

(1) Sopko Doubts...

Afghanistan's security forces, buying more than 600,000 weapons, 70,000 vehicles and more than 200 aircraft.

But SIGAR audits have found that US and NATO efforts have often been unorganized, with Afghan forces suffering as a result.

"Afghan security forces cannot survive without external donor support, both financial and technical," Mr. Sopko said at the Center for Strategic and International Studies on Monday. "Many advisers were unaware that the Afghan security forces prioritize the evacuation of deceased personnel over critically wounded based on religious customs."

"Problems don't miraculously disappear. We, and other oversight bodies, have identified problems that affected reconstruction. And some of these problems could affect lasting peace," he said.

The constant turnover, shifting agendas and the division of labor across agencies, military branches and countries have consistently undercut the Afghan rebuilding process, Mr. Sopko said.

"Without the guidance of a comprehensive, expert-designed and enduring multiyear plan to guide all security-sector activities, the US's approach often changed with each personnel rotation," he said.

Among the 36 recommendations outlined in the report, the SIGAR's office said plans must be developed now for peacetime challenges such as drug trafficking, economic development and security.

"Failure to plan now is planning to fail once peace is declared," said Mr. Sopko.

The report comes amid ongoing peace efforts by the Afghan and US governments which will allow the two allies to find a political settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan. But the Taliban has continued attack on government targets as the talks have proceeded and are demanding all US and foreign troops pull out before talks with the Afghan government can begin. (Pajhwok)

(2) UN Urges ...

saw record high numbers of recorded civilian casualties— the UN notes with concern disturbing patterns such as the 27 per cent increase in civilian deaths in the second quarter of 2019 compared with the first.

The UN welcomes the reduction in civilian casualties in the 1 January-30 June 2019 period, but continues to regard the level of harm done to civilians as shocking and unacceptable. UNAMA acknowledges that parties have announced efforts to reduce civilian casualties, but they are insufficient. More must be done.

The UN supports the demand for all parties to reduce civilian casualties to zero, made in the joint declaration by Afghan participants from the 7-8 July 2019 Intra-Afghan Dialogue held in Doha.

"Everyone heard the message loud and clear from Afghan delegates in the Doha talks - 'reduce civilian casualties to zero!'" said Tadamichi Yamamoto, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan. "We urge all parties to heed this imperative, to answer the call of Afghans for immediate steps to be taken to reduce the terrible harm being inflicted," added Yamamoto, who is also head of UNAMA.

Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) continued to cause the majority of civilian casualties. However, civilian deaths attributed to Pro-Government Forces (PGFs) exceeded those caused by AGEs for the second quarter in succession.

Ground engagements remained the leading cause of civilian casualties, causing one-third of the overall total, albeit a 16 per cent decrease compared to the first half of 2018. The use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), mainly in non-suicide attacks, was the second leading cause, representing 28 per cent of the total. Civilian casualties from aerial operations amounted to 14

per cent.

UNAMA attributed 52 per cent of all civilian casualties to AGEs, with 38 per cent attributed to Taliban, 11 per cent to Daesh/Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), and 3 per cent to unidentified AGEs.

Civilian casualties attributed to AGEs decreased by 43 per cent during the first half of 2019 as compared to 2018. This was mainly due to a reduction in civilian casualties from suicide IEDs. Civilian casualties attributed to PGFs increased by 31 per cent, mostly caused by an increase of aerial and search operations.

From 1 January to 30 June 2019, AGEs caused 1,968 civilian casualties (531 deaths and 1,437 injured). There was a sharp drop in civilian casualties from suicide and complex attacks, particularly by Daesh/ISKP.

UNAMA documented 985 civilian casualties (306 deaths and 679 injured) from AGE attacks that deliberately targeted civilians, including government officials, tribal elders, aid workers, religious scholars, mullahs and places of worship and culture. UNAMA reiterates that civilians not directly participating in hostilities, including civilian government workers, and civilian objects may never be the target of attack. UNAMA urges AGEs to apply a definition of civilian and civilian object that accords with international humanitarian law.

During the first six months of 2019, UNAMA attributed 1,397 civilian casualties (717 deaths and 680 injured) to Pro-Government Forces, a 31 per cent increase from the corresponding period in 2018. PGFs caused 37 per cent of all civilian casualties in the first half of 2019 (18 per cent by Afghan national security forces, 12 per cent by International Military Forces, 2 per cent by Pro-Government armed groups and the remainder to undetermined or multiple PGFs).

Aerial operations caused 519 civilian casualties (363 deaths and 156 injured), 150 of which were child casualties (89 deaths and 61 injured). This represents a 39 per cent increase in overall civilian casualties from this tactic. While the number of injured decreased, the number of civilians killed more than doubled, highlighting the lethal character of this tactic. UNAMA continues to express concern about the rising level of civilian harm as a result of aerial operations, particularly those conducted in support of Afghan forces on the ground and strikes on civilian structures.

UNAMA attributed 83 per cent of the civilian casualties resulting from aerial operations to International Military Forces, nine per cent to the Afghan Air Force, and the remaining eight per cent to undetermined PGFs.

Women continue to be disproportionately impacted by the armed conflict in Afghanistan. Up to 30 June 2019, the conflict caused 430 women casualties (144 deaths and 286 injured), a decrease of 22 per cent compared to the same period in 2018.

Child casualties represented almost one-third of the overall total of civilian casualties, with 327 deaths and 880 injured. Children continue to comprise the vast majority -84 per cent- of all civilian casualties from explosive remnants of war.

"Parties to the conflict may give differing explanations for recent trends, each designed to justify their own military tactics," said Richard Bennett, UNAMA's Human Rights Chief. "The fact remains that only a determined effort to avoid civilian harm, not just by abiding by international humanitarian law but also by reducing the intensity of the fighting, will decrease the suffering of civilian Afghans." (PR)

(3) Trump Admin Want ...

are stationed in the country.

"End the endless wars, draw down, reduce," Pompeo said, Military News reported. "It won't just be us. ... we hope that overall, the need for combat forces in the region is reduced."

Asked about timing the withdrawal to the election, Pompeo laughed that "it's

not only my expectation, it would be job enhancing," according to Military Times.

The number of US forces in Afghanistan has actually increased in the two-plus years since Trump took office, the news outlet reported.

"When I was there last, I met with [non-governmental organizations], I met with women's groups, a broad swath of Afghanistan," Pompeo said, Military Times reported.

"We want them to take their country back and we want to reduce what is for us tens of billions of dollars a year in expenditures and enormous risk to your kids and your grandkids who are fighting for America."

So far this year, 12 US service members have been killed in fighting in Afghanistan; more than 2,400 have died there since 2001. (Pajhwok)

(4) Herat Farmers ...

Most of the vineyards are located in the Injil, Guzara, Pashtun Zarghun and Obe districts of the province.

Figures by the Ministry of Agriculture indicate that Afghanistan produced up to 1.1 million tons of grapes last year. Afghanistan's grapes are mostly sent to India and Pakistan. (Tolo news)

(5) Atmar's Election ...

Mir Haidar Afzali, an MP.

The council of presidential candidates has warned that they can boycott the elections unless the president assures transparency in the process.

"If the elections are held, this should be fair and transparent. If it doesn't happen, the candidates will announce their final decision to the people of Afghanistan on Thursday [August 1]," said presidential candidate Shahab Hakimi.

This comes as a number of election campaign teams including Peace and Justice team led by former NDS chief Rahmatullah Nabil have accused President Ghani of trying to manipulate the upcoming elections.

However, President Ghani's spokesman Sediq Sediqqi assured that there will be no interference by the government in the electoral process. (Tolo news)

(6) Kunduz Militants...

They were working day and night to prevent insecurity, he continued.

Noor Mohammad, a resident, said the Taliban Red Unit had caused the security forces huge casualties in recent months.

"At least 70 people were killed as a result of attacks by the Red Unit in Imam Sahib district in the past two months," he claimed.

He said of the security forces' morale was higher than the militants', The fighters, however, used binocular rifles in night attacks and thus put the security personnel in trouble. (Pajhwok)

(7) Electioneering...

candidates had opened their campaign offices in the province but police had received no official letter to provide these offices security.

"We have prepared our own plan for security of election campaigns, police would ensure security for all candidates who campaign in Kunar," he said.

He said police were also ready to ensure security of electioneering events in rural areas of the province.

Sahar said there were 110 polling stations in Kunar and 76 of them faced no security threats. However, he said 20 polling stations faced middle level threat and 14 others high level threats. He said Afghan forces would soon launch a clearing operation in areas where polling stations were under high threat to ensure security of voters and election workers there.

He added Afghan forces would ensure security in 90 percent areas of Kunar province during the September 28 presidential election.

"All government departments including judiciary organs are active in all districts of the province," he said, adding tourists from other provinces visited Kunar due to good security here. About the presence of Daesh or so called Islamic State (IS) fighters in Ku-

nar, he said the group had been defeated in the province and only a few remnants were active in mountainous areas such as in Shurik, Dewgul, Chapari and Baidal regions.

Sahar said 3,000 families, who were displaced as a result of clashes between Daesh and the Taliban militants in the province, had returned to their areas.

He said police had ordered illegal smuggling of timber in Kunar besides controlling other illegal activities in the province. (Pajhwok)

(8) Fruit Harvests ...

trees on his land and he collected 10kg of fruits from each.

A number of other farmers held similar views and urged the agriculture department to provide more assistance to them. (Pajhwok)

(9) 2 US Soldiers ...

combat operations," Col. Art Sellers was quoted as saying.

The deaths bring to 12 the number of US soldiers killed in Afghanistan so far this year. The US military has suffered 2,427 fatalities since 2001.

Currently, the US has about 14,000 troops in Afghanistan, a reduction following the 2014 drawdown. (Pajhwok)

(10) 'Don't Walk...

Later in the day, the US embassy in Berlin told DPA news agency that Washington had formally asked Germany to embark on the mission to "combat Iranian aggression." The embassy maintained that the government was "clear that freedom of navigation should be protected... Our question is, protected by whom?"

That aside, sending ships to the Gulf could be akin to a 'mission impossible' for the military. Last year, it was reported that Germany's Navy is running out of combat-capable warships and had six out of fifteen frigates decommissioned.

Newer-generation warships are either going through trials or are under construction.

Last week, the UK called for a joint effort to protect the safety of shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow but important waterway which connects the Persian Gulf with the Indian Ocean. The call was made shortly after Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps seized British-flagged oil tanker Stena Impero in the area.

The seizure followed an earlier incident in which British Royal Marines and Gibraltar police seized the Iranian oil supertanker Grace 1 off the southern coast of Spain. London said the ship was suspected of carrying oil to Syria in violation of EU sanctions, but Tehran denied any wrongdoing. (RT)

(11) 'Whoever's on...

When Israel adopted its controversial "Jewish state" law, Erdogan likened the move to "the Hitler spirit... risen again among some Israeli officials."

However, his latest comments could also be interpreted as a dig at Washington, after the US "suspended" Turkey from the F-35 fighter jet program, condemning its purchase of Russian-made S-400 missile systems as a betrayal of NATO's security interests.

While the Trump administration has made it clear that Ankara can rejoin the pricey program if it ditches the Russian equipment, Erdogan has hinted instead that he is prepared to further distance Turkey from the American weapons market, publicly mulling the cancellation of an order of 100 "advanced Boeing aircraft."

Israeli military forces killed 56 Palestinian children and injured nearly 2,700 "in the context of demonstrations, clashes, and search and arrest operations" in 2018, according to a United Nations report released on Friday that - like many UN fact-finding missions before it - urged Israel to "end the excessive use of force." The number of children killed was the highest since 2014, when Israel waged its most recent one-sided war against Gaza.

The UN Security Council attempted to denounce Israel's demolition of 10 Palestinian apartment buildings in the Wadi Hummus area of Jerusa-

lem last week, drafting a resolution that condemned the destruction for "undermin[ing] the viability of the two-state solution and the prospect for just and lasting peace," only for the US to veto the move. (RT)

(12) Rivals Iran...

proxy war with Shi'ite Iran.

Iran has said it wants to improve relations with its regional Sunni rivals Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

"Iran has always given extreme importance to the security of the Persian Gulf and it needs cooperation among all Persian Gulf states," said an Iranian official who asked not to be named.

Washington and Tehran are in a protracted standoff over Iran's nuclear and missile programs, and its regional influence.

Washington has imposed and tightened sanctions on Iran's oil exports after President Donald Trump pulled out of Iran's 2015 deal with major powers, under which Tehran got access to world trade in return for curbs on its nuclear program.

Tehran has repeatedly warned it would block exports through the waterway if the United States tried to strangle its economy. (Reuters)

(13) U.S. Firms...

meant the government would issue export licenses in cases where there is no national security risk and where the items are "non-sensitive" and readily replaced by rivals.

But the department has yet to respond to any of a total of around 50 license requests from about 35 companies, sowing uncertainty in the industry and in Beijing.

"At this stage, there is mass confusion," said William Reinsch, a former Commerce official, adding that the plan for case-by-case decisions "maximizes the uncertainty."

The governments of the world's two largest economies have imposed billions of dollars of tariffs on each other's goods, slowing global growth and roiling markets.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer will meet with Chinese Vice Premier Liu He starting on Tuesday, the first face-to-face meeting since the two leaders met.

Many people close to the talks expect the topic of Huawei to dominate, along with the failure of Chinese agricultural purchases to meet expectations, taking time and attention away from the many deeper, longer term issues.

Trump hosted a meeting of seven technology CEOs last week to discuss Huawei and other topics, at which the executives expressed frustration at Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross for not providing clear guidelines, Reuters reported.

"By making the meeting public, the U.S. was trying to send a signal, 'we're moving on Huawei, we need you to move on agriculture'," said Wendy Cutler, a former U.S. trade negotiator and Vice President of the Asia Society Policy Institute. (Reuters)

(14) Biden Will...

crime bill. Booker continues to poll in low single digits and needs a breakout moment.

"He's telegraphing his debate strategy," McKinney said. "It's no coincidence that on the stump he's going after Biden."

Biden is also likely to be confronted by Harris, the California senator who stole the spotlight in the first forum last month when she attacked him for his record on school desegregation.

That two black candidates are going after Biden on issues related to race as they try to cut into his strong support among black voters. A Quinnipiac poll released Monday showed Biden a strong front-runner overall, with 53 percent support among black voters. Harris had 7 percent among black voters and Booker trailed even further.

"If they want to argue about the past, I can do that," Biden said last week. "I got a past I'm proud of. They got a past that's not quite so good." (Bloomberg)