



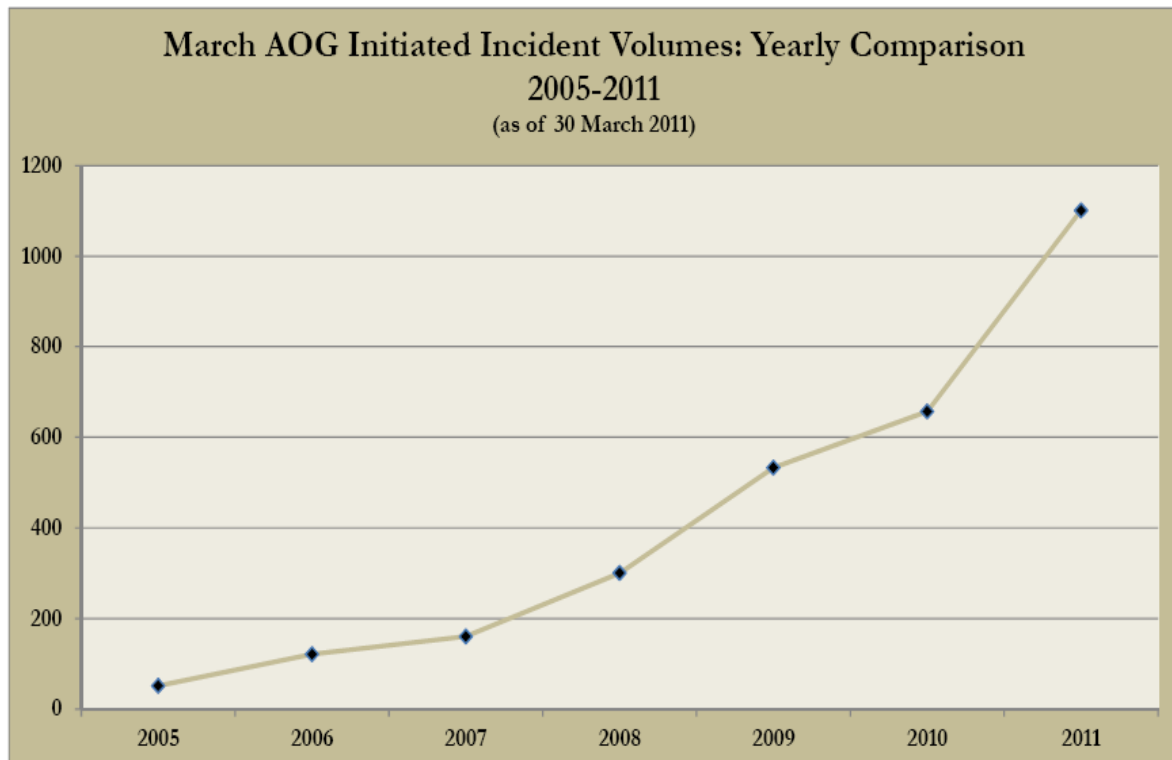
# INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM RESEARCH

A Centre of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies

## MONTHLY COUNTRY REPORT

**Afghanistan**

**March 2011**



**The Afghan Opposition Groups (AOG) have continued to increase the insurgent activities against the Afghan government and the ISAF forces across Afghanistan.**

**(Source: ANSO Report, March 2011)**

## **Who Burns Schools in Afghanistan?**

The Taliban supreme leader Mullah Muhammad Omar rejected allegations by President Hamid Karzai that Taliban fighters burn down schools in Afghanistan. President Karzai recently appealed to the Taliban fighters not to burn school and allow education to be imparted. In response Mullah Omar claimed that the Taliban are not involved in burning schools. Taliban's spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid also claimed that the Taliban fighters do not destroy schools and public places. The spokesperson stated that the Taliban believe education is the only way of success in this world and that the elements involved in damaging national assets do not represent the group but they are agents of the enemy trying to defame Taliban. Destruction of schools and other public constructions such as roads and bridges is believed to be an integral part of the ongoing insurgency and Taliban have been repeatedly blamed for this in the past. During last seven years hundreds of school burning and bridge destroying were blamed on the Taliban but this is the first that the Taliban supreme leader and their spokesperson denied the blame and called it baseless.<sup>1</sup>

## **Civilian Casualties**

The incidents of civilian casualties that happened in the month of March have further strained relationship between the Afghan government and ISAF authorities. The popular German weekly *Der Spiegel* published some of the thousands of pictures taken by the American soldiers while posing with corpses of civilians killed by them in Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> *Der Spiegel* magazine published several photos related to the killings one of which shows an American soldier grinning over a bloodied corpse and lifting the dead man's head by the hair for the camera. Afghan President strongly condemned this act and the Afghan presidential spokesman said that "If the United States of America wants to be friendly with Afghan people and the government to have a presence in this country, then they should put an end to operations which result in civilian casualties."<sup>3</sup>

In another incident a NATO airstrike killed nine Afghan boys in eastern Kunar province while they were collecting wood. Afghan President Hamid Karzai showed a harsh reaction and told the NATO commander General David Petraeus that apologies are not enough when it comes to civilian casualties. David Petraeus made a public apology for the incident while President Barack Obama called it a "tragic accident." On February 20, in the same province 64 civilians were killed in a joint operation by the NATO troops and Afghan security forces.

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<sup>1</sup> "Mullah Omar denies destroying public places", The Nation, March 28, 2011

<sup>2</sup> "Afghan war", Pakistan Observer, March 27, 2011

<sup>3</sup> "Afghans Urge Investigation Into 'Kill Teams' In Wake Of Sentencing, Photo Scandal", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 24, 2011

The dead included 20 women and 15 children.<sup>4</sup> In reaction to the above civilian casualties hundreds of people protested in Kabul chanting "Death to America". The protestors marched through the center of the capital carrying banners bearing pictures of blood-covered dead children killed in air strikes by foreign forces.<sup>5</sup>

### **Spike in Taliban's Attacks**

Taliban increased attacks against the Afghan government and ISAF troops, which also resulted in high civilian casualties. Early March suicide bomber posing as an army volunteer struck Afghan army recruitment center in the northern Kunduz province and killed at least 33 new recruits for the Afghan army. The same recruitment center was targeted in December 2010 when eight Afghan soldiers and police officers were killed. Taliban also claimed responsibility for a suicide attack on 10 March, 2011 that killed Kunduz Police Chief and two of his bodyguards.<sup>6</sup> In February, a suicide bomber killed 30 people waiting in line for identification cards a government office in the same province.<sup>7</sup> And in the same month another suicide attack on branch of Kabul Bank in eastern Jalalabad city killed over 40 civilians and injured more than 70 others.<sup>8</sup>

### **Transition Sites Announced**

On 22 March 2011 Afghan President Hamid Karzai announced the first sites of transition where security will be handed over to the Afghan forces. The transition sites are the provinces of Kabul except Sarobi district, Bamyan and Panjshir and the cities of Mazar-i-Sharif, Lashkar Gah, Herat and Mehterlam. President Karzai's announcement of the first transition sites came after the NATO countries agreed last year to begin the transition designed to allow foreign troops to leave Afghanistan by the end of 2014. But with a major Taliban insurgency still raging, doubts remain over the readiness of the Afghan security forces. The Afghan Interior Minister stated that the Afghan security forces lack the ability to take over security responsibilities now and he argued that the transition should instead start in three years. The Afghan Defence Minister while stating that there are threats ahead of the possible security transition said that there is possibility the anti-government elements may deliberately give the ISAF and Afghan government a false feeling of victory in a bid to encourage withdrawal by the coalition. Taliban dismissed the transition process as "a game

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<sup>4</sup> "Karzai to Petraeus: Apologies are not enough", CNN March 6, 2011

<sup>5</sup> "Hundreds protest civilian deaths in Afghan capital" Reuters March 6, 2011

<sup>6</sup> "Suicide bomber kills at least 33 in Afghanistan", Associated Press, March 14, 2011

<sup>7</sup> ibid

<sup>8</sup> "Attack on Kabul Bank's Branch in Jalalabad", Pajhwok News Agency, February 19, 2011

by the invading forces” and said that they would not stop but increase their attacks in places that come under Afghan control.<sup>9</sup>

The people of Afghanistan have different views on the transition plan. Some back up the transition while others believe that the current Afghan security forces are not able to withstand pressure from insurgents that have fought the well equipped and trained troops from the NATO countries. Both the Afghan people and the government stress that the Afghan security forces need to be equipped and trained with modern and heavy arms including a strong air force before the transition is completed.<sup>10</sup> The manpower of Afghan National Army currently totals 155,418 and will reach 171,600 by the end of 2011 while the Afghan police force is over 118,000 at the moment.<sup>11</sup>

### **Germany to Send 300 AIR Force Crew to Afghanistan**

On 25 March 2011 the German parliament approved the government's bill to send 300 air force crew to Afghanistan in order to ease the pressure of its NATO allies in Libya. The bill was endorsed by a large majority of 407-113 with 32 abstentions. Foreign Minister of Germany said that his country would not join in the military actions against Libya but it would not put its allies in danger and would reduce their burden in Afghanistan. The 300 air force crew will serve on NATO airborne warning and control system (AWACS) aircraft to watch the airspace of Afghanistan. Germany is the third largest troop contributing country in Afghanistan with a total number of 5,300 soldiers based in northern part of the country and it wants to start withdrawing its troops from the country at the end of current year.<sup>12</sup>

### **Afghanistan Fostering Economic Ties with Turkmenistan**

Turkmenistan and Afghanistan have agreed to build a 120 kilometers long railway line from Amatyrat, Turkmenistan, to Akina, Afghanistan. Presently, the two neighboring countries are connected by a 10 kilometers line from Kuska in Turkmenistan to Herat in Afghanistan. In February this year President of Turkmenistan also signed an order to start construction of a new electricity supply line to Afghanistan which will increase electricity by five times, to 300 mega watts in Afghanistan. Another even bigger project is construction of a gas pipeline called the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) line. At the initiative of Turkmenistan's President, Ashgabat hosted a summit on the pipeline in December 2010

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<sup>9</sup> “Afghanistan announces crucial security handover”, AFP , March 22, 2011

<sup>10</sup> “Afghan Forces Not Ready for Security Transition”, TOLONews.com, 06 April 2011

<sup>11</sup> “Security handover from NATO to Afghan forces seen challenging” , Xinhua, March 25, 2011

<sup>12</sup> “German parliament approves sending more troops to Afghanistan”, Xinhua, March 25, 2011

where the four countries signed an agreement on the gas pipeline project.<sup>13</sup> These infrastructure projects will play a crucial role in Afghanistan economic progress in future and contribute to Afghanistan becoming a regional hub between Central and South Asia.

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<sup>13</sup> “Turkmenistan, Afghanistan to build new rail link Hindustan”, Times March 13, 2011