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Kabul

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## Preface

The Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs Salahuddin Rabbani visited Moscow last Tuesday, February 7, 2017. During his trip, Russia invited Afghanistan to take part in the upcoming regional conference on Afghanistan. In a joint press conference with his Afghan counterpart, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lovrov said that Russia monitors the situation in Afghanistan and might reach an agreement with the US about this country as they did about Syria.

After a stage of suspicions in Afghanistan-Russia relations and with the official visit of the Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs, once again, relations between the two countries are improving. Since the past one year, with the intensification of insecurities in Northern Afghanistan, Russia has put more focus on Afghanistan. The direction of Kabul-Moscow relations and the role that Russia wants to play in Afghanistan are issues that are analyzed in the first part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies.

In the second part of the analysis, you will read about the Afghan civilian casualties in 2016. In its annual report, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has stated that 2016 was the bloodiest years in the past one and a half decades for civilians in Afghanistan. Although, the reports of internal and international institutions cannot present a comprehensive and real image of the victims of war in Afghanistan, but it is certain that the greater part of victims of the current war in Afghanistan are civilians and the engaged parties in this war do not pay attention to their lives. Here you would read about civilian casualties in Afghanistan since 2001 and the reasons behind the rise of these casualties in 2016.

## Russia and Afghanistan; has mistrust ended?



The Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs Salahuddin Rabbani traveled Moscow last week while, in the past two years, suspicions have been growing in Kabul-Moscow relations. Therefore, news about this visit were widely reflected in national and international media, and now after this visit, there exists hopes that tensions between the two countries will decrease.

Two improvements were made in Rabbani's trip: First, Russia will continue its contributions to Afghanistan in various fields, particularly in military-technical fields; Second, Russia will organize a regional conference about Afghanistan in Moscow on February 15, where regional countries- Russia, China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and Iran will be participating.

How were the Afghan-Russian relations during the National Unity Government (NUG) in Afghanistan? How did tensions raised in Kabul-Moscow relations? And will suspicions in these relations terminate? Here we have analyzed these and other similar questions.

### **Kabul and Moscow; from regional consensus to trust deficit**

After 2001, Afghanistan had normal relations with Russia, but in the second term of Karzai's Presidency, these relations began to improve. After the formation of the NUG in Afghanistan, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and the Afghan National Security Advisor Hanif Atmar, in an effort to fight against extremism, tried to reach a regional consensus. In following efforts to this end, both Ghani and Atmar traveled to Russia and, at first, Russia promised four helicopters to the Afghan government, but soon relations between the two countries deteriorated, which had the four following reasons behind it:

**First;** ISIL's emergence and activities in Afghanistan which attracted Russia's attention towards this country. In addition, accusations, made by some Afghan Parliament members, about the Afghan National Security Council's support from ISIL also increased Russia's distrust on Afghan government's anti-terrorism efforts.

**Second;** improving relations between Moscow and the Taliban, which concerned the Afghan government, and in response, emphasized on state-to-state talks rather than talks with groups.

**Third;** the Russia, China and Pakistan trilateral meeting on Afghanistan organized by Russia also shadowed bilateral relations between the two countries.

**Fourth;** in the first week of January 2017, news were released about Russia trying to create obstacles in the way of delisting Hezb-e-Islami (HI) leader Hekmatyar's name from the UN blacklist. Trying to implement the provisions of the peace deal with HI, the Afghan government had demanded from the UN to remove Hekmatyar's name from its blacklist.

## Are suspicions going to come to an end?

Before Rabbani's visit to Russia, suspicions had increased in Kabul-Moscow relations; but now given the remarks and decisions made in this trip, it seems as though relations between the two countries are improving. Because:

**First;** although, at first, Russia had expressed concern about delisting Hekmatyar's name from the UN blacklist, but on February 2017, due to Russia's cooperation, Hekmatyar's name was removed from the UN sanctions list.

**Second;** the two sides (Afghanistan and Russia) promised to cooperate in Security-Military-Technical fields and particularly the combating abilities of the Afghan government were enhanced and they received new weapons. In this regard, the two sides also began to build a legal framework, which was implemented in November 2016.

**Third;** regional countries (Russia, China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and India) are going to take part in a conference on Afghanistan, to be held in Moscow on 15 February 2017.

**Fourth;** supporting Afghanistan's membership in Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and building the "Contact Group" regarding Afghanistan within this organization.

**Fifth;** emphasizing on such a negotiations with the Taliban, which is based on the UN Security Council's resolutions and the Afghan government's support.

**Sixth;** coordination in increasing the meetings between the two countries' ministers of foreign affairs.

Generally, the recent visit of the Afghan Foreign Minister was an effort to improve relation between the two countries, which, in the short term, will decrease suspicions between the two countries and will bring the opinions of the two countries closer. But still, the internal situation in the country and some international factors (particularly increasing tensions in relations between Russia on the one side and NATO and the US on the other) can increase distrust between Kabul and Moscow.

## **Afghanistan; from the superpowers' rivalry to regional powers' coordination**

Since the past one year, cooperation between the two superpowers –the US and Russia- in Afghanistan has ended and Moscow has, for several times, criticized the US strategy in Afghanistan. Therefore, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lovrov blamed the former US President Barrack Obama for the termination of cooperation between Russia and the US in Afghanistan and said that the two sides had not met during Obama's Presidency and thus suspicions increased in relations between the two countries.

Crises in Ukraine and Syria have also played a key role in putting an end to cooperation between Russia and the US in Afghanistan. Russia is now interested in Afghanistan's issue and makes contradictory remarks regarding the US strategy in Afghanistan. For instance, it sometimes questions the US bases in Afghanistan and then sometimes says that if the US troops withdraw its forces from Afghanistan, situation in Afghanistan will further deteriorate.

Increasing influence of ISIL in Afghanistan and its increased activities in Northern Afghanistan have also resulted in more attention of Russia towards Afghanistan. Therefore, Russia is organizing a conference of regional countries, without involving the US and NATO, to discuss the Afghan issue and, thus, tries to find a regional solution for Afghanistan's issue. But, ignoring the involved parties in Afghanistan (the US, NATO and the Taliban) while holding such conferences, which are aimed at settling the conflict in Afghanistan, will make it impossible for these conferences to achieve their goals. It is necessary to create coordination between the regional countries and the US in fundamental and general issues such as paving the way for the Afghan peace process and the peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

## 2016; the bloodiest year in the past one and a half-decade



In its annual report about civilian casualties in Afghanistan, UNAMA has stated that, in 2016, civilian casualties have risen 3% compared to 2015, which had been unprecedented since the beginning of the documentation of civilian casualties by UNAMA in 2009.

This report, released on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2017, states that 11418 civilians casualties were recorded in 2016, 3498 of which were killed and 7920 were wounded. The report also signifies those responsible for these casualties.

Since 2009, UNAMA records civilian casualties every year and its reports show that civilian fatalities increase annually; but it must be noted that UNAMA has always blamed the government's armed opposition and the Afghan forces for civilian casualties and has covered the casualties caused by foreign troops.

Here you would read about civilian casualties in the past one and a half-decade, the attribution of responsibility of these casualties, the role of engaged armed groups in civilian casualties and reasons behind the rise in these casualties in 2016.

### Civilian casualties (2001-2016)

In 2001, when the US and Coalition forces attacked Afghanistan, the number of civilian casualties increased and reached to about 2375 people. Later-on, from 2002 to 2006, a total of 2422 civilians were killed. It should be noted that these statistics are not put together by any official administration or organ and are collected from various sources by researchers.

UNAMA began documenting civilian casualties in 2007, but, from a methodological point of view, its annual reports in 2007 and 2008 are different than its reports in 2009 and the years after that.

If one studies UNAMA's annual reports on civilian casualties in Afghanistan, the statistics of the civilian casualties provided by this institution would lead one to conclude that whenever insecurity has increased or the war has intensified between the Taliban on the one side and the Afghan Government and foreign forces on the other side, civilian casualties have also increased. After 2007, civilian casualties have increased every year (except 2012). (see the Chart-1 for further information). In 2007 there were 1523 civilian casualties while in 2015 this number increased to 11002.

Overall, based on the statistics of the UN, from 2007 to the end of 2016, 73793 civilian casualties have been recorded in Afghanistan.

**Chart-1: Civilian Casualties in Afghanistan (2009-2016)**

year	Injuries	deaths	total
2009	3556	2412	5968
2010	4368	2792	7160
2011	4709	3133	7842
2012	4821	2769	7590
2013	5669	2969	8638
2014	6833	3701	10534
2015	7457	3545	11002
2016	7920	3498	11418

Source: UNAMA's annual reports on civilian casualties in Afghanistan (2009-2016)



### Attribution of responsibility for civilian casualties

Besides providing statistics of civilian casualties, UNAMA also attributes the responsibility for these casualties and makes some recommendations to the engaged groups to decrease these casualties.

It should be noted that in these statistics UNAMA has not included those incidents of civilian casualties which were not verified or were out of the reach of UNAMA; and neither are the casualties caused by drone attacks and the foreign forces included in these statistics.

UNAMA's 2016 annual report shows that the responsibility for 61% of civilian casualties goes to Anti-Government Elements (mainly the Taliban) and 24% to Pro-Government Elements (20% Afghan security forces, 2% pro-government militias and 2% foreign forces). The institution has attributed 10% of civilian casualties to the engagements on the ground between Anti-Government and Pro-Government elements, because it was not possible to attribute these casualties to one particular party. 5% remaining casualties are not attributed to any party because these casualties were mainly due to the exploded explosives.

In the statistics of UNAMA, only 2% of civilian casualties are attributed to foreign forces which is astonishing, because, in 2016, the foreign forces, on the one hand, returned to the battlefield and, on the other hand, increased their drone attacks.

**Chart-2: attribution of the responsibility of the civilian casualties (2009-2016)**

year	Casualties caused by the anti-governmental forces	Casualties caused by the pro-governmental forces	other
2009	4124	1035	809
2010	5428	824	910
2011	5817	1106	919
2012	6669	603	318
2013	7255	982	401
2014	7643	1453	1438
2015	6859	1854	2289
2016	6994	2728	1696

Source: UNAMA's annual reports on civilian casualties in Afghanistan (2009-2016)

## Women and children casualties (2009-2016)

Based on the statistics of UNAMA, 3512 children casualties were recorded in 2016, 923 of whom were killed and 2589 others were injured. This number marks a 24% increase compared to 2015.

Women casualties show a 2% decrease in 2016 compared to 2015 (1218 women casualties have been documented in 2016, 341 of whom were killed and 877 others were wounded). (See more in Chart-3)

**Chart-3: women and children casualties in Afghanistan (2009-2016)**

year	Children injuries	Children deaths	total	Women injuries	Women deaths	total
2009	423	307	<b>730</b>	152	133	<b>285</b>
2010	799	378	<b>1177</b>	202	167	<b>369</b>
2011	804	557	<b>1361</b>	247	203	<b>450</b>
2012	821	492	<b>1313</b>	352	196	<b>548</b>
2013	1200	564	<b>1764</b>	514	236	<b>750</b>
2014	1761	715	<b>2476</b>	611	298	<b>909</b>
2015	2096	733	<b>2829</b>	913	333	<b>1246</b>
2016	2589	923	<b>3512</b>	877	341	<b>1218</b>

Source: UNAMA's annual report on civilian casualties in Afghanistan (2009-2016)

## Reasons behind the rise of civilian casualties in 2016

Intensification of war on the ground and insecurities, lesser attention of engaged parties to the lives of civilians, the return of foreign forces to the battlefield, airstrikes on residential houses and some other factors are the main factors behind the rise in civilian casualties in 2016.

- **Intensification of War:** 2016 was a challenging year for both the people and government of Afghanistan. Fight with the government's armed oppositions increased in this year. On the one hand, the ground battle was intensifies, and on the other hand, foreign forces increased their airstrikes and killed many civilians.
- **Explosions and operations of the armed oppositions of the government:** another factor behind the rise of civilian casualties in 2016 was group attacks and deadly explosions in Kabul and other major cities of the

country. In this year, most of the attacks of the government's armed oppositions were carried out in areas where people were busy doing their daily chores.

- **ISIL:** UNAMA's 2016 report attributes the responsibility of 899 civilian casualties (209 dead and 690 injured) to ISIL in Afghanistan while in 2015 ISIL was reported to have caused 82 civilian casualties (39 dead and 43 injured), which means that in 2016, they have killed and injured ten times more people than in 2015.
- **Government's military operations:** UNAMA's report attributes the responsibility of 20% of civilian casualties to the Afghan forces, while in 2015, it was 17%. The increased civilian casualties were due to the Afghan forces' airstrikes and their increased aggressive operations without undertaking preventive measures to avoid civilian casualties.

The end

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**Contact Us:**

Email: [info@csrskabul.com](mailto:info@csrskabul.com) - [csrskabul@gmail.com](mailto:csrskabul@gmail.com)

Website: [www.csrskabul.com](http://www.csrskabul.com) - [www.csrskabul.net](http://www.csrskabul.net)

Office: (+93) 784089590

**Contact with Officials:**

Dr. AbdulBaqi Amin, General Director of CSRS: (+93) 789316120 [abdulbaqi123@hotmail.com](mailto:abdulbaqi123@hotmail.com)

Hekmatullah Zaland, Senior Manager: (+93) 775454048 [hekmat.zaland@gmail.com](mailto:hekmat.zaland@gmail.com)

**Note:** Please let us know your feedback and suggestions for the improvement of Weekly analysis.

