sub-section, some highlights concerning the indicators above are presented in terms of recent trends in the situation in Afghanistan, before looking into the assessment of indiscriminate violence at provincial level.

According to several UN reports, issued between June 2019 and June 2020, the security situation in Afghanistan remained volatile during the mentioned period. In their annual report released in February 2020, UNAMA indicated that there were significant fluctuations in violence throughout 2019, coinciding with gains and setbacks made during negotiations between the Taliban and the US in Doha. The first half of the year [2019] was characterised by an intense campaign of airstrikes by international military forces and search operations by Afghan forces, particularly by the NDS Special Forces.

On 29 February 2020, the US and the Taliban signed an agreement for bringing peace to Afghanistan. After signing the deal, the Taliban almost immediately resumed and intensified attacks against ANSF. The group carried out more than

4 500 attacks in 45 days across Afghanistan. Since the US-Taliban agreement, Taliban attacks have been less frequent in cities, but have continued to target Afghan government forces in rural areas.

In response to the Taliban attacks, ANSF have also resumed their operations against the Taliban. ANSF and the Taliban were reportedly fighting each other in Takhar, Jawzjan, Paktya, Helmand, Khost, Ghor, Kunduz, Badghis, Kandahar, Samangan, Faryab, Ghazni, Logar, Herat and Badakhshan provinces of Afghanistan. Widespread fighting between the ANSF and AGEs over the control of the Afghan highways was also reported in June 2020. As a result of continued fighting between the Taliban and AGEs, insecurity has significantly increased on the highways, including on the Kabul-Logar-Paktia, Kabul-Baghlan, Baghlan-Kunduz, Pul-e Khumri-Samangan, Kabul-Jalalabad and Kabul-Kandahar highways. In the context of Afghanistan, all actors in the conflict engage in activities which (indiscriminately) affect civilians.

According to UNAMA reporting for 2019, AGEs were responsible for 62 % of civilian casualties, including 47 % caused by the Taliban, 12 % by ISKP, and the remaining 3 % attributed to undetermined and other AGEs. The third quarter of 2019 was particularly violent, registering the highest number of civilian casualties of any quarter since UNAMA began systematic documentation in 2009. The main factors contributing to the spike in civilian casualties were suicide and non-suicide IED attacks by AGEs, primarily by the Taliban, along with election-related violence. In the first half of 2019, the number of civilian casualties attributed to pro-government forces was higher than that caused by AGEs; this was 'a trend that UNAMA had not documented before 2019'. UNAMA attributed 28 % of the civilian casualties in 2019 to pro-government forces, including 16 % caused by ANSF, around 8 % by international military forces, nearly 2 % by pro-government armed groups, and just under 3 % by undetermined or multiple pro-government forces. Civilian casualties caused by pro-government armed groups occurred mainly in the context of ground engagements (40 %) and search operations (34 %).

In 2019, UNAMA documented 10 392 civilian casualties, including 3 403 deaths and 6 989 injured as a result of the armed conflict, with a 5 % decrease compared to 2018. This decrease was due to the reduction in civilian casualties caused by ISKP, while civilian casualties caused by other actors increased, notably by the Taliban and by international military forces.

The conflict in Afghanistan continued to be one of the deadliest in the world for civilians. Between 1 January and 30 June 2020, UNAMA documented 3 458 civilian

casualties including 1 282 deaths and 2 176 injured, with a 13 % decrease compared to the same period in 2019. This also represented the lowest number of civilian casualties recorded for the first half of the year since 2012. The overall decrease was due to the significant drop in civilian casualties caused by airstrikes by international forces and the reduced activity of ISKP. At the same time, during the first quarter of 2020, UNAMA stated it was 'gravely concerned with the acceleration in violence observed in March 2020, mainly by the Taliban against Afghan national security forces, and the consequent increase in the number of civilian casualties and harm caused, particularly in the northern and north-eastern regions'. According to SIGAR, during the second quarter of 2020, civilian casualties increased by nearly 60 % compared to the first quarter of the year, and by 18 % compared to the same period in 2019.

The Taliban, along with other militant groups, continued to carry out high-profile attacks in 2019. According to UNAMA, suicide attacks, including complex attacks by the Taliban, caused 1 499 civilian casualties, including 165 deaths and 1 334 injured, in 2019, which represented 133 % increase compared to 2018. During the first six months of 2020, UNAMA documented 342 civilian deaths and 428 injured caused by deliberate attacks on civilians, which represented 21 % of the overall civilian casualties.

The figure below illustrates the proportion of civilian casualties by type of incident in 2019 and the first half of 2020.

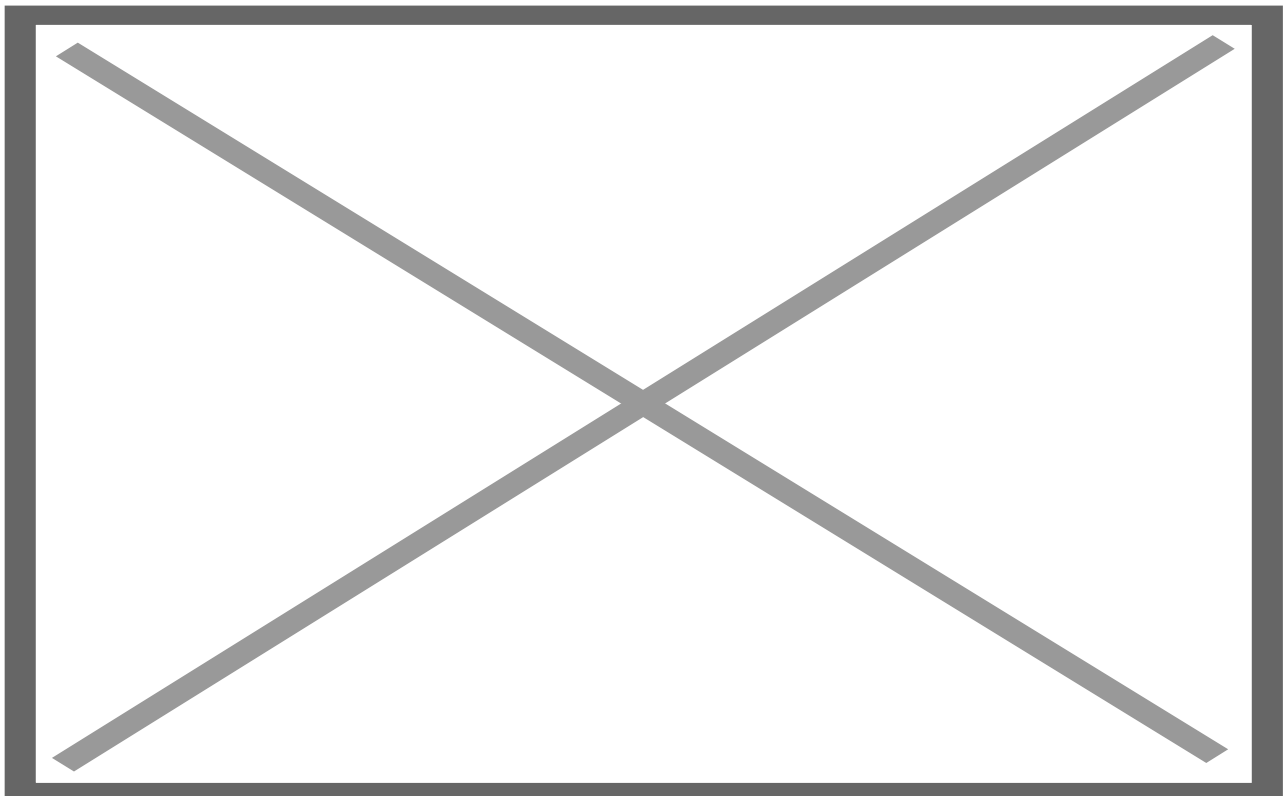


Figure 10. UNAMA, Proportion of civilian casualties by main incident types in 2019 compared to the first half of 2020

■ **Combined improvised explosive devices (IEDs):** In 2019, UNAMA documented 4 336 civilian casualties (885 killed and 3 451 injured) resulting from suicide and non-suicide IED attacks combined, making these types of incidents the leading cause for civilian casualties. It further indicated a surge in harm to civilians from **non-suicide IED attacks** in 2019, which caused 2 258 civilian casualties, a 24 % increase compared to 2018. 22 % of all civilian casualties were caused by non-suicide IEDs, which were in themselves the second leading cause of civilian casualties in 2019 behind ground engagements. The Taliban and ISKP reportedly increased their non-suicide IEDs attacks in 2019. Civilian casualties attributed to the Taliban from this tactic increased by 21 %, whereas those attributed to ISKP increased by 183 %. In 2019, **suicide IED attacks**, including complex attacks, by AGEs caused 2 078 civilian casualties, representing a 26 % decrease as compared to 2018, mainly linked to a drop in these attacks by ISKP.

During the period of **1 January to 30 June 2020**, the use of IEDs was the second leading cause of civilian casualties following ground engagements. They were the leading cause of the civilian casualties by AGEs, and resulted in 688 civilian casualties, including 217 deaths and 471 injured. The widespread use of pressure-plate IEDs by the Taliban caused around half of the civilian casualties (45 %) from IEDs, representing 50 % increase compared to the same period in 2019.

■ **Ground engagements:** In **2019**, UNAMA observed the lowest number of civilian casualties caused by ground engagements since 2013. However, ground engagements remained the second leading cause for civilian casualties, after suicide and non-suicide IEDs attacks, and represented 29 % of all attacks. UNAMA documented 3 057 civilian casualties, including 763 killed and 2 294 injured, registering a 10 % decrease compared to 2018.

During the **first six months of 2020**, ground engagements were the leading cause of civilian casualties, and represented 35 % of total civilian casualties. They resulted in 1 195 civilian casualties, including 336 deaths and 859 injured.

■ **Aerial operations:** According to UNAMA, 10 % of the overall casualties in **2019** were caused by the airstrikes. In particular, 219 airstrikes were carried out by pro-government forces, which caused 1 045 civilian casualties, including 700 deaths and 345 injured, with a 3 % increase compared to 2018.

During the **first half of 2020**, civilian casualties caused by airstrikes represented 9 % of the overall civilian casualties. UNAMA indicated that there has been 43 % decrease in overall civilian casualties by airstrikes during the mentioned period, due to an important reduction in activity by the international military forces following the signing of the US-Taliban agreement in February 2020. At the same time, UNAMA expressed concerns over the increase in civilian casualties caused by the Afghan Air Force (AAF), noting that during the first six months of 2020 the number of civilian casualties caused by AAF's airstrikes tripled compared to the same period in 2019.

■ **Targeted killings and conflict-related abduction:** In **2019**, UNAMA documented that 8 % of civilian casualties were the result of **targeted / deliberate killings**. In the **first half of 2020**, attacks classified as 'targeted killings', which included mass shooting incidents, were the third leading cause for civilian casualties overall, but the main cause of civilian deaths.

In addition, in **2019** UNAMA documented 218 incidents of **conflict-related abductions** that affected 1 006 civilians and caused 50 civilian deaths and five injured, a 46 % decrease in the number of civilians abducted compared to 2018; however, the number of abductees who were killed remained at the same level as in 2018. During the **first six months of 2020**, UNAMA verified 28 incidents of abductions of civilians that resulted in 68 civilian casualties (40 killed and 28 injured), representing more than a five-fold increase in civilian casualties resulting from this incident type as compared to the first six months of 2019.

■ **Explosive remnants of war:** In **2019**, UNAMA documented 520 civilian casualties, including 149 deaths and 371 injured caused by explosive remnants of war, with a 6 % increase compared to 2018. 78 %, or 403, of those casualties were children. During the **first half of 2020**, UNAMA verified 218 civilian casualties (59 killed and 159 injured) from explosive remnants of war, over 80 % of whom were children.

[43] In addition, the UNAMA 'Afghanistan, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2019' and the UNAMA 'Afghanistan, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Midyear Report: 1 January - 30 June 2020' have been consulted directly. The report is available at https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_poc_midyear_report_2020_-_27_july-revised_10_august.pdf [accessed 10 December 2020]. [\[back to text\]](#)