

SIGAR Report Highlights Taliban Violence, COVID-19, Attempted Integration of Women into ANDSF

The latest SIGAR report documents the significant increase in violent attacks by the Taliban in Afghanistan, and how this high level of violence is inconsistent with the U.S.-Taliban agreement signed in February of this year. “According to the United States Forces-Afghanistan, average daily enemy-initiated attacks this quarter were 50% higher compared to last quarter.” The report cites statements by U.S. officials including Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, RS Commander General Scott Miller, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, and U.S. Charge´ d’ Affairs Ross Wilson, condemning the increase in Taliban violence, and pointing out how the increase in violence violates the terms of the February agreement. SIGAR further points out that the number of civilian casualties increased 43% from the previous quarter.

COVID-19 is cited in the SIGAR report numerous times because of its detrimental effects on the Afghan economy and public health system. Health officials estimate that approximately one-third of Afghans have contracted the disease. As a result of the pandemic, the GDP of Afghanistan is expected to contract between 5.0-7.4%, and GIRoA’s revenues have declined 17.2% year over year. Trade and investment has been hampered, and “Many U.S. funded economic and social-development programs have been limited by the Afghan government’s lockdown or have been redirected to mitigate COVID-19.” SIGAR mentions the Parliament’s oversight of GIRoA’s use of funds to combat COVID-19, specifically, “In July 2020, members of the Wolesi Jirga—lower house of parliament—raised concerns that President Ghani’s \$244 million “National Dining Table” food relief program only affords new opportunities for fraud and complained that its budget details had not been shared with lawmakers.”

Included in the report is a performance audit SIGAR conducted of funds set aside to support the inclusion of women in the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). The funds were used by CSTC-A to build 29 facilities for the ANDSF. According to CSTC-A “every region of Afghanistan needs women serving in the ANDSF, and without facilities like the ones DOD is constructing, women will never have the same opportunities as men in the ANDSF.” But, CSTC-A did not explain how these facilities will help to develop much needed female human capital in the ANDSF. As SIGAR points out, “DOD could only provide SIGAR with documentation for two of the 29 construction projects it funded for women in the ANDSF. DOD did not provide need assessments for the remaining 27 projects, nor documentation of project funding approvals for any of the 29 projects. Without these documents, SIGAR could not determine why CSTC-A decided there was a need for and approved these particular projects to construct facilities for women in the ANDSF.” CSTC-A acknowledged the shortcomings of measuring success solely based upon completion of a project rather than on completion and whether the facility is being used for its intended purpose. “DOD told SIGAR that, going forward, it intends to measure the success and use of facilities designed to support women’s integration and participation in the ANDSF.”

The report updated numbers and findings related to waste, fraud and abuse, from January 1, 2018, to December 31, 2019. During this period alone, approximately \$3.4 billion in waste, fraud and abuse were identified by SIGAR in its 111 published reports and 55 closed

fraud and abuse were identified by SIGAR in its 111 published reports and 33 closed investigations. The report states, "of this total, we specifically identified approximately \$1.5 in taxpayer funds that we believe were wasted, \$300 million that were lost to fraud, and \$34 million that we believe were lost due to abuse. The remaining \$1.6 billion was allocated to counter-narcotics efforts that we believe were wasted." Waste accounted for nearly 90 percent of losses, which SIGAR defines as "the act of using or expending resources carelessly, extravagantly, or to no purpose." Not all cases of waste had an associated dollar value, the report maintains.

SIGAR does not make any further recommendations at this time, though it warns that GIRoA's failure to fight back corruption and violence could jeopardize the ongoing peace efforts. "Endemic corruption, widespread insecurity, and a lack of accountability over on-budget assistance continue to make any investments made in Afghanistan vulnerable to waste, fraud and abuse and may threaten the peace process as well as the perceived legitimacy and effectiveness of the Afghan government."



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