



Afghanistan in June 2017

Peace and Politics

This month, the National Unity Government had to endure new internal political shocks. The highlight was when 5 protestors demanding better security were shot dead and many injured near the Presidential Palace (Arg). Anti-riot police were stopping the protestors from getting closer to the Arg and attempting to occupy it. The protestors blamed the anti-riot police for the violence. The protest was in response to the massive suicide attack near the diplomatic district in Kabul on the 31st of May that killed over 150 people who were mostly civilians. Although the protest was initially organised by civil society groups, it soon got out of hand.

One of the protestors killed was Salem Ezadyar, the son of Mohammad Alam Ezadyar, the first deputy chairman of the Senate. Many politicians attended the funeral, including CEO Abdullah Abdullah and Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani. The funeral was attacked by 3 suicide bombers posing as mourners. This increased tensions further. Salahuddin Rabbani, the leader of Jamiat-e Islami, called for the heads of all security agencies to be removed, a demand that President Ghani immediately declined.

Other political groups including the Council for the Protection and Stability of Afghanistan have also criticised the failure of security agencies. Some politicians have called for early elections. President Ghani responded to the dilemma by promising serious security reforms which include using the security forces more efficiently and improving the rule of law. He has embarked on a series of meetings with community leaders to create a consensus about new security plans.

In the midst of this chaos, Kabul hosted regional and international diplomats for the Kabul Process on the 6th. The event was seen as a last-ditch effort to convince the Pakistani government and military to bring the Taliban into the peace process. On the 10th President Ghani met with Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif during the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Astana Kazakhstan. Officials confirmed the exchange of delegations between the two countries who plan to talk about increasing their security and intelligence cooperation to fight terrorism. Expectations about the success of these meetings are low.

The U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres made a visit to Afghanistan on the 14th; during this visit he warned terrorist sponsor states that their support for terrorism will eventually damage their own countries as well. Guterres also stated that the only way to end the war in Afghanistan would be through talks with anti-government armed groups.

The Independent Elections Commission of Afghanistan set the date of the next parliamentary elections for July 7th 2018.

Security

The security situation in Afghanistan worsened in June. According to TOLONews, this Ramadan (27 May – 25 June) was the deadliest month for Afghanistan in the last 15 years, as more than 230 people were killed in various parts of the country. Three days before the Eid festival Taliban fighters detonated a car bomb outside a bank in Lashkar Gah in Helmand. The blast killed 34 and wounded 60 civilians and members of the Afghan security forces who were waiting to collect their pay. Kabul was in chaos after coordinated suicide attacks hit the heavily guarded funeral proceedings of Salem Ezadyar, killing at least 20 people and wounding 87. This was the closest attack on CEO Abdullah Abdullah since his appointment in 2014.

Daesh attacks and expansion increased in June. They made a sectarian attack on a Shia mosque in Kabul on the 15th, where Daesh fighters killed at least 6 civilians. On the 14th, lawmakers in parliament discussed the growing influence of Daesh in the East. On the 28th it was reported that two Taliban groups joined Daesh fighters in Jowzjan. On the 25th, Security officials said Tora Bora area of Nangarhar was completely cleared of insurgents. Tora Bora was home to hundreds of Daesh fighters. It became famous in 2001 because Osama bin Laden escaped to Tora Bora to hide from American forces.

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On the 27th Iran's speaker of parliament Ali Larijani said Afghans are capable of fighting terrorists on their own and that NATO troops are not needed. Two sites in Tehran including the parliament building were attacked by Daesh recently. Regional powers including Iran and Russia have been accused of supporting Taliban fighters in a bid to safeguard against Daesh inroads.

On the 29th NATO confirmed increasing troops in Afghanistan; however the number has not been announced. The next day the US Defence Secretary James Mattis said that at least 70 percent of the NATO's new plan requirements were in place and he looked forward to bridging the remaining gap. He criticised the 2014 military withdrawal, saying troops have been decreased too quickly. On the 14th it was announced that US President Donald Trump handed authority to set troop levels in Afghanistan to Secretary Mattis. Reports say that up to 4,000 new troops might be sent to Afghanistan for the Resolute Support mission that trains, advises and assists Afghan troops. Presently, NATO has 13,500 troops in the country.

Rights

The right to assembly came under serious threat in June when at least 7 civilians were killed when anti-riot police opened fire on protesters near the Arg. Afghan and international rights groups condemned the Afghan forces' actions and called for the prosecution of those responsible.

A video of a forced child marriage in a rural Northern Province went viral in June; it caused uproar in social media. In the video a young child is forced into marriage by her male relatives who are supported by a Mullah. The men use force against the girl and her female relatives who are left with no choice. A female relative shouts for help from people and from God. At the end, the child is carried away forcefully.

Humanitarian and Development

President Ghani appointed nine new commissioners to the country's Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission, including two women. This 'futuristic' group is comprised of mostly young educated Afghans, most of whom have studied in Western countries.

On the 19th, in a desperate attempt to end reliance on Pakistan for trade, Afghanistan opened an aerial trade corridor with India. The first freight flight took off from Kabul carrying 60 tons of medical plants worth \$11 million. The next flight will take 40 tons of fresh and dried fruits. Similar flights are scheduled from India to Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has been removed from the gray list by the Financial Action Task Force. It was removed after the Central Bank of Afghanistan was successful in accomplishing its commitments to crackdown on banking crimes. Officials said that this means that Afghanistan's financial system will achieve credibility globally and all its banks will be able to do business with international banks.

On Thursday June 15th Kabul municipality announced its plans for the first phase of a metro bus system in Kabul. This will be the first major urban public transportation project in the country. The bus system will help decrease traffic in Kabul which is the country's most highly populated city.

People and Culture

In a proud moment for Afghanistan, its Cricket Board received full membership status to the International Cricket Council (ICC). This means that Afghanistan will receive about \$40 million from the ICC until 2023. Afghanistan's Cricket story is among the most extraordinary in international sport this century.

Mohammad Mohaqiq, the Deputy CEO, caused stir in social media after he posted pictures of his wife Waheeda and daughter Hadya on Facebook. Mohaqiq is an avid social media user and is thought to appeal to voters who embrace the idea of social liberalisation. A former warlord, Mohaqiq has four wives and 23 children.

Abbas Karimi, an 18-year-old disabled Afghan swimmer, has won two gold medals at the U.S Indianapolis Para Swimming World Series. He is the first Afghan to qualify for the 2017 World Para Swimming Championships in Mexico which will be held later this year.

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