

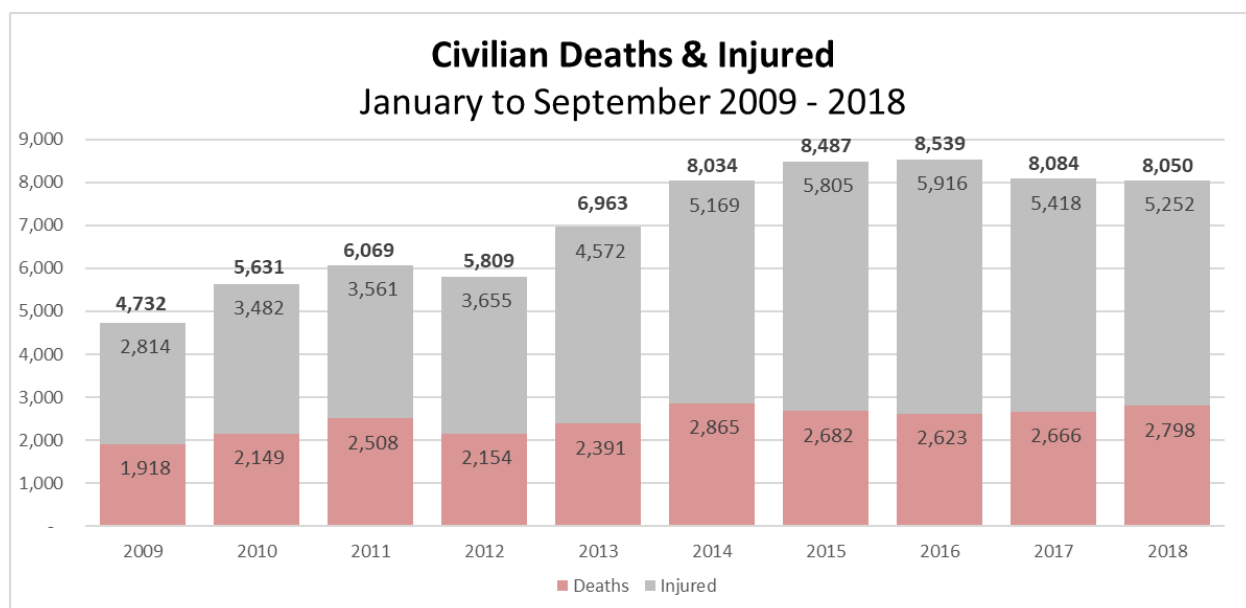


QUARTERLY REPORT ON THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN ARMED CONFLICT: 1 JANUARY TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2018

In the first nine months of 2018, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continued to document extreme levels of harm to civilians from the armed conflict, including recording the most civilian deaths during the same nine-month period since 2014. UNAMA renews its calls on parties to the armed conflict to better protect the civilian population and urges all parties to take concrete steps toward a peaceful settlement to the conflict in the interest of protecting the population.

From 1 January to 30 September 2018, UNAMA documented 8,050 civilian casualties (2,798 deaths and 5,252 injured),¹ reflecting the same extreme levels of harm to civilians as during the same period in 2017. Civilian deaths increased by five per cent while the number of civilians injured decreased by three per cent.

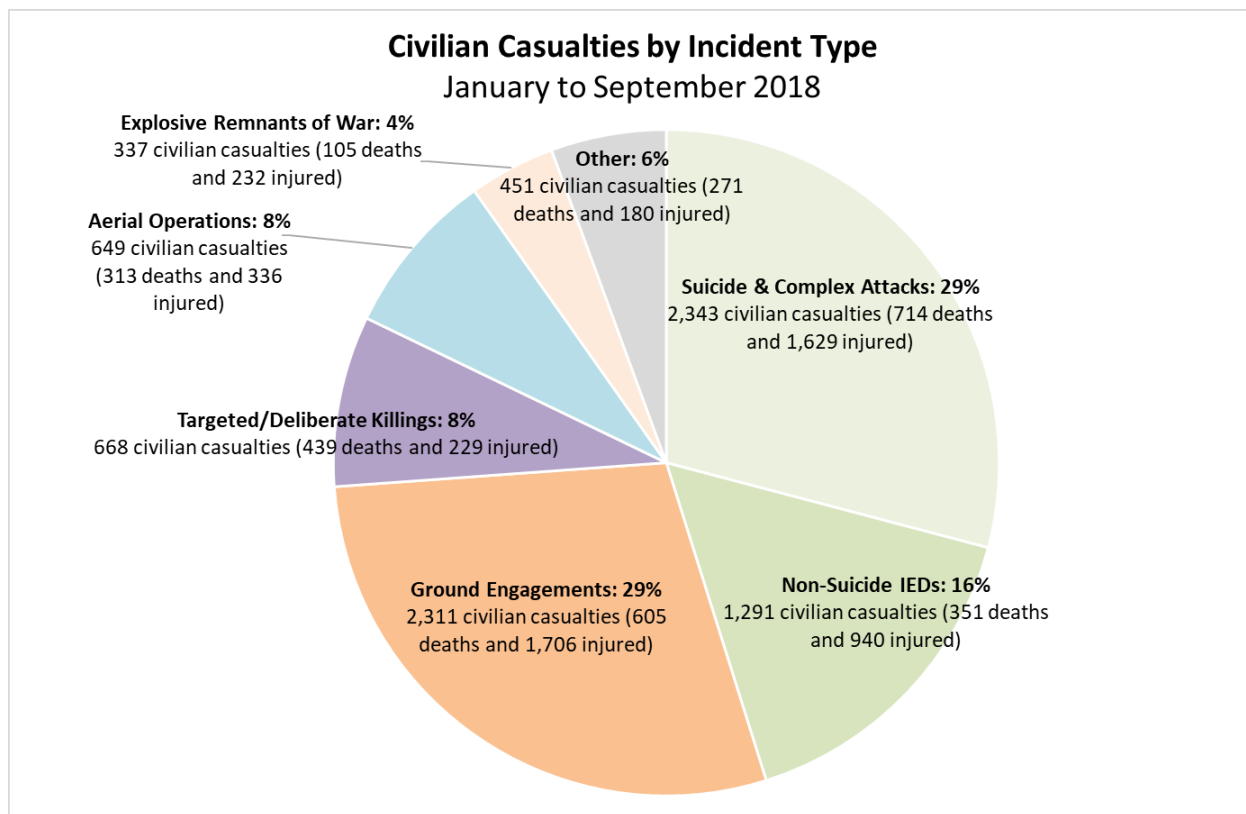
The combined use of suicide and non-suicide improvised explosive devices (IEDs) remained the leading cause of civilian casualties in the first nine months of 2018, causing nearly half of all civilian casualties. The majority resulted from suicide and complex attacks, which increased both in frequency and in lethality to civilians, driving the overall rise in civilian deaths. Ground engagements were the second leading cause of civilian casualties, followed by targeted and deliberate killings, aerial operations, and explosive remnants of war. Civilians living in the provinces of Nangarhar, Kabul, Helmand, Ghazni, and Faryab were most impacted by the conflict. UNAMA notes with extreme concern that Nangarhar became the province that recorded the most civilian



¹ Includes 829 women casualties (250 deaths and 579 injuries) and 2,136 child casualties (653 deaths and 1,483 injured).

casualties in the first nine months of 2018 with 1,494 civilian casualties (554 deaths and 940 injured), more than double the number of civilian casualties recorded in that province during the same period in 2017.²

The increase in the number of civilian casualties from suicide and complex attacks by Anti-Government Elements, more than half of which are attributed to *Daesh*/Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP), continued to offset decreases in civilian casualties from other incident types, including an 18 per cent reduction in casualties caused during ground engagements, as well as a 32 per cent decrease from targeted and deliberate killings.

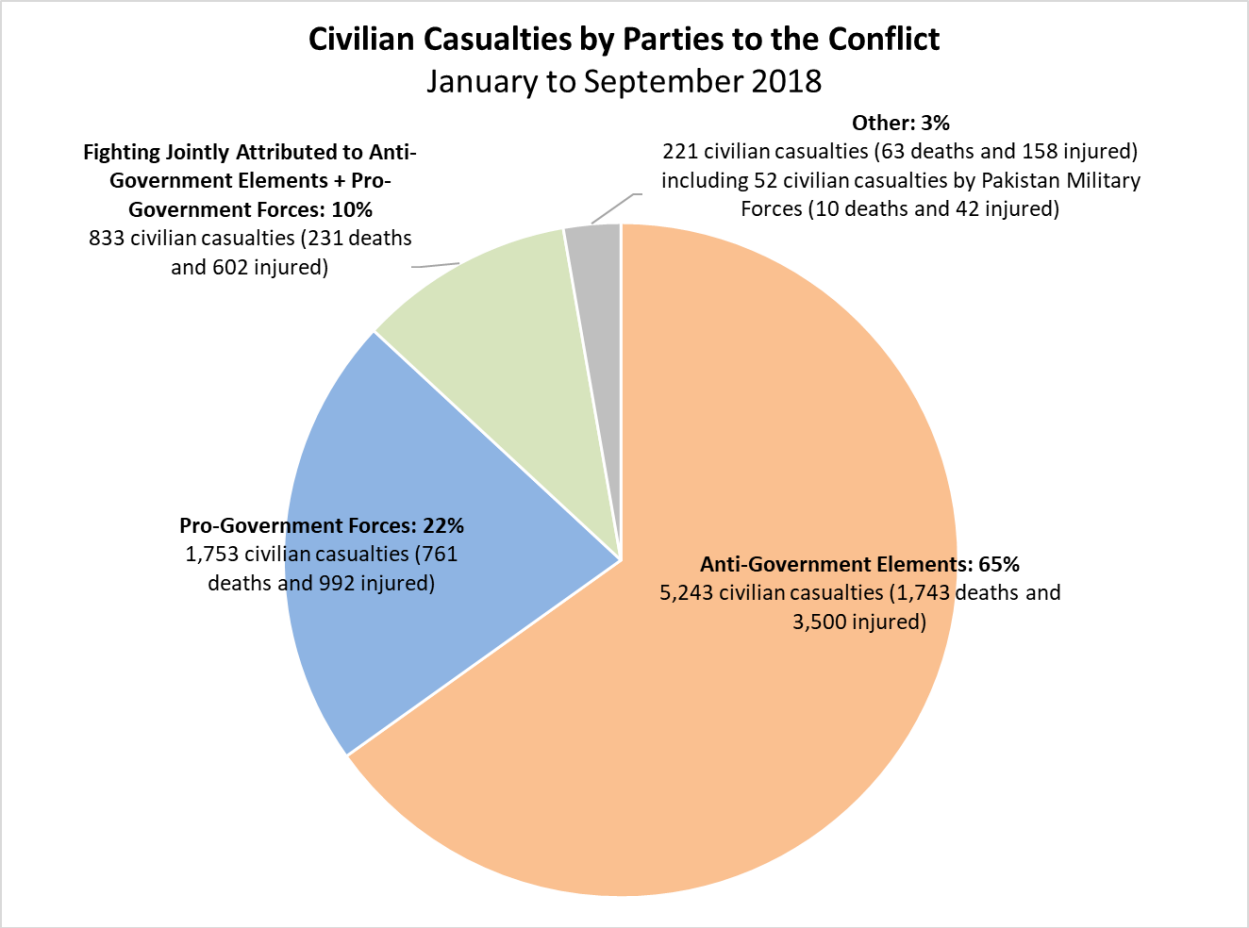


Attribution of Civilian Casualties

From 1 January to 30 September 2018, Anti-Government Elements caused 5,243 civilian casualties (1,743 deaths and 3,500 injured), accounting for 65 per cent of all civilian casualties, approximately the same as in the first nine months of 2017. Of the 65 per cent of civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements, 35 per cent were attributed to Taliban, 25 per cent to *Daesh*/ISKP, and five per cent to unidentified Anti-Government Elements (including less than one per cent to self-proclaimed *Daesh*/ISKP). The use of IEDs, mainly during suicide attacks, remained the leading cause of civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements. Overall IED civilian casualties increased by 21 per cent, while civilian casualties from suicide and complex attacks increased by 46 per cent. Ground engagements, the next leading cause of civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements, marked a 26 per cent decrease compared with the first nine months of 2017.

² From 1 January to 30 September 2017, UNAMA recorded 609 civilian casualties (232 deaths and 377 injured) in Nangarhar province.

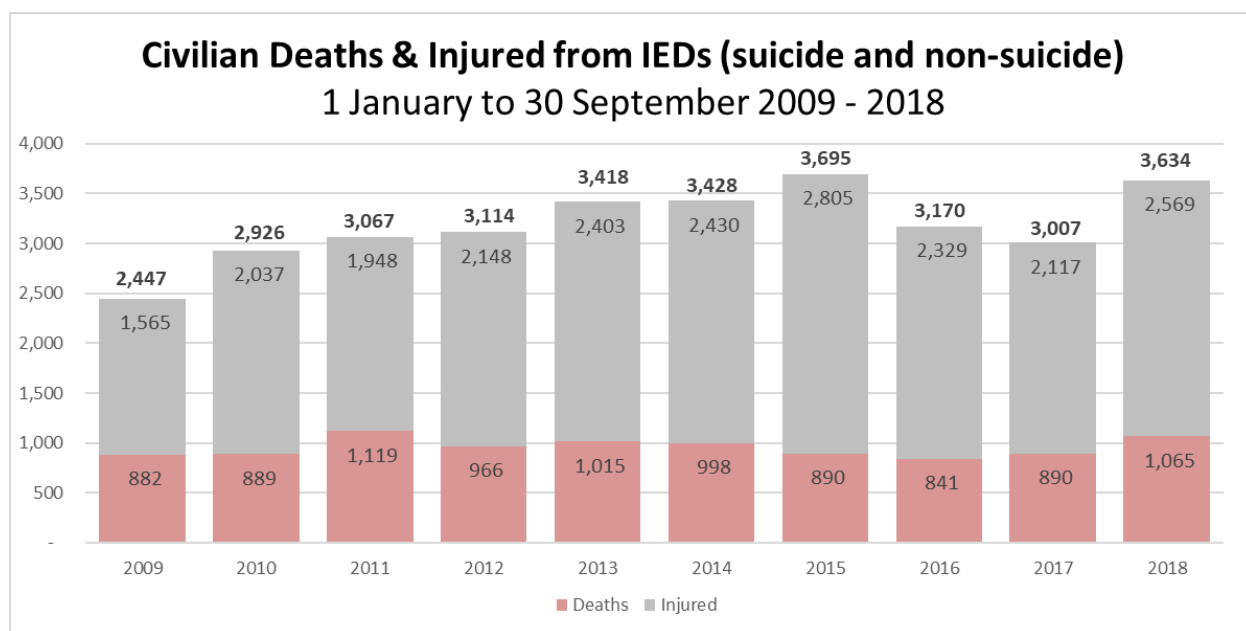
UNAMA attributed 1,753 civilian casualties (761 deaths and 992 injured) to Pro-Government Forces between 1 January and 30 September 2018, a nine per cent increase from the corresponding period in 2017. Pro-Government Forces caused 22 per cent of all civilian casualties in the first nine months of 2018 (16 per cent by Afghan national security forces, five per cent by international military forces, and one per cent by pro-Government armed groups). The majority of civilian casualties caused by Pro-Government Forces resulted from ground engagements, despite a 17 per cent reduction in ground engagement civilian casualties attributed to Pro-Government Forces (mainly Afghan national security forces). The next leading cause of civilian casualties by Pro-Government forces was aerial attacks, for which UNAMA recorded a 39 per cent increase in civilian casualties, which together with a significant increase in civilian casualties from search operations offset the decrease in civilian casualties from ground fighting.



Attacks Using Suicide and non-Suicide Improvised Explosive Devices (IED)

The leading cause of civilian deaths and injuries from the armed conflict remained the combined use of suicide and non-suicide IEDs by Anti-Government Elements, reaching record high levels in the first three quarters of 2018, with Anti-Government Elements increasingly directing such attacks against the civilian population, including minority Shi'a Muslims, the majority of whom are ethnic Hazara. Between 1 January and 30 September 2018, UNAMA documented 3,634 civilian casualties (1,065 deaths and 2,569 injured) from suicide and non-suicide IED attacks. Throughout 2018, Anti-Government Elements intensified their attacks in civilian areas and against the civilian population, increasingly using IEDs containing large amounts of explosives as well as using multiple devices, resulting in rising levels of civilian casualties.

UNAMA recalls that attacks deliberately targeting civilians and the murder of civilians are serious violations of international humanitarian law that amount to war crimes.³ In addition, widespread or systematic attacks directed against a civilian population (including religious and/or ethnic minorities) in which civilians are intentionally killed may constitute crimes against humanity.⁴ Additional details of civilian harm from IEDs may be found in the 7 October 2018 UNAMA special report detailing concerns with the increasing harm to civilians from use of suicide and non-suicide IEDs.⁵



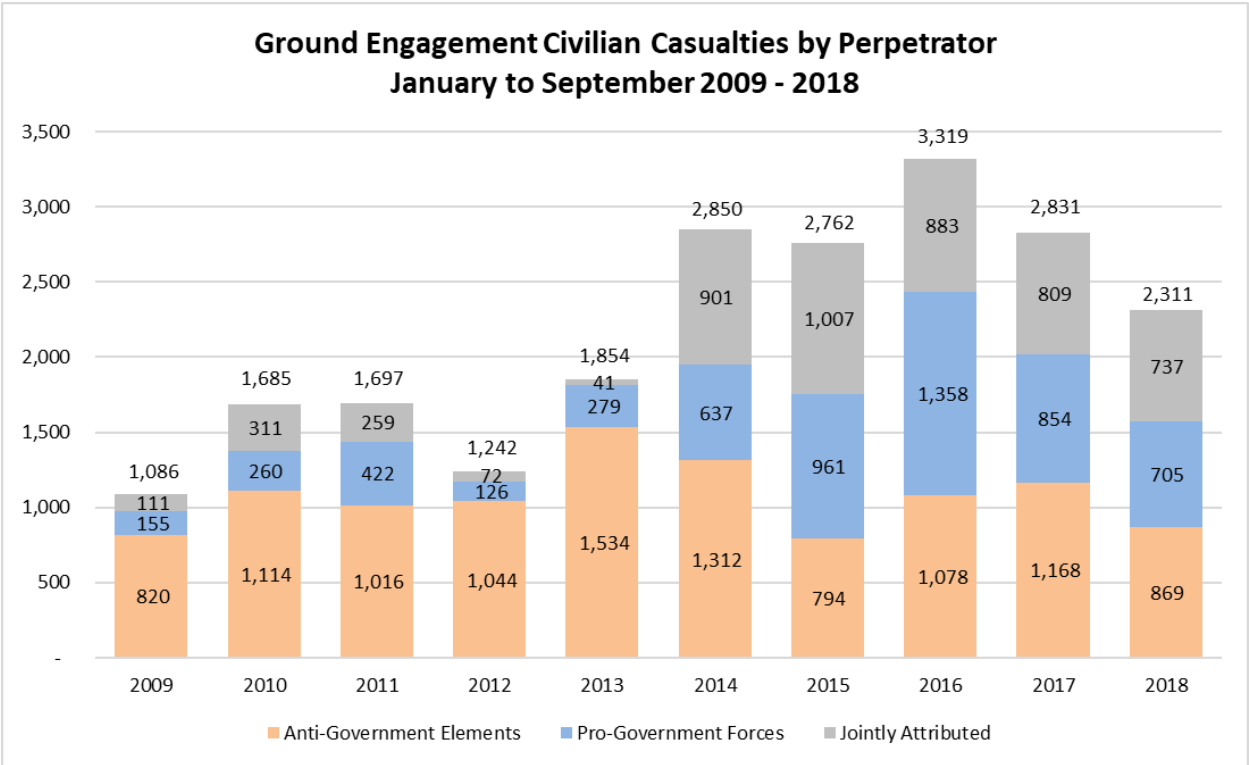
³ Common Article 3; Additional Protocol II, Articles 4(2), 13(2); Rome Statute, Articles 8(2)(c) and 8(2)(e)(i); ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study, Rules 1, 6, 89, 156.

⁴ For example, crimes against humanity as defined in Article 7 of the Rome Statute include, *inter alia*, acts of murder; extermination; or persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, or other grounds; and other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health, when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack.

⁵ Available on UNAMA's website at <http://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports>

Ground Engagements

Ground engagements remained the second leading cause of civilian casualties, causing 2,311 civilian casualties (605 deaths and 1,706 injured), accounting for 29 per cent of all civilian casualties. In the first nine months of 2018, civilian casualties from ground engagements decreased to the lowest levels since 2013, with a decrease in civilian casualties caused by Pro-Government Forces and Anti-Government Elements. The continued reductions in civilian casualties from ground engagements may have resulted from the continued shift from regular ground fighting toward the increased use of suicide IEDs by Anti-Government Elements, and airstrikes and search operations by Pro-Government Forces. The reduction also suggests that parties undertook measures to protect civilians from harm during ground operations. In 2018, sources continued to report to UNAMA that parties increasingly warned civilians in advance of some operations, and that Afghan national security forces used fewer heavy weapons in areas with civilian populations. This is an area on which UNAMA has consistently focused its advocacy with parties to the conflict in recent years.



Targeted and Deliberate Killings

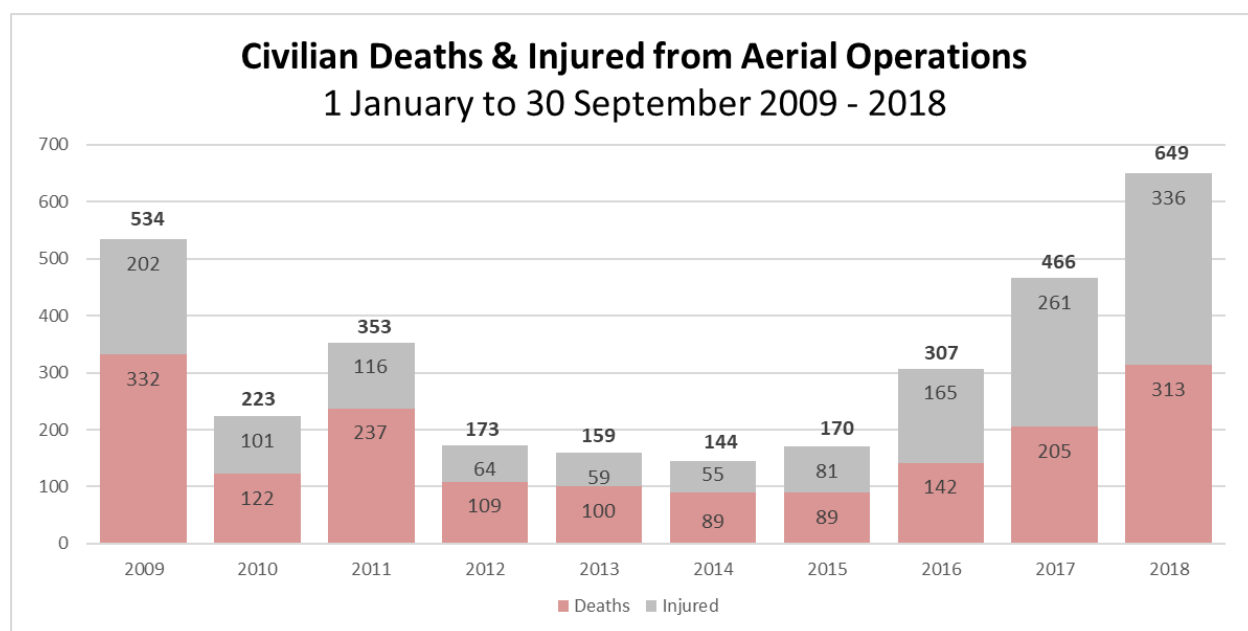
Targeted and deliberate killings remained the third leading cause of civilian casualties between 1 January and 30 September 2018, resulting in 668 civilian casualties (439 deaths and 229 injured), a 32 per cent drop compared to the corresponding period in 2017. Anti-Government Elements caused 89 per cent of these civilian casualties, mainly from Taliban targeting civilian government officials and civilians accused of spying for or providing information to Pro-Government Forces. Pro-Government Forces caused the remaining 11 per cent from this tactic, mainly pro-Government militia intentionally killing or harming civilians.

Aerial Operations by Pro-Government Forces

Aerial operations conducted by Pro-Government Forces caused eight per cent of total civilian casualties, the fourth leading cause of civilian casualties between January and September 2018. The mission documented 649 civilian casualties (313 deaths and 336 injured) resulting from aerial operations, a 39 per cent increase from the same period in 2017. The number of civilian casualties recorded from aerial operations in the first nine months of 2018 has already surpassed the number of civilian casualties recorded over every entire year since UNAMA began systematic civilian casualty documentation in 2009.

The majority of the increase in civilian casualties from aerial operations resulted from incidents attributed to international military forces, which have more than doubled over the first nine months of 2018 as compared to the same time period last year. This worrying trend comes amidst continued reports of high numbers of airstrikes, by both Afghan⁶ and international military forces.⁷ UNAMA attributed 51 per cent of civilian casualties from aerial attacks to international military forces, 38 per cent to the Afghan Air Force, and the remaining 11 per cent to Pro-Government Forces where specific attribution could not be established.

Women and children continued to comprise more than 60 per cent of all aerial attack civilian casualties and the number of child casualties from these attacks increased by 53 per cent compared to the first nine months of 2017. Most women and child casualties from aerial strikes occurred during aerial strikes in areas populated by civilians, often targeting Anti-Government Elements who were co-located with the civilian population, and who sometimes targeted Pro-Government Forces from civilian residences.



⁶ According to Afghanistan Ministry of Defence press releases, the Afghan Air Force conducted 407 airstrikes between 1 July and 30 September 2018. See <http://mod.gov.af/en/blog>, last accessed on 9 October 2018.

⁷ At the time of this report's release, the monthly data normally available on the US Air Forces Central Command website concerning weapons released by air was not available past 31 July 2018. See <http://www.afcent.af.mil/about/airpower-summaries/>, last accessed 9 October 2018. On 4 October, US Forces – Afghanistan released a summary of strikes it conducted during ground and aerial operations in September 2018 on the NATO Resolute Support website. See <https://rs.nato.int/news-center/press-releases/2018-press-releases/us-forces--afghanistan-september-2018-strike-summary.aspx>, last accessed on 9 October 2018.

As the number of civilian casualties from aerial operations documented by UNAMA reached unprecedented records already in 2018, the mission once again recommends that both the Afghan Air Force and international military forces review targeting criteria and pre-engagement precautionary measures, including considering the high likelihood of civilian presence in populated areas and starting from a position of considering all persons to be civilians unless determined otherwise.

Search Operations by Pro-Government Forces

In the first nine months of 2018, UNAMA documented 222 civilian casualties (178 deaths and 44 injured) caused during search operations by Pro-Government Forces, more than double the number recorded during the same period in 2017.⁸ UNAMA attributed 143 civilian casualties (124 deaths and 19 injured) to search operations involving National Directorate of Security (NDS) Special Forces, either alone or partnered with international military forces.

In addition to the increase in civilian casualties occurring during search operations, UNAMA notes with concern allegations of human rights abuses during these operations. The mission received consistent, credible accounts of intentional destruction of civilian property, illegal detention, and other abuses carried out by NDS Special Forces and pro-Government armed groups, including the Khost Protection Force. UNAMA continues to seek avenues to deconflict incidents impacting civilians with NDS Special Forces. UNAMA notes further concern at what appears to be a lack of accountability for abuses by these forces and recommends investigation of all allegations of human rights abuses and civilian casualties caused by NDS Special Forces and pro-Government armed groups. The mission urges NDS and international military forces working with NDS Special Forces to provide a point of contact through which UNAMA may engage with these groups.

Harm to Civilians from Fighting in Ghazni City in August 2018

On 10 August, Taliban launched an attack on Ghazni city, mainly targeting Afghan national security forces' check posts and buildings, as well as government offices. The Taliban also attacked the telecommunication antennas, thereby cutting off communication networks, and used civilian homes during the fighting. Residents experienced power outages along with water and food shortages, and civilians were largely confined to their homes due to the fighting. Insecurity and blockages on the roads prevented people from fleeing. After clearance operations began on 13 August, Afghan national security forces, with the support of international military forces, regained control of the city and basic services resumed.

During the attack and throughout the period of fighting, civilians paid a heavy toll. The fighting caused hundreds of civilian casualties, overwhelming the capacity of the Ghazni Public Hospital, and forced many families to displace to neighbouring provinces. As of 7 October, UNAMA has verified 210 civilian casualties (69 deaths and 141 injured) which occurred between 10-15 August 2018 in Ghazni city, the majority from ground fighting between Taliban and Pro-Government Forces, as well as casualties from aerial operations. UNAMA also verified the targeted killing of a public prosecutor by the Taliban and the abduction of an electoral candidate, who was later found dead, as well as intentional damage to civilian property.

UNAMA continues its to work to substantiate the remaining numerous allegations of civilian casualties resulting from this fighting in Ghazni.

⁸ Between 1 January and 30 September 2017, UNAMA documented 88 civilian casualties from search operations.

Election-Related Attacks

Between 1 January and 30 September 2018, UNAMA recorded 366 civilian casualties (126 deaths and 240 injured) from election-related violence involving parties to the armed conflict, most of which (more than 250 casualties) came from two IED attacks on 22 April and 6 May in Kabul and Khost, respectively. As noted in the UNAMA Protection of Civilians Midyear Update in July 2018 and the *Special Report on Election Related Attacks* issued in May 2018, Anti-Government Elements perpetrated election-related violence during the voter registration period targeting *tazkira* (national ID) distribution centres and voter registration sites, as well as election-related personnel, including elections workers and Afghan National Police officers dedicated to providing security to election-related sites, through the use of IEDs, suicide attacks and targeted killings.⁹

UNAMA notes that many of the sites used for voter registration and polling centres are located in schools, health clinics and mosques. Notwithstanding the devastation of civilian deaths and injuries from attacks against these election-related sites, the mission remains concerned about the negative impact on rights to education, health and freedom of religion. The mission is especially concerned about their continued use as polling centres on election days planned for October 2018 and April 2019.

The mission is also concerned with recent targeting of candidates. A notable example is an incident on 25 September in Kandahar where a parliamentary candidate well-known in his community as a civil society activist and outspoken critic of corrupt politicians was shot and killed by gunmen. Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack.¹⁰

UNAMA welcomes additional mitigation measures put in place at such sites for the next stages of the election to protect Afghan voters seeking to freely exercise their rights to political participation, and reiterates its call on Anti-Government Elements to cease targeting election-related sites. UNAMA implores Anti-Government Elements to cease attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, including election-related sites, particularly those located in schools, mosques and clinics, which are facilities that are afforded special protection under international law due to their particular religious, social and humanitarian significance. Anti-Government Elements must take concrete and meaningful steps to abide by previous commitments to uphold basic human rights and humanitarian principles.

Children and Armed Conflict

During the first nine months of 2018, UNAMA continued to receive reports of incidents of killing and maiming, sexual abuse and recruitment and use of Afghan girls and boys, highlighting the severe impact of the armed conflict in Afghanistan on children. Between 1 January and 30 September 2018, UNAMA recorded 2,136 child casualties (653 deaths and 1,483 injured) as a result of the armed conflict, an overall decrease of 15 per cent compared to the same period in 2017. The decrease mainly resulted from fewer children killed and injured during ground engagements, though this incident type remained the leading cause of child casualties. The mission also recorded a reduction in child casualties from non-suicide IEDs but noted with concern that child casualties from suicide and complex attacks and aerial attacks increased and that children continued to comprise more than one-third of casualties from pressure-plate IEDs. Though UNAMA recorded decreases in child casualties from explosive remnants of war in line with overall casualty reductions from this incident type,

⁹ See UNAMA Special Report on Election-Related attacks and abuses during the initial voter registration period, 10 May 2018, available at <http://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports>.

¹⁰ Taliban claim of responsibility available at <http://alemarah-english.com/?p=35057>, last accessed on 7 October 2018.

the mission reiterates concern that children comprised 90 per cent of civilian casualties from explosive remnants of war.

The mission takes note of the continued practice of child recruitment by Anti-Government Elements, noting particular concern with *Daesh*/ISKP. In a particularly high-profile recruitment incident, on 31 July 2018, approximately 250 self-proclaimed *Daesh*/ISKP fighters, including children, in Darzab district of Jawzjan province surrendered to Afghan National Security Forces after heavy fighting with the Taliban. Of the 89 detainees claiming to be below the age of 18, 55 were assessed by NDS to be children, with at least four children reported to be below the age of 12 years. UNAMA condemns the recruitment and use of children and urges Anti-Government Elements to immediately cease this unlawful practice that has such devastating consequences for children. The mission reminds the Afghan authorities that detention of a child should only be used as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate time and urges the authorities to transfer the children currently being held in NDS adult detention facilities to the Juvenile Rehabilitation Centres as soon as possible, as set out in NDS Directive 0423.

For more detailed information, please consult the UNAMA annual reports on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict (available at: <http://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports>)