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In this issue:

- Afghan Civilian Deaths on the Rise, But Not at the Hands of International Forces
- Ukraine: Sea Breeze Despite Withdrawal of NATO Ambitions
- Poland Stands Firm on Georgian NATO Membership
- Latest Attacks
- Pakistan seeks Peaceful Relations with India

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Afghan Civilian Deaths on the Rise, But Not at the Hands of International Forces

By: Tanah Sullivan

An Afghan rights group has released statistics showing that the escalating violence in Afghanistan is now the worst since the first few months of the war that has spanned almost nine years. The fighting has claimed the lives of 1074 civilians so far this year, as international forces struggle to combat the escalating insurgency attacks.

However, the Afghan Rights Monitor has also said that fewer civilians are being killed by international forces, with the number of victims to NATO airstrikes halving thanks to new restrictive rules of engagement put in place last year. The drop in civilian casualties due to NATO airstrikes has been accredited to former international forces commander General Stanley McChrystal, after he set in place restrictions last year which severely limited the circumstances in which troops could call in an airstrike or fire into buildings.

NATO spokesman Brigadier General Josef Blotz issued a statement this weekend reiterating that there would be no change in policy, contrary to the speculation regarding the new arrival of coalition commander General David Petraeus. Critics have said that any policy change now would only increase the danger to American and other foreign troops.

With the recent 30 000-strong American troop surge to bolster international forces in Afghanistan, the intensity and frequency of insurgency attacks have also increased to match. As a means of strengthening Afghan government control, the reinforcements have been deployed to the Taliban strongholds in the south and east of Afghanistan. Insurgents have responded with a wave of suicide attacks, assassinations, roadside explosives and ambushes.

Last month alone saw 212 civilians killed, according to the director of the Afghan Rights Monitor, Ajmal Samadi. The statistics for the report were compiled based on interviews with witnesses, families of victims, media reports and local and community officials. Since 2002, June, 2010, was the worst month in attacks and civilian deaths, with almost 1200 violent incidents occurring within the month. Last month was also the deadliest of the war for coalition forces, with 103 international personnel and troops killed. 60 of the troops killed were American.

The Afghan Rights Monitor's report said that in terms of security, "2010 has been the worst year since the demise of the Taliban regime." 61 per cent of civilian deaths have been caused by insurgent attacks, and the increasing number of casualties only highlights the need for international forces in Afghanistan to succeed in its goal of protecting the Afghan people.

This goal has been the focal point of the NATO counterinsurgency strategy, with the aim of providing security against Taliban attacks so as to win the support of locals to encourage them sharing information regarding insurgents. Much of the Canadian mission's focus has been on securing Kandahar City to prevent these types of incidents and attacks from happening. **Sources:** [Afghanistan: civilian casualties 'on the rise'](#), [Afghan monitor says 2010 worst year of war](#), [War report: 14 killed in insurgent attacks in Afghanistan](#), [Afghanistan: Conflict Kills, Injures 14 Civilians Everyday](#), [Blast kills 3 Afghans as civilian casualties soaring in Afghanistan](#)

International community gathers in Kabul for one-day conference

By: Tanah Sullivan

More than 70 officials from 60 countries have gathered in Kabul for a one-day conference on the distribution of aid money and how the Afghan government can begin taking control of its own country. The arrival of foreign officials did not go unnoticed by insurgents, as rocket fire at Kabul's Airport prevented a plane carrying UN Secretary Ban-Ki Moon and Sweden's Foreign Minister from landing in the Afghan capital on Tuesday morning prior to the meeting. Canada's Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon is also among the delegates.

In his introductory speech at the conference, Afghan President Hamid Karzai reaffirmed his commitment for Afghan police and soldiers to take charge of the nation's security by 2014. Minister Cannon also showed his support for President Karzai's commitment by reaffirming Canada's key goal of building a "self-sufficient Afghan army and police force" to ensure a smooth handover of security and military operations to Afghanistan by the target date of 2014.

President Karzai also highlighted reconciliation with the Taliban as a focal point of his policy going forward. Canada has said it will support reconciliation to bring peace to Afghanistan, but only if a set of key criteria is met first. These criteria include the renunciation of violence by anyone taken into the reconciliation program, laying down of arms, severance of ties with groups such as al-Qaeda and commitment to respect the Afghan constitution.

There is debate on how effective Karzai's reconciliation program may be, as despite its possible success with low and mid-level fighters and Taliban supporters, there are still the hardcore insurgents and Taliban leaders who are not going to be as easily swayed. The notion of reconciliation has been outright rejected by the Taliban leadership..

The one-day conference in Kabul has also been focused on the billions of dollars in aid money that has already been committed to Afghanistan, and how this money will be spent. Corruption is still a prime concern over the distribution and use of the money pledged by foreign donors, including Canada, and there has been a lot of criticism of President Karzai regarding his inefficiency in curbing corruption within his government. Karzai has been defensive against these allegations, saying that it is just as much up to the international community to stop wasting aid, highlighting the importance of the international community's role in promoting accountability, oversight and committing to the necessary reforms.

The conference will also hope to establish a set of milestones that the international community will use to gauge whether the measures taken are being properly implemented, and whether or not progress is being made. One of the possible solutions that have already come out of the conference today is to try to put the aid money through the Afghan budget, as opposed to funneling it through individual ministries, government departments and other agencies. This may put in place a better system of checks and balances so the Karzai government will be able to curb corruption and monitor the distribution of aid more effectively.

[Canada wants 'self-sufficient' Afghan army, police: Cannon](#), [Karzai pledges to take control by 2014](#), [Taliban denounce Kabul meeting as sign of failure](#), [Analysts debate whether Karzai ready for post-Kabul conference mandate](#), [Kabul conference sets lofty goals](#)

Ukraine: Sea Breeze Despite Withdrawal of NATO Ambitions

By: Monika Wyrzykowska

On Monday, July 12, Ukraine and NATO have launched two weeks of military exercises, despite Ukraine's recent decision to stop pursuing membership in the Alliance. Last year the Ukrainian parliament refused to approve the drills which have been conducted in the country since 1997. In 2006 and 2007 anti-NATO protests contributed to the drills to being cancelled outright.

This year's February presidential elections brought Russia-friendly Viktor Yanukovich into power. Although he abandoned his predecessor's bid to join NATO, the multinational exercises in the Crimea were approved in May by lawmakers.

The Sea breeze joint military exercises include land, naval and air drills and involve around 1,000 troops from Ukraine and 500 more from 12 countries, including the U.S., Belgium and Germany. The main focus will be to practice international anti-piracy operations. Ukraine will also host this year a series of other international military and peacekeeping exercises, including Ukrainian-U.S. Rapid Trident 2010, Ukrainian-Romanian Cossack Steppe 2010 and Ukrainian-Polish-Lithuanian-Canadian Maple Arch 2010.

Sources: [Ukraine-NATO drills start in Crimea](#), [Ukrainian-U.S. Sea Breeze 2010 peacekeeping naval exercises start in Ukraine](#), [NATO not ruling out Ukraine's participation in Lisbon summit](#), [Ukraine-NATO military drills to begin on Monday](#), [Ukraine, NATO launch 2 weeks of military exercises focused on combating piracy](#)

Poland Stands Firm on Georgian NATO Membership

By: Monika Wyrzykowska

Georgia's integration into NATO and the EU remains a priority for Poland. Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said after a meeting with his Georgian counterpart Grigol Vashadze that Poland intends to provide the country all possible assistance in these matters. Sikorski's visit to Georgia took place on the eve of the first round of the EU negotiations of association agreements with Georgia.

Georgia became a member of the EU's "Eastern Partnership" last year. Although the Eastern Partnership does not imply membership in the EU, it is of great importance in terms of integration into European structures. Poland hopes that the country will follow a similar path as Poland did in the late 1990s where NATO membership helped pave the way for EU membership. Poland joined NATO in 1997 and entered the EU as a full member in 2004.

Sikorski said that Warsaw supported the plan for assigning a Membership Action Plan to Georgia at the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008 which, however, has not been implemented. "But Poland will always support your country on the path of integration in the Atlantic Alliance", Sikorski said. The Polish official added that newly elected Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski defined his foreign policy priorities at a meeting at the Foreign Ministry. "Our political priorities remain unchanged," he said. "Although the political climate has changed, Warsaw will continue to support Georgia's integration into NATO."

Sources: [Polish FM: Poland to make efforts on Georgia's integration in NATO and EU](#), [Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski visits Georgia and Armenia](#), [Polish FM: Poland supports Georgia despite political climate](#)

Latest Attacks in Afghanistan

By: Tanah Sullivan

The morning of Tuesday, July 20, 2010, claimed the life of another Canadian soldier in Afghanistan. 24 year old Sapper Brian Collier died when an IED exploded about 15 kilometres west of Kandahar City, making him the 151st Canadian soldier killed in Afghanistan.

A series of attacks on Sunday, July 11, 2010, have left at least fourteen Afghan police officers dead in the northern part of the country. Officials say that attacks in that part of the country are increasing, due in part to the fact that police are poorly trained and ill-equipped.

On the same day, a regional director was also killed in an IED attack, and six US soldiers also killed in an extremely "bloody and costly weekend" for NATO and Allied Forces. Most of NATO's resources have been concentrated to the south of Afghanistan, due to the northern regions of the country being relatively calm, particularly compared to the insurgency activities in the southern province of Kandahar.

Reports from NATO are saying the recent attacks do not mean the insurgency is gaining ground, but it is concerned about the brazen border attack that killed nine border patrol officers. NATO officials have said that they are matching the insurgency step-for-step and this is "a mark of the escalation" in the fighting, with an increasing number of insurgents seemingly matching that of the NATO troop surge.

Sources: [War report: 14 killed in insurgent attacks in Afghanistan](#), [Taliban attacks on rise in northern Afghanistan](#), [Taliban attacks kill 14 Afghan police](#)

Pakistan seeks Peaceful Relations with India

By: Monika Wyrzykowska

Pakistan's Foreign Office spokesman Abdul Basit recently raised the issue of violence in Jammu and Kashmir, stating that his government will continue to lend support to the people of the region for their struggle for self-determination. The northernmost state of India is disputed territory among China, India and Pakistan and is also referred to as Indian-occupied Kashmir. Basit also noted that Pakistan would welcome the NATO forces' decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, noting that it was for the US and the allied nations to decide the time for the pull out. Pakistan has suffered a lot during the ongoing "war on terror" in Afghanistan, added Basit.

On July 9th, Pakistani Prime Minister, Yousuf Raza Gilani, said that he wants a peaceful resolution to all contentious issues with India, including Kashmir, so that Pakistan can "entirely focus" on the western border with Afghanistan for rooting out terrorism. He made the remarks during a meeting with a visiting delegation of US senators.

Sources: [Pak wants resolution of all issues, Kashmir with India](#), [Pak would welcome NATO's pull out from Afghanistan: FO](#)



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