

(1) Civilian Casualties...

Based on the report, in November insurgent attacks dropped by 19 percent against the previous month while in December the attacks dropped by 37 percent against November.

The survey reveals that counterinsurgency operations increased by six percent in December and that Afghan forces detained many insurgents during December as a result of intelligence sharing and surveillance activities - which was up by 11 percent in December.

"Presently 19 operations are underway in 13 provinces including 13 separate operations led by Afghan Special Forces. We have mapped out an inclusive plan during the winter to be prepared for next spring," DawlatWaziri, a defense ministry spokesman said on Friday. "373 military operations were launched including 107 events of surveillance and arrests, 38 incidents of explosions and mine plantation, 64 attacks by armed opponents, 28 armed attacks, 23 incidents of kidnapping and violence, 20 air strikes, six suicide attacks, 12 armed confrontations among the insurgent groups and six missile attacks were recorded in December," the report stated.

The report notes that 49 military operations in Helmand, 40 in Ghazni, 37 in Faryab, 28 in Kunduz and 26 operations launched in Nangarhar during the month.

As in November, the eastern province of Nangarhar witnessed the highest number of security issues in December while Helmand was second.

"Nangarhar suffered 77 security incidents in December, Helmand 67, Faryab 56, Ghazni 44, Kandahar 34, Herat 26, Paktika 23, Uruzgan 23, Sar-e-Pul 20 and Kabul 20 security cases," the report added.

According to the report, despite a nine percent decrease in casualties among the armed opponents and a four percent decrease among security forces, civilian casualties were increased by 57 percent in December. The report says that the number of civilians killed in November were around 86 and the figure increased to 135 in December.

Overall 1,870 casualties were reported during December of which 1,509 were insurgents, 206 security personnel, 135 civilians including eight foreign nationals, two of them civilians.

According to the survey, suicide attacks doubled in December compared to November. Six suicide attacks happened in December - two in Kabul - while in November there were only three.

This comes after Kabul witnessed four suicide attacks in the first week of this year - a sudden surge that has triggered alarm among residents. (Tolonews)

(2) MPs Renew ...

Unity Government, the president is authorized to issue another legislative order when MPs are on winter recess to conduct the elections and implement necessary amendments on election law," secretary of the House of Representatives Abdul Rauf Enaami said.

Meanwhile, a number of MPs were outraged at their colleagues for refusing Ghani's recent legislative order.

"If the election date is not finalized, if the election reforms are not set in place, when the National Unity Government completes its two years, there may be some people who will claim that the government must seek its credibility from the Loya Jirga," MP Fawzia Kofi said. The parliamentary elections are set to be held by the end of next summer.

The international community has also called for electoral reforms to be held as soon as possible. (Tolonews)

(3) CEO Renews...

Referring to parliament's move to reject a presidential legislative order, the commission said the move was against the will of the Afghan people.

"We are on our way to winter vacations, the president of Afghanistan may once again use the opportunity and issue a new decree to continue with the reform process. The third issue is that the president of Afghanistan may seek help from the body that is tasked to interpret the implementation of the constitution to resolve the matter," head of parliament's legal commission Mohammad Abdoh said.

Abdoh made it clear that the elections will not be conducted in the presence of the current IEC and ECC commissioners, stressing that

above all, the international community is also not prepared to endorse elections held under the present structure.

"In case the present commissioners of the election commissions still continue their jobs and they do not surrender to reforms, then all must know that we will not be able to conduct the parliamentary and district council elections, because the international community will not pay the necessary funds we require to hold elections," he said.

However, many people believe that bringing about reforms can help re-install public trust.

"Elections need to be held and democracy must continue. For that, implementation of reforms is a must. We can resort to political and legal efforts to get the job done. I think the issue is not that complicated and a settlement to the matter can be found," former IEC chief Fazal Ahmad Manavi said.

"To revive trust in the process we must bring about reforms. The trust of the nation must be revived in the process. If people do not go to the polls, questions will be raised on the credibility of the process, therefore we are determined to continue our struggle for the sake of the credibility of the process," former Jihadi figure Sayed Ahmad Gillani said.

Bringing about key reforms in Afghanistan's election law is among the top commitments made by government leaders. (Tolonews)

(4) Daesh Presence...

and at the moment they are spreading their influence," said Abdul Rahman one of the residents.

"Government so far did not take serious action against Daesh and Daesh presence has become a source of concern for BatiKot and Chaparhar districts and the situation is very bad in those districts," said Murad Khan another resident. Meanwhile, Nangarhar provincial council confirms the presence and activity of Daesh in Achin, DehBala, Chaparhar, BatiKot and Kot districts of Nangarhar and said if the terrorist group is not stopped, Nangarhar province could fall to them.

"My request from the central government is as soon as possible deploy additional forces to Nangarhar province and prevent Daesh militants spreading in Nangarhar because they are creating a threat for the province," said Ahmad Ali Hazrat the provincial council head.

In contradiction to the provincial council remarks security officials only confirm the presence and activity of Daesh militants in three districts.

"For the past seven months Daesh militants have been active in Achin, DehBala and Chaparhar districts and are fighting with Taliban but we also brought them heavy casualties," said Fazl Ahmad Shirzad, Nangarhar Police Chief.

Nangarhar residents said however that the Taliban recently received their own reinforcements to help fight Daesh in the BatiKot district. (Tolonews)

(5) Ghani Requests...

fixed-wing aircraft that will provide the Afghan air force with an indigenous air-to-ground capability and aerial reconnaissance capabilities to support the country's counterinsurgency operations. (KP)

(6) ANSF to Receive...

Enhanced Armament Carrier is an improved version of the standard Humvee (HMMWV) having a heavier chassis and improved engine to handle add-on armor.

The international and regional allies of Afghanistan have stepped up efforts to equip the Afghan forces amid deteriorating security situation in the country.

The Afghan armed forces will also receive 55 Mobile Strike Force vehicles under a contract by the US Department of Defense (DoD).

The vehicles would be built by Textron Marine & Land Systems. "Textron Marine & Land Systems, New Orleans, Louisiana, was awarded a \$56,176,864 firm-fixed-price foreign military sales (Afghanistan) contract for 55 Mobile Strike Force vehicles with related fielding hardware and field service representative services for system deprocessing," the statement said.

The statement further added that the work will be performed in Slidell, Louisiana, with an estimated completion date of April 28, 2016. (KP)

(7) Marjah Cleared ...

to confront us," said Faqir. Meanwhile Helmand Police Chief Abdul Rahman Sarjang said that the Taliban has been defeated in most part of the Marjah district and

operations by Afghan forces have incurred heavy casualties on the insurgent group.

"Marjah district is completely under Afghan forces control and all the routes to Marjah are open and we have created 10 security check posts," said Helmand Police Chief Abdul Rahman Sarjang.

But not everyone agrees. A local police commander said that after Afghan troops carried out a ground clearance operation and NATO forces assisted with air strikes, the Taliban simply resumed activities in the district. (Tolonews)

(8) Special Force ...

from Syria and Iraq had joined the loyalists of the terror group in eastern Nangarhar province and are trying to consolidate links with the leadership of the terror group based in Syria and Iraq.

Meanwhile, the US Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter later said that the threat posed by the terror group is being tracked very closely as they have started creating 'little nests' in Afghanistan. (KP)

(9) Wide Range ...

will open a new chapter of trade and transit ties in the region", he added. On the issue of terrorism, Abdullah said that terrorism and drug trafficking were also discussed with the Iranian officials on how to curb the scourge.

The CEO said that Iran has major potential in business and capacity building, adding Afghans may learn from the expertise Iran has made in the economic sector.

Referring to his tour to Chabahar port, CEO Abdullah said that investments by the Iranian government have been substantial over the past two years which can be helpful at bolstering work and investments in the region.

"Chabahar is a good alternative route to Afghanistan, while trade balance and capacity building were also discussed," he said. "Iran also vowed to share their expertise with Afghans. Iran also pledged to fund the third phase of the railway line to Herat."

Elaborating on the economic significance of the port on regional economic interaction, Abdullah said that a trilateral meeting between representatives from Afghanistan, Iran and India will soon meet to discuss the ongoing work on Chabahar.

He said that Iran has been playing a constructive role in the reconstruction process in Afghanistan.

Reacting to the recent spate of terror attacks across the nation, Abdullah maintained that in the past few weeks the country has been coping with waves of attacks which is quit concerning.

He expressed hope that the recent diplomatic outreach for resuming the stalled talks with the Taliban will be groundbreaking talks, however he said that Afghanistan will never forfeit the gains the country has made since the downfall of the Taliban regime.

Abdullah says terrorists and extremists must be tackled and rooted out of communities without any differentiation.

Abdullah stated "our people have been the victim of terrorism, we do not consider a difference between terror groups," he said.

In answer to a question on the possible role of Iran in the peace talks process, Abdullah said that Tehran is willing to contribute to the Afghan peace process, but said for now only four countries were involved.

On the issue of the Taliban, Abdullah said that those who conduct acts of violence and kill Afghan civilians will not reach their political aims.

"If someone thinks violence can support their political points, they are wrong. We hope Taliban will not think like that," he said.

Abdullah states government hopes all groups realize that violence and killing of civilians will not help them reach their political objectives. Abdullah also touched on the issue of tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia and called on the two countries to ease tension.

Abdullah renewed government's commitments on the implementation of reforms in the country's electoral system and said the elections will be held under the supervision of new election commissioners. (Tolonews)

(10) Some Taliban ...

plagued by factional infighting. However, whether the group eventually joins the talks is still far from clear.

Even if it did, those present would only represent part of the Islamist militant movement fighting to top-

ple the government in Kabul and impose strict Islamic rule as they did before being ousted in 2001, say critics.

But senior members of the Taliban have reportedly signaled they may be willing to send negotiators at some point.

One Taliban commander said preparations had gone as far as choosing a team, including two members of the Taliban's office in Qatar, but others were more cautious.

"We may do it after the venue, time and terms and conditions for the proposed talks are decided by these four countries first," said one senior member of a group of Taliban leaders based in the Pakistani city of Quetta.

Afghan officials say the meeting schedule does not include any Taliban representation, but they do not rule out the possibility of the group joining at some stage.

With security worsening, Kabul is trying to limit expectations of a breakthrough, and says the aim of next week's talks is to map out a plan for peace negotiations and a way of assessing whether they remain on track.

"This will help Afghanistan and our partners to measure the tangibility and sincerity of efforts taken by the parties," President Ashraf Ghani's spokesman said in an emailed response to questions on the objectives of the meeting.

It is uncertain whether the latest violence in Afghanistan is intended to disrupt talks or strengthen the Taliban's negotiating hand, but Chief Executive Abdullah said Kabul would not bow to pressure.

"I hope that various groups of the Taliban do not think that," he told reporters.

After six months of worsening fighting, with the province of Helmand slipping out of control and frequent suicide bombings in the capital, Afghanistan and its neighbors are trying to return to peace talks, albeit without the Taliban for now.

Leadership divisions may impede progress, with some militant factions saying they will not take part. "There is no such thing as the Taliban, there are groups of Taliban," Ghani said last month.

The announcement last July, shortly after inaugural talks between Kabul and the Afghan Taliban were staged, that its founder Mullah Mohammad Omar had been dead for more than two years, threw the militant group into disarray, stopping the fledgling peace process in its tracks.

Mullah Akhtar Mansour, Mullah Omar's longtime deputy, took over the leadership, but was rejected by parts of the movement which accuse him of covering up Omar's death for his own gains and of being Pakistan's puppet.

But Mansour's faction has shown signs of warming to the idea of joining peace talks at some stage. One militant said they had received "positive" signals from different sources to make preparations for likely talks, but that it had not been decided when or where they would be held.

A senior Taliban commander said Sirajuddin Haqqani, Mansour's deputy and the head of the feared Haqqani network blamed for a series of suicide attacks in Kabul, may take part.

Another, however, believed that if Haqqani was involved it would only be through proxies, as he was unwilling to risk his security by coming out into the open.

"As usual, he may send his representatives but he would never attend such a meeting," said one person close to him.

The Taliban's main spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, said no formal negotiating team had been appointed, but he stopped short of a full denial of involvement.

"We haven't received any formal message for peace talks so far and therefore we didn't appoint our team for negotiations," he said.

By contrast, Mansour's rivals, led by Mullah Mohammad Rasoul, are holding out.

"We are not involved and will never be part of Mullah Mansour's peace negotiation," said Rasoul's deputy and spokesman, Mullah Manan Niaz, adding the group's objective remained to drive foreign forces out of Afghanistan completely.

"We will continue this jihad until reaching that goal."

For its part, the Taliban may look for signs of concessions in areas including 2011 United Nations sanctions that impose asset freezes and travel bans on its leaders.

"They should first remove us from the blacklist so we can freely travel around the world for negotiations

with them," said the member of Mansour's faction.

Russia has already signaled a willingness to be "flexible" on the issue. (Tolonews)

(11) Turkey ...

cleric Nimr Baqir al-Nimr, along with 46 others convicted of "terrorism."

Tehran warned that Saudi Arabia would pay a "steep price" for the cleric's death, while Iranian protesters attacked Saudi diplomatic missions in Tehran and the Iranian city of Mashhad.

On Sunday, Riyadh severed all diplomatic ties with Iran and gave Iranian diplomats 48 hours to leave the kingdom. (Xinhua)

(12) Clashes Between...

district over the past three days.

They have also claimed shooting down a U.S. military helicopter in Marja district on Tuesday. (Xinhua)

(13) Afghan Youth...

crushing machine - this cost a total of 12,000 Afs. He said that Nahor district of Ghazni province uses his machine.

"I have made a grass crushing machine and later built a device which can run on gas for my cousin who has a confectionary factory. He uses this in his bakery and then other bakery owners saw the machine and also asked me to build for them. I made two, which also cost almost 12,000 Afs," Hassani added.

He said a lot of money used to build the machines came from his brother who works in Iran. Hassani said he wants to do his MBA but right now does not have money to continue his education. (Tolonews)

(14) First Library ...

provinces. QalamLar is mulling to extend its activities to Urozgan province as well.

Residents of Shahr-e-Safa District thanked Waisa for his efforts and said that they are standing with QalamLar in its initiative to promote education.

Zabul is one of the areas in Afghanistan that witnessed severe insecurity in last 14 years due to which the education system is badly affected. (KP)

(15) 38 Militants ...

local and foreign militants from the region. Earlier in December, AsimBajwa, the director general of Inter-Services Public Relations, the army's media wing, said a total of 3,400 militants have been killed in the operation so far. He said the military has also destroyed 837 hideouts of the militants.

The director general said the operation in Shawal town is the final push against militants as the offensive has entered its final stage after most of the areas in North Waziristan have been cleared of the insurgents. (Xinhua)

(16) Senior Afghan...

Afghanistan has not formally confirmed the assassination of Mawlawi Alam so far.

Mawlawi Alam has reportedly led numerous fights in favor of Mullah Mansoor following soaring tensions among the Taliban leaders with the announcement of Taliban group founder Mullah Mohammad Omar's death and announcement of his successor. (KP)

(17) US Prosecutors...

said prosecutors had also obtained a search warrant for Farek's DNA to see if it matches a sample recovered from the packing tape on one of the bombs.

"We expect in a month or two we'll know what we can prove," she said. (AP)

(18) Not all Youths...

will defend the country. I got an education in my country and I love my country and till the last drop of my blood I will defend my country," Aryoubi added.

But life is a constant struggle for Aryoubi who was recently given 20 days' notice to vacate his rental home.

"The house owner gave me 20 days to find another house for myself and now if possible I am trying to find a house in Kart-e-Now area of Kabul - a house for myself," Aryoubi said. Aryoubi is however, intent on improving life for him and his family and is not only committed to his country but also to his job, he said. (Tolonews)

(19) Polish, EU ...

agency. The new law will not cover Poland's private broadcasters. The commission's envoy to Poland MarzennaGuz-Vetter said the talks were "very good, matter-of-fact" and helped clarify many doubts.

(AP)

(20) Belgium Found...

connection with the Paris attacks. The find adds to indications that the Nov. 13 shooting and suicide bomb attacks in Paris, in which 130 people were killed, were at least partially planned in Belgium. Two of the attackers had been living in Brussels and Belgian authorities have arrested 10 people. Investigators also found a fingerprint of Salah Abdeslam, the brother of one of the attackers, who returned from Paris the morning after the attacks and has still not been found. (Reuters)

(21) Egypt Minister ...

moil and instability which hurt the economy, and the political landscape resembles the past.

Egypt has been cracking down hard on dissent since then army chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi toppled the country's first freely elected president, Islamist Mohamed Mursi, following mass protests against his rule in 2013. Under Sisi's rule, protesting without police permission is illegal. (Reuters)

(22) Special Forces...

by U.S. special forces. Washington said last month it was deploying a new force of around 100 special operations troops to Iraq to conduct raids against Islamic State there and in neighboring Syria, without providing details. U.S. Army Col. Steve Warren, spokesman for the international coalition bombing Islamic State, rejected the media reports this week, calling them "Iranian disinformation" aimed at distracting from Iraqi military gains against Islamic State elsewhere. (Reuters)

(23) Syria Rebels...

not accept any concessions that run counter to "the principles of our revolution" and condemned what it called international connivance "against the revolution".

Opposition leaders told de Mistura the government must take goodwill steps before any negotiations by halting bombardments of civilian areas, lifting blockades of rebel-held areas and releasing detainees. They are waiting to hear back from him. (Reuters)

(24) EU Welcomes ...

foreign policy chief, and the bloc's Commissioner for Humanitarian aid and Crisis Management, Christos Stylianides, said in a joint statement on Friday.

"The European Union welcomes it and expects it will be fully implemented and extended by all parties to all the cities under siege."

A new Syrian opposition group created to oversee peace negotiations has also demanded that Damascus halt the bombardment of civilian areas and use of barrel bombs, and urged it to release detainees before the talks, calls echoed by Mogherini and Stylianides. (Reuters)

(25) ASEAN ...

concerned to exert common efforts to maintain peace and security in the said region and create an environment conducive to the early resumption of the Six-Party Talks to help pave the way for maintaining and strengthening peace, security and stability in the region and the world", said the statement. The DPRK announced on Wednesday that it has successfully carried out its first "hydrogen bomb" test. (Xinhua)

(26) UN Chief ...

announcement to begin constitutional reform, it added. "He calls on all stakeholders to cooperate in a spirit of inclusion and good faith," said the statement. Sirisena, who assumed presidency a year ago, has vowed to set up a domestic mechanism to probe war crimes allegedly committed during the final stages of the country's civil conflict.

The Sri Lankan government said Thursday that it will begin a domestic accountability process next week. (Xinhua)

(27) Turkish Forces...

between Turkey and Iraq as the latter claimed the presence of Turkish troops to the camp was violation of the country's sovereignty. (Xinhua)

(28) India, France ...

for the armies to train together and gain from each other's rich operational experience," the Indian Army has said in a statement.

"Both countries have troops deployed in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist operations and therefore sharing each other's military experiences will pay meaningful dividends." (Xinhua)