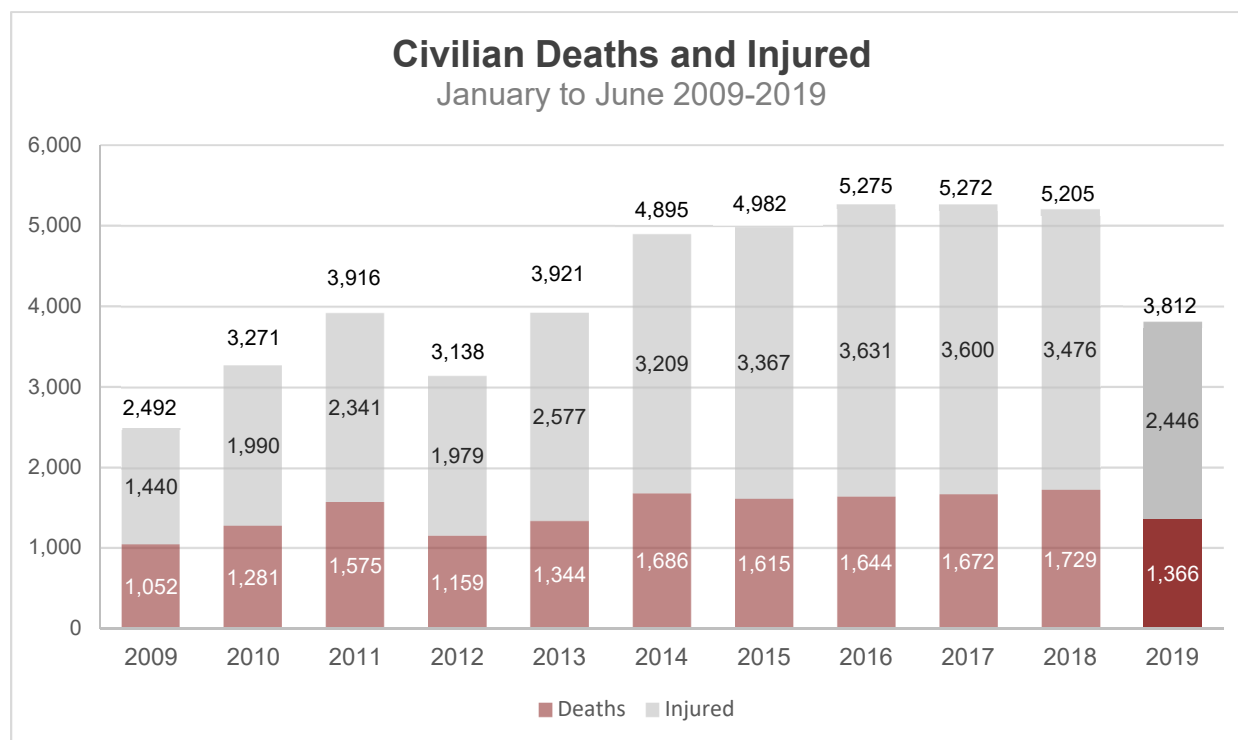




MIDYEAR UPDATE ON THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN ARMED CONFLICT: 1 JANUARY TO 30 JUNE 2019*

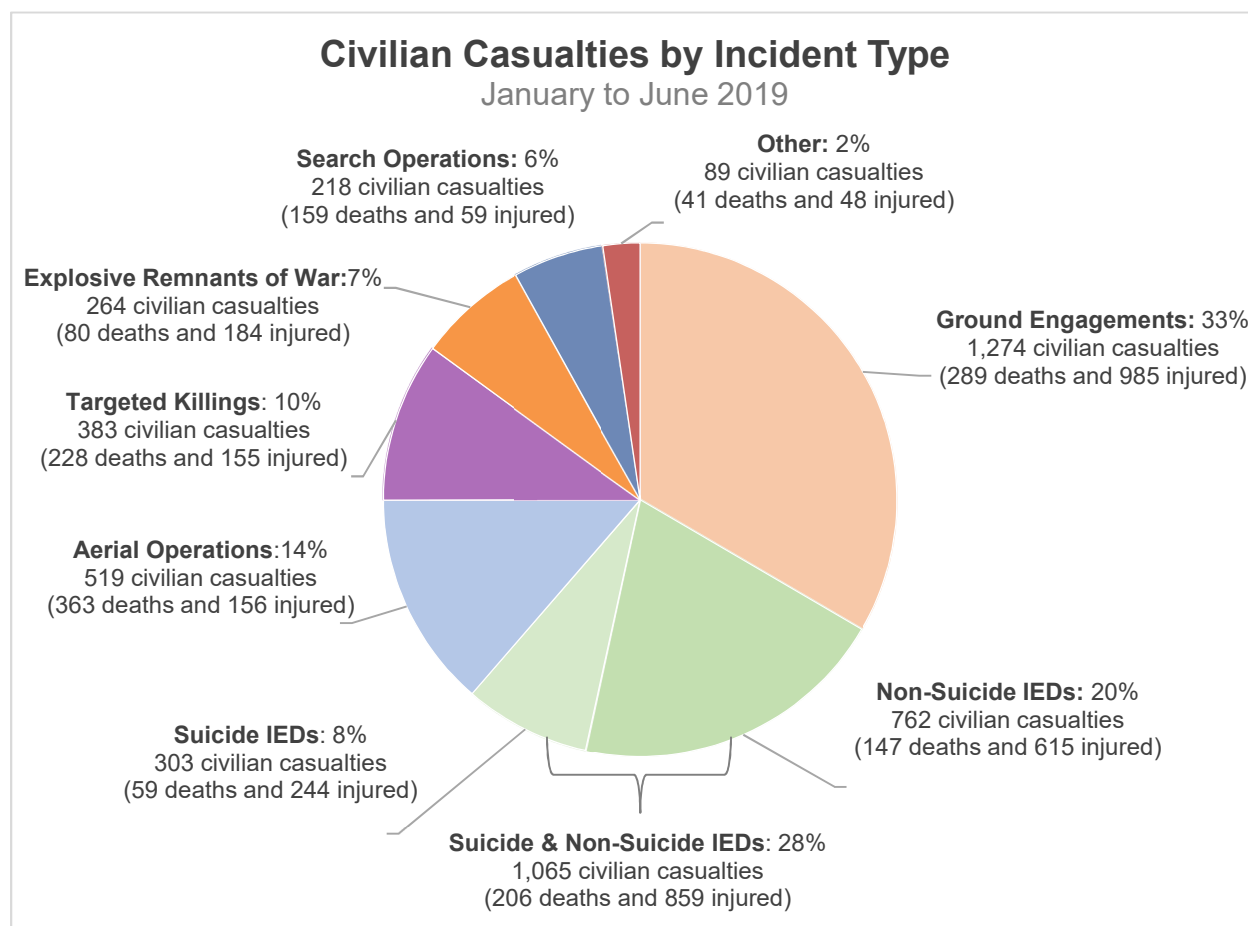
In the first six months of 2019, the armed conflict continued to inflict significant harm on the civilian population, killing and maiming thousands, displacing families from their homes, and impacting essential services including education and health care. From 1 January to 30 June 2019, UNAMA documented 3,812 civilian casualties (1,366 deaths and 2,446 injured), a 27 per cent decrease from the same period in 2018 and the lowest total of civilian casualties for the first six months of the year since 2012. While the number of injured civilians in the second quarter is comparable to the first quarter of 2019, UNAMA documented a 27 per cent increase in civilian deaths from the first to second quarter in 2019. Trends documented in the first quarter of 2019 continued. Anti-Government Elements continued to cause the majority of civilian casualties. Civilian deaths (not total casualties) attributed to Pro-Government Forces continued to exceed those caused by Anti-Government Elements.



* In memory of Mohamed Conde, a UN Volunteer with UNAMA Human Rights Service, who passed away during the writing of the report and whose work during his long and dedicated service was instrumental to the mission.

Taliban claim that the reduction in civilian casualties attributed to them is due to the precautions they have taken to protect civilians. Pro-Government Forces assert that the reduction in casualties caused by Anti-Government Elements is due to the effective measures that have been taken to thwart attacks by Anti-Government Elements and more effectively protect civilian areas.

The overall reduction of civilian casualties was driven by a decrease in civilian casualties from suicide improvised explosive device (IED) attacks by Anti-Government Elements and ground engagements, while civilian casualties from aerial and search operations continued to rise. Civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements decreased by 43 per cent during the first half of 2019 as compared to 2018, while civilian casualties attributed to Pro-Government Forces increased by 31 per cent.



Ground engagements remained the leading cause of civilian casualties in the first half of 2019, causing one-third of the overall total. However, this represents a 16 per cent decrease compared to the first half of 2018.¹ The combined use of suicide and non-suicide IEDs was the second leading cause of civilian casualties, causing 28 per cent of the total with non-suicide IEDs causing

¹ According to the UN Department of Security and Safety, the number of armed clashes reduced by 12 per cent between 1 January and 30 June 2019 compared to the same period in 2018, which is proportional to the 16 per cent reduction in civilian casualties from ground engagements.

20 per cent.² Civilian casualties from aerial operations amounted to 14 per cent, a significant increase compared to the same period in 2018.³

Civilians living in Kabul, Helmand, Nangarhar, Faryab and Ghazni provinces were most affected.⁴ UNAMA notes an overall increase in civilian casualties in the northern and north-eastern regions, particularly in Balkh, Baghlan and Takhar provinces, as well as a notable increase in civilian casualties in Paktika province, with an especially high proportion of deaths compared to injured persons.

Women and armed conflict

Women continue to be disproportionately impacted by the armed conflict in Afghanistan, not only suffering loss of life and limb, but also conflict-related displacement, economic insecurity, and lack of access to essential services. The armed conflict also exacerbates inequalities and discriminatory practices against women, which increases their exposure to sexual and gender-based violence.

From 1 January to 30 June 2019, the armed conflict caused 430 women casualties (144 deaths and 286 injured), a decrease of 22 per cent as compared to the same period in 2018. Ground engagements were the leading cause of women casualties, followed by the combined use of suicide and non-suicide IEDs and aerial operations. Women casualties comprised 11 per cent of the overall total.

Anti-Government Elements continued to impose illegal punishments against women through parallel justice structures, as well as carry out targeted killings of women, for allegedly committing “immoral” acts. For instance, on 4 January in Sancharak district, Sari Pul province, Taliban lashed a 25-year-old woman on the accusation of adultery. The punishment was conducted in front of a large crowd of people. On 27 June in Qaysar district, Faryab province, Taliban shot and killed a 30-year-old woman and her three-year-old child while they were sleeping in their home after the woman’s husband accused her of committing adultery and complained to Taliban.

Children and armed conflict

Throughout the first half of 2019, conflict-related violence continued to severely impact children in Afghanistan, particularly due to the threat posed from the presence of explosive remnants of war, attacks on schools and hospitals, and vulnerability to recruitment and use by parties to the

² This compares to the first six months of 2018 when the combined use of suicide and non-suicide IEDs was the leading cause of civilian casualties, causing 45 per cent of all the overall total. According to the UN Department of Security and Safety, the number of suicide and non-suicide IED attacks decreased by 20 per cent, while the number of civilian casualties from these tactics decreased by 54 per cent, suggesting an improved harm ratio.

³ In the first six months of 2018, aerial operations caused seven per cent of the overall total of civilian casualties. According to the UN Department of Security and Safety, the number of airstrikes increased by 31 per cent in the first half of 2019 as compared to 2018, while the number of civilian casualties resulting from this tactic increased by 39 per cent.

⁴ Kabul: 473 civilian casualties (63 deaths and 410 injured); Helmand: 440 civilian casualties (160 deaths and 280 injured); Nangarhar: 401 civilian casualties (163 deaths and 238 injured); Faryab: 271 civilian casualties (88 deaths and 183 injured); and Ghazni: 186 civilian casualties (77 deaths and 109 injured).

conflict. Ongoing impunity for sexual violence against children, including *bacha bazi*, remains a serious concern.

UNAMA documented 1,207 child casualties (327 deaths and 880 injured) during the first six months of 2019. This represents a decrease of 13 per cent compared to the same period in 2018. Forty-one per cent of all child casualties resulted from ground engagements, followed by the combined use of suicide and non-suicide IEDs, and explosive remnants of war. Child casualties represented almost one-third of the overall total of civilian casualties.

Children continue to comprise the vast majority – 84 per cent – of all civilian casualties from explosive remnants of war. In one incident, on 14 April, in Laghman province, near a high school, an explosive remnant of war killed seven boys and maimed eight others when they began to play with it. These casualties are especially disturbing as they are entirely preventable through mine action, for which unimpeded access to affected areas is critical.

During the first six months of 2019, UNAMA verified the recruitment and use of 26 boys between 12 and 17 years of age. Twenty-three of these boys were recruited and used by the Taliban for fighting, planting IEDs, carrying weapons, spying and/or for guarding their bases. Three boys were recruited and used by Afghan national security forces and pro-Government armed groups to act as bodyguards, to carry weapons, to patrol and/or for sexual purposes.

Between 1 January and 30 June 2019, UNAMA documented four cases of sexual violence carried out by parties to the armed conflict involving five children. Two girls were raped by Anti-Government Elements and three boys were raped and/or used for *bacha bazi* purposes by Afghan national security forces and pro-Government armed groups. These figures, however, likely do not reflect the extent of the problem in the country given that such cases are widely under-reported and, when reported, difficult to verify due to extreme sensitivities and concerns for victim and witness protection.

UNAMA notes the recent conviction of two perpetrators for *bacha bazi* in Takhar province. While the perpetrators are not members of armed forces or groups, these convictions indicate a willingness on the part of the authorities to investigate and prosecute such serious crimes and enforce the provisions on *bacha bazi* of the revised Penal Code which entered into force in February 2018. Nonetheless, in most cases of *bacha bazi*, impunity remains widespread and victims continue to face stigma and exclusion from society. UNAMA encourages the Government to heighten its efforts to investigate, arrest and prosecute perpetrators of *bacha bazi*.

Incidents affecting education and health services

Between 1 January and 30 June 2019, UNAMA documented 25 incidents impacting education, mostly during the first quarter, particularly in the western, eastern, north-eastern and central regions. Sixteen incidents were attributed to Taliban, including six incidents of attacks by Taliban targeting girls' schools in Farah province alone between January and April 2019. For instance, on 14 April, in Farah province, Taliban entered a high school and detonated the school building using explosives. The explosion caused substantial damage to the school, temporarily hampering

education for around 1,000 students. This was the second time this year that the same school was set on fire by Taliban. Taliban denied both incidents. Following advocacy with Taliban by UNAMA, no further incidents against schools in Farah province were recorded in May or June. Additionally, two incidents impacting education were attributed to *Daesh*/Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), three to Afghan national security forces, one to International Military Forces, and the remaining three were joint attributions.

UNAMA documented 38 incidents impacting health care facilities and personnel, the majority of which were carried out in the first quarter, particularly in eastern, southern and northern regions. UNAMA attributed 25 incidents to Taliban, seven to Afghan national security forces, two to International Military Forces, and the remaining to undetermined Anti-Government Elements and joint attributions. For instance, on 20 April, Taliban forced the closure of 13 clinics in four districts of Nuristan province due to their failure to meet their demands regarding the provision of services. They remained closed until 24 May, when they reopened following mediation by community elders. On 12 May, Taliban forced the closure of another 11 clinics in four districts of Baghlan province. These were reopened within the same week.

Also of concern, on 5 May, in Zabul province, Afghan National Police (ANP) officers injured two hospital staff members for not opening the gate to the hospital quickly enough when they were trying to gain access. One man was shot and the other was beaten up by ANP. ANP used small arms fire inside the facility and arrested one of the patients on suspicion of being a Taliban member. He was released the following day after mediation by elders.

On 11 April, Taliban banned activities of the World Health Organization and the International Committee of the Red Cross across Afghanistan, which effectively brought all polio vaccination campaigns to a halt. No campaigns were carried out in the second quarter of 2019, although more than one million children were vaccinated against polio via other means (such as vaccination by permanent transit teams around inaccessible areas and vaccination of travelers leaving the country). Afghanistan is one of the few remaining countries in the world where polio is endemic with 21 cases reported in 2018 and 10 cases reported in 2019.⁵ Nine of these cases were reported in areas that are typically difficult for vaccinators to access due to bans by Anti-Government Elements or active conflict.

Anti-Government Elements

From 1 January to 30 June 2019, Anti-Government Elements caused 1,968 civilian casualties (531 deaths and 1,437 injured), a 43 per cent decrease from the same period in 2018.⁶ A significant decrease in civilian casualties from suicide IED attacks, particularly by *Daesh*/ISKP, contributed to the overall trend.

⁵ See <http://polioeradication.org/polio-today/polio-now/this-week/#weekly-country-updates-as-of-10-july-2019-0>

⁶ In 2018, UNAMA attributed 3,458 civilian casualties (1,142 deaths and 2,316 injured) to Anti-Government Elements for the first six months of the year.

UNAMA attributed 52 per cent of all civilian casualties to Anti-Government Elements, with 38 per cent attributed to Taliban, 11 per cent to *Daesh*/ISKP, and three per cent to unidentified Anti-Government Elements.

Suicide and non-suicide IED attacks

Anti-Government Elements carried out significantly fewer high-profile suicide IED attacks during the first half of 2019 as compared to 2018, resulting in a corresponding drop in civilian casualties from this tactic type. Suicide IED attacks by Anti-Government Elements caused 303 civilian casualties (59 deaths and 244 injured) in the first half of 2019, a 79 per cent reduction from the first half of 2018.⁷ Taliban carried out nine suicide IED attacks causing 268 civilian casualties (44 killed and 224 injured)⁸ while *Daesh*/ISKP carried out two such attacks causing 34 civilian casualties (15 deaths and 19 injured).⁹

Contrary to trends reported in the first quarter, UNAMA documented a decrease in civilian casualties from non-suicide IEDs for the first six months of 2019. However, UNAMA notes with concern the continued use of indiscriminate and unlawful pressure-plate IEDs by Anti-Government Elements, which caused 205 civilian casualties (58 deaths and 147 injured), mostly attributed to Taliban.¹⁰ More than half of all pressure-plate IED incidents that caused civilian casualties occurred in the southern region. For instance, on 11 June, a car travelling in Dand district, Kandahar hit a roadside pressure-plate IED emplaced by Taliban, which resulted in the deaths of two adult civilian males and four children who were in the car. According to police officials, the IED contained a large quantity of explosives intended to damage or destroy armoured military vehicles.

UNAMA reiterates that victim-activated pressure plate IEDs function like anti-personnel landmines, which are prohibited under the Ottawa Convention on Anti-Personnel Mines, to which Afghanistan is a party. They are particularly harmful to the civilian population as they are inherently indiscriminate and are just as likely to be activated by a civilian as by an intended military target; no amount of precautions is sufficient to mitigate the harm they pose to civilians. UNAMA reiterates its calls on Anti-Government Elements to immediately cease the use of all pressure-plate IEDs as a key measure to better protect civilians.

Deliberate targeting of civilians

Of concern, UNAMA continued to document deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian objects, including Government officials, tribal elders, aid workers, religious scholars, mullahs and places of worship and culture.

⁷ From 1 January to 30 June 2018, UNAMA recorded 1,413 civilian casualties (427 deaths and 986 injured) from suicide and complex attacks.

⁸ In 2018, UNAMA attributed 16 suicide IED incidents to Taliban, resulting in 563 civilian casualties (190 killed and 373 injured).

⁹ In 2018, UNAMA attributed 17 suicide IED incidents to *Daesh*/ISKP, resulting in 815 civilian casualties (234 killed and 581 injured).

¹⁰ This represents a 37 per cent reduction in civilian casualties from pressure-plate IEDs in the first half of 2019 as compared to the same period in 2018.

Between 1 January and 30 June 2019, UNAMA documented 985 civilian casualties (306 deaths and 679 injured) from Anti-Government Element attacks that deliberately targeted civilians. While this represents a 51 per cent decrease from the same period in 2018, UNAMA notes with concern that these attacks accounted for 26 per cent of all civilian casualties and more than half of the civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements.¹¹

Anti-Government Elements carried out attacks on civilians and civilian structures using a variety of tactics, including suicide and non-suicide IEDs as well as small arms fire and grenades. On 8 May around midday in Kabul, Taliban carried out a complex attack using a vehicle-borne IED, small arms fire and mortars against Counterpart International, a non-governmental organization (NGO), resulting in eight civilians killed and 27 injured. While none of the staff members of Counterpart International were among the victims, three staff members of the neighbouring CARE International NGO were among the dead. Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack through Twitter and other public statements, claiming that the organization had “promoted inter-mixing between men and women” and had “groomed Kabul administration security and other personnel in implementing pro-Western objectives.”¹²

On 28 June in Aybak, Samangan province, a remote-controlled IED emplaced by Taliban detonated inside a mosque during Friday prayers, wounding 14 civilians, with ages ranging from 13 to 81 years old. According to sources, Taliban were targeting the mullah, also a member of the ulema shura, who had praised the Afghan national security forces in previous services.

In contrast to the high level of civilian harm recorded during the 2018 voter registration process for the parliamentary elections, no election-related civilian casualties were documented during the smaller-scale voter registration ‘top-up’ process for the 2019 Presidential elections.¹³ However, in Ghazni province, where a full voter registration process took place, UNAMA recorded five election-related incidents, all attributed to Taliban.¹⁴ On 19 June in Ghazni City, an IED detonated in the yard of a school that was being used as a voter registration centre, injuring three ANP officers who were acting as guards for the centre. Other incidents involved threats of attack and the abduction of the head of a voter registration centre, who was held in Taliban custody for a few days before being released as a result of mediation by tribal elders.¹⁵

UNAMA reiterates that civilians not directly participating in hostilities, including civilian government workers, may never be the target of attack. UNAMA strongly urges Anti-Government

¹¹ From 1 January to 30 June 2018, UNAMA documented 2,015 civilian casualties (711 deaths and 1304 injured) from deliberate attacks against civilians.

¹² Voice of Jihad, 8 May 2019, available at: <https://alemarahenglish.com/?p=45608#> (last accessed 21 July 109).

¹³ The ‘top up’ voter registration process for the Presidential elections, scheduled to take place on 28 September, took place across Afghanistan from 8-29 June, with the exception of Ghazni province, where a full voter registration process was extended to 8 July.

¹⁴ In Ghazni province, voter registration was extended by a week and closed on 6 July.

¹⁵ UNAMA also recorded an incident on 30 June 2019 in Maruf district, Kandahar province, in which Taliban coordinated attacks on the District Administrative Centre. As a result of explosions caused by suicide vehicle-borne IEDs, four members of the Independent Election Commission (IEC) were killed. One IEC member was also abducted along with Afghan National Police officials. It is the analysis of UNAMA that the IEC members were not the intended target of the attack or abduction and therefore this incident was not recorded as election-related.

Elements to apply a definition of civilian that accords with international humanitarian law and repeats its call for Anti-Government Elements to immediately cease the deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian objects.

In addition, UNAMA has consistently documented incidents in which Anti-Government Elements used residential homes and other civilian objects for military purposes, including sites from which they plan operations and launch attacks, and places in which they take shelter during engagements with Pro-Government Forces. UNAMA reminds the parties to the conflict of the obligation to respect the principle of distinction during preparation for and in the conduct of combat, which requires parties to clearly distinguish between civilians and combatants, and civilian objects and military objectives. Inherent in this obligation is the prohibition against the use of civilians to render military objectives immune from attack or to impede military operations. It must be emphasized that the failure by one party to the conflict to respect these principles does not absolve an opposing party from its obligations under international law concerning principles of distinction, precaution and proportionality.

Pro-Government Forces

From 1 January to 30 June 2019, UNAMA attributed 1,397 civilian casualties (717 deaths and 680 injured) to Pro-Government Forces, a 31 per cent increase from the corresponding period in 2018.¹⁶ Pro-Government Forces caused 37 per cent of all civilian casualties in the first half of 2019 (18 per cent by Afghan national security forces, 12 per cent by International Military Forces, 2 per cent by pro-Government armed groups and the remainder to undetermined or multiple Pro-Government Forces). This compares to 20 per cent of all civilian casualties caused by Pro-Government Forces in the first half of 2018. The mission documented an increase in civilian casualties from ground engagements, mainly attributed to Afghan national security forces; aerial attacks, mainly attributed to International Military Forces; and search operations, mainly attributed to National Directorate of Security (NDS) Special Forces, the Khost Protection Force and Paktika-based Shaheen Forces, which are supported by International Military Forces.

Aerial operations

Amidst reports of increasing airstrikes as part of the United States' strategy to target Taliban leaders and "set the conditions for a political settlement",¹⁷ civilian casualties from aerial operations continued to increase throughout the first half of 2019 as compared to the same period in 2018. The number of airstrike incidents and civilian casualties resulting from this tactic also increased in the second quarter of 2019 as compared to the first quarter. From 1 January to 30 June 2019, aerial operations caused 519 civilian casualties (363 deaths and 156 injured), 150 of which were child casualties (89 deaths and 61 injured). This represents a 39 per cent increase in overall civilian casualties from this tactic in comparison to the first half of 2018. While the number of injured decreased, the number of civilians killed more than doubled in comparison to the first

¹⁶ From 1 January to 30 June 2018, UNAMA attributed 1069 civilian casualties (423 deaths and 646 injured) to Pro-Government Forces.

¹⁷ SIGAR Report, Operation Freedom's Sentinel, 1 January – 31 March 2019, available at: https://www.stateoig.gov/system/files/fy2019_lig_oco_report.pdf (last accessed on 21 July 2019).

six months of 2018, highlighting the lethal character of this tactic. UNAMA attributed 83 per cent of the civilian casualties resulting from aerial operations to International Military Forces, nine per cent to the Afghan Air Force, and the remaining eight per cent to undetermined Pro-Government Forces.

UNAMA continues to express serious concern about the rising level of civilian harm as a result of aerial operations, particularly those conducted in support of Afghan forces on the ground and strikes on civilian structures. For instance, on 25 March at around 2200 hrs in Surobi district, Kabul, Afghan National Army and United States military forces conducted a search operation in a residential area of a local Taliban commander, which led to an exchange of fire with Taliban. Air support was called in, resulting in five civilians killed (including three women and one boy) and four injured (including three women). Resolute Support acknowledged in a media statement shortly after the incident that four women and one child were killed.¹⁸

In another incident on 23 May in Shib Koh district, Farah province, International Military Forces carried out an airstrike reportedly targeting a Taliban location, which caused the deaths of two male employees of a local NGO delivering hygiene services. The airstrike also destroyed the NGO compound and damaged a project vehicle.

The high level of civilian harm resulting from these aerial operations reflects the risks inherent in conducting strikes in civilian-populated areas, or on homes or other civilian structures. UNAMA has in recent years consistently raised its concern about the increasing numbers of civilian casualties arising from airstrikes, and the need for continuous review of targeting criteria and pre-engagement precautionary measures, particularly considering the likelihood of civilians being present in the same buildings and locations as Anti-Government Elements.

UNAMA reiterates its calls on Pro-Government Forces to strengthen efforts to review incidents with allegations of civilian casualties, particularly in the context of partnered operations, conduct effective battle damage assessments, and increase engagements with affected communities on incidents in which civilian casualties have occurred.

Airstrikes on drug manufacturing facilities

Following the announcement of the United States' South Asia strategy in August 2017 and a relaxation of the rules of engagement for United States Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A),¹⁹ USFOR-A began to target "revenue streams" of Anti-Government Elements, including drug manufacturing facilities (commonly known as "labs").²⁰ UNAMA documented a number of

¹⁸ See Tolo News, 26 March 2019, available at: <http://prod.tolonews.com/afghanistan/five-civilians-killed-afghan-forces-operation-surobi> (last accessed 21 July 2019).

¹⁹ See New York Times, 6 June 2019, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/06/world/asia/mattis-afghanistan-rules-of-engagement.html> (last accessed on 21 July 2019).

²⁰ US Department of Defense Press Briefing, 20 November 2017, available at: <https://dod.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1377753/departments-of-defense-press-briefing-by-general-nicholson-via-teleconference-fr/> (last accessed 16 July 2019). A drug

airstrikes thereafter on civilian structures reported to be used as drug labs, often conducted at night and in support of counternarcotic operations on the ground.

USFOR-A indicated after the first quarter of 2019 that it had ended its campaign against drug processing labs and warehouses.²¹ However, on 5 May, during the daytime, USFOR-A carried out a series of airstrikes against what it reported to be more than 60 drug manufacturing "labs" in Bakwa district, Farah province, extending into Delaram district, Nimroz province. According to USFOR-A, it targeted methamphetamine labs that were controlled and operated by Taliban, and it considered all personnel inside of the laboratories to be Taliban combatants. USFOR-A assessed that there were no civilian casualties resulting from the operation.

However, UNAMA received multiple reports of significant numbers of civilian casualties resulting from this operation. It carried out a mission to Bakwa District, which is under Taliban control. UNAMA is continuing its verification of civilian casualties stemming from this incident. UNAMA intends to publish a separate report on this incident.

Search operations

Between 1 January and 30 June 2019, UNAMA recorded 218 civilian casualties (159 deaths and 59 injured) as a result of search operations, more than half of which were caused by NDS Special Forces.²² This represents an 79 per cent increase from the first half of 2018 when UNAMA documented 122 civilian casualties (99 deaths and 23 injured).

UNAMA has increasingly raised concern in recent reports about the rising level of civilian harm caused during search operations, particularly those carried out by the NDS Special Forces and the Khost Protection Force. In 2019, UNAMA has also started to document civilian casualties resulting from search operations in Paktika province carried out by a pro-Government armed group referred to locally as "Shaheen Force," which is reported to be supported by United States Forces.

UNAMA has documented that search operations carried out by these forces have significantly higher civilian casualty figures as well as higher death rates in comparison to operations carried out by the Afghan National Army. In addition to the rising numbers of civilian casualties, UNAMA has also documented alarming human rights abuses by these forces, including intentional killings, torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests, intentional property damage, and other abuses. For example, on the night from 22 to 23 February, NDS Special Forces, with International Military Forces' support, conducted a search operation on Taliban locations in multiple villages of Daimardad district of Maidan Wardak province. During the operation, ground forces used explosive material to destroy the door of a house. They pulled a couple and their children and

²¹ SIGAR Report, Operation Freedom's Sentinel, 1 January – 31 March 2019, available at: https://www.stateoig.gov/system/files/fy2019_lig_oco_report.pdf (last accessed on 21 July 2019).

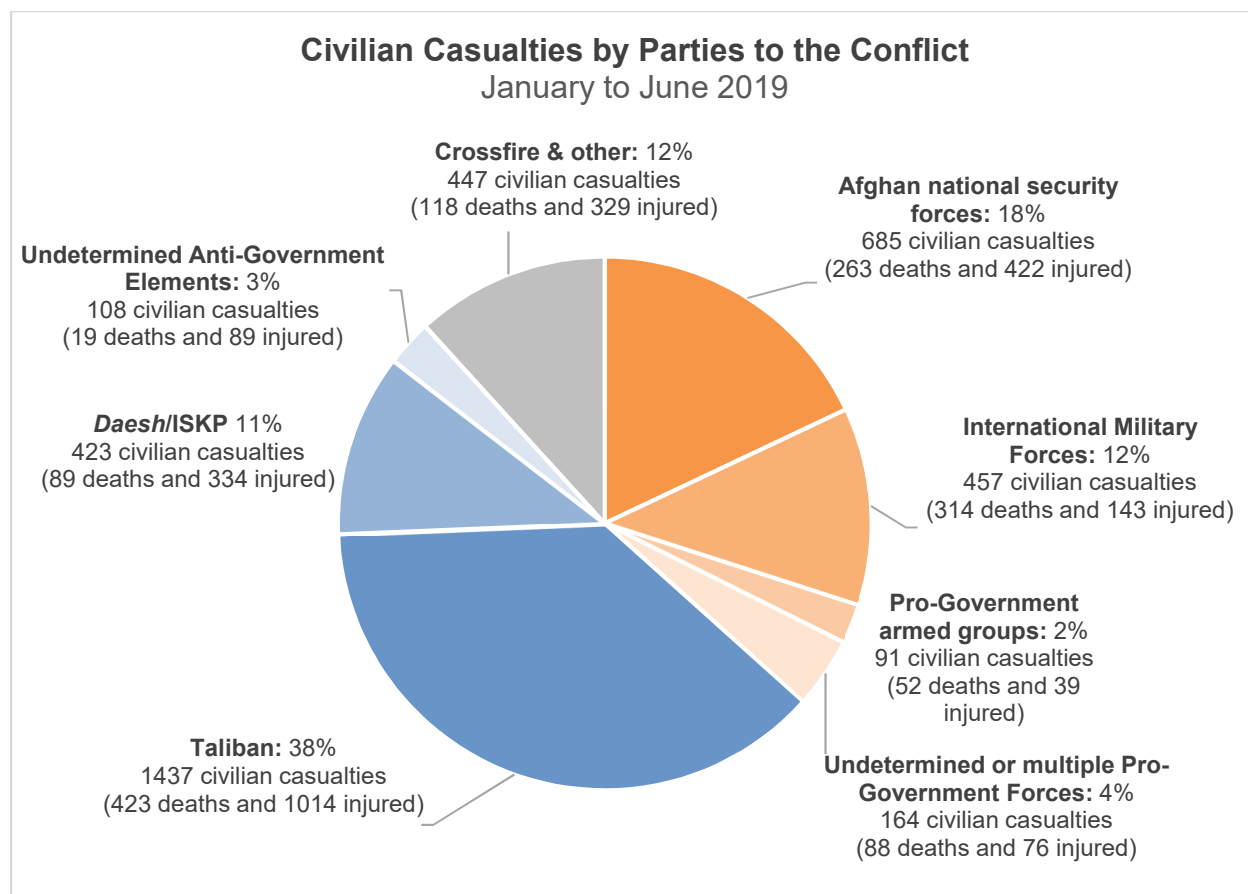
²² During the first six months of 2019, NDS Special Forces caused 115 civilian casualties (79 deaths and 36 injured). UNAMA attributed 39 civilian casualties (all deaths) from search operations to pro-Government armed groups such as the Khost Protection Force and Shaheen Forces; 25 civilian casualties (12 deaths and 13 injured) to search operations by the Afghan National Army; four civilian casualties (all injured) to International Military Forces; and the remainder is jointly attributed to various Pro-Government Forces.

relatives out of their rooms, blindfolded the father and adult son, and moved the rest of the family to a neighbouring house. The father was shot and killed by NDS Special Forces in the garage of the house and the son was arrested and transferred to Kabul. During the operation, another civilian man was shot and killed in his home in the same village.

UNAMA reiterates that the killing, by any party to the conflict, of persons taking no active part in hostilities is explicitly prohibited by Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions at any time and any place, and may amount to a war crime. UNAMA also reiterates that under international human rights law, the unlawful killing of a person constitutes a violation of the right to life. States must investigate the use of lethal force by their agents in the context of law enforcement operations and situations of alleged violations of the right to life committed during armed conflict.²³

As it has done several times previously, UNAMA calls on the Afghan authorities to immediately disband and disarm all illegal armed groups and militias, including the Khost Protection Force and Shaheen forces, or formally incorporate members into the Afghan national security forces following a robust vetting procedure; increase transparency and accountability concerning operations of NDS Special Forces, which fall outside of the official Afghan national security forces' chain of command; and investigate all allegations of human rights abuses and international humanitarian law violations with a view to ensuring accountability.

²³ See paras. 9, 10 and 17 of the United Nations Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, adopted on 24 May 1989 by the Economic and Social Council Resolution 1989/65. See also United Nations Security Council and General Assembly resolutions concerning non-international armed conflict, calling for all parties to respect international human rights law.



Since 2009, UNAMA has been systematically documenting civilian casualties attributed to parties to the conflict in Afghanistan using a consistent methodology, which has allowed for year-on-year trend analysis and reporting. The work of UNAMA on protection of civilians is grounded in principles of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and its methodology is based on best practices and the advice and guidance of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Existence of civilian casualties does not mean a violation has been committed, although high numbers of casualties may be indicative of violations or reflect patterns of harm. UNAMA engages with parties to the conflict to receive information about civilian casualties and takes this information into account when determining civilian casualties. UNAMA takes note of the differences in methodologies for tracking civilian casualties, interpretations of international humanitarian law, and sources of information that has typically contributed to different outcomes in civilian casualty figures. Since a common goal is to reduce civilian casualties, UNAMA remains committed to discussions with the parties to the conflict to better protect civilians.²⁴

²⁴ For more detailed information on methodology, see UNAMA *Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – Annual Report 2018*, pages i and ii, available at <https://unama.unmissions.org/protection-of-civilians-reports>.