

Pentagon issues grim review of Afghanistan war

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Violence has reached record levels in Afghanistan, and the resistance to the US-led occupation is more widespread than ever, according to a report issued by the Pentagon.

The semiannual report, required by Congress, provides a grim assessment of the US war, now in its tenth year, giving the lie to rosy public statements issued by the Obama administration and senior military commanders.

The report, released this week, is titled, "Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan," but its contents suggest that in doubling the number of US troops deployed in Afghanistan since taking office, President Barack Obama has only created a deeper quagmire for the US military.

With nearly 100,000 American soldiers and Marines and another 50,000 other NATO and foreign troops participating in the occupation, the report found that security conditions in 124 districts viewed by NATO as "key terrain" remained "relatively unchanged."

The report states, "Progress across the country remains uneven, with modest gains in security, governance and development in operational priority areas." It described progress as "slow and incremental."

What has changed sharply, however, is the number of Afghans dying and the level of violence, which has risen in tandem with the increase in the number of foreign troops deployed in the country.

The report, which covers developments from last April through September, cites a 300 percent increase in armed clashes since 2007 and a 70 percent rise since last year.

Despite the US troop buildup, the report concedes that "The insurgency has proven resilient with sustained logistics capacity and command and control." It acknowledges that the Taliban and other anti-occupation forces have managed to "retain operational momentum in some areas."

According to the Pentagon survey, the number of Afghans describing their security situation as "bad" has likewise risen to its highest level. Stating the self-evident, the report continues by noting that the "downward trend in security perception is likely due to the steady increase in total violence over the past nine months."

Pointing toward the threat of a wider war, the report blames the continued strength of the resistance on so-called "insurgent safe havens" across Afghanistan's borders in Pakistan as well as Iran.

"Efforts to reduce insurgent capacity, such as safe havens and logistic support originating in Pakistan and Iran, have not produced measurable results," the report states.

It also attributes the gains of the armed anti-government groups to the corrupt character of the US-backed puppet regime headed by President Hamid Karzai.

"Corruption continues to have a corrosive effect on ISAF efforts in Afghanistan," it states. "Afghan perceptions of injustice and the abuse of power fuel the insurgency in many areas more than the Afghan Government's inability to provide services do."

The survey conducted by the US military in September found that "80.6 percent of Afghans polled believe corruption affects their daily lives."

The report adds, "This is consistent with the view that corruption is preventing the Afghan government from connecting with the people and remains a key reason for Afghans supporting the insurgency."

While the report claims that the growth of the Afghan National Army (ANA) stood out as "one most promising areas of progress," it acknowledges that "numerous challenges persist." Among these it notes continuing high rate of attrition in which newly trained Afghan soldiers melt away.

It also admits that recruitment of Pashtuns into the Afghan military has remained exceedingly low. Afghanistan's largest ethnic group, Pashtuns account for 42 percent of the population. But according to the report, southern Pashtuns, concentrated in the provinces of Helmand and Kandahar, the center of the insurgency, account for just 3 percent of recruits. This means that the Afghan forces being deployed there are themselves an outside occupation force, largely reproducing the battle lines that prevailed in the civil war that raged in the country in the 1990s.

Underscoring the crisis confronting the US occupation was

the revelation this week that a supposed senior Taliban official with whom US and NATO officials were organizing negotiations was an imposter.

The individual, identified as “Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour”, was supposedly the number-two man in the Quetta Shura led by Mullah Mohammed Omar. He was flown from Quetta, Pakistan aboard NATO aircraft and was paid substantial sums of money to participate in talks with NATO and the Karzai government. According to press reports, the “Taliban negotiator”, now identified as a shopkeeper from Quetta, met with Afghan and NATO officials three times before his masquerade was discovered.

There are suspicions within the US-NATO camp that the imposter was planted by the Pakistani military intelligence service, the ISI, as part of a bid to sabotage any attempt by Washington to bypass Pakistan in seeking a settlement with the Taliban.

Such suspicions may explain how the imposter was able to get away with his deception in the first place. The person he pretended to be was a minister of civil aviation in the previous Taliban government and known to a number of people in the Afghan government and its 70-member peace council, which was set up to pursue reconciliation with the Taliban. But they apparently were not consulted.

“It is ridiculous that people are willing to meet anyone who introduces themselves as a high authority within the Taliban. This is why we have this council – to vet people,” a member of the Afghan peace council told the *Financial Times*.

In an attempt to mask the humiliating blunder, Karzai issued a statement denying the talks have ever taken place, calling reports to the contrary “propaganda” from the “foreign press.”

For his part, the US senior commander in Afghanistan, Gen. David Petraeus, claimed that the fact that the individual with whom his subordinates were negotiating – and paying off – was an imposter was “not a surprise.” He insisted that there had been skepticism “all along, and it may well be that that skepticism was well-founded,” declared the general.

In reality, however, US officials had touted the talks as a key part of their strategy for diffusing the insurgency and reducing the size of the US-led occupation. The Taliban leadership has repeatedly insisted that it would negotiate only under conditions of a withdrawal of foreign troops from the country.

Meanwhile, the announcement of the results of the September 18 parliamentary election by the Afghan electoral commission Wednesday served to deepen the country’s crisis.

The results underscored the fraudulent character of the entire electoral process, from the presidential vote last year

to September’s parliamentary ballot. They included the exclusion of 24 candidates from parliament on the grounds of fraud and a finding that 1.3 million ballots out of the 5.6 million cast had been tossed out as invalid.

Hundreds of people protested in the streets of Kabul on Wednesday denouncing the results as fraudulent.

One substantive result of the election is a sharp loss in representation for Afghanistan’s Pashtun population, which had previously accounted for the majority in the country’s parliament. It was suspected that violence in the Pashtun areas and hostility to the central government may have driven down the vote.

The BBC cited preliminary reports indicating that in Ghazni, for example, all 11 parliamentary seats went to members of the Hazara minority, the third largest ethnic group in the southern province, where Pashtuns are the majority. The election commission said on Wednesday that the results in the province had still not been determined.

The Pentagon’s progress report comes in the wake of last weekend’s NATO summit in Lisbon, which followed Washington’s lead in burying the commitment made by Obama when he launched the Afghanistan “surge” last December to begin withdrawing US troops in July 2011. Instead, it adopted a policy ostensibly aimed at transferring the “lead” in combat operations to Afghan puppet forces by the end of 2014.

Asked by a reporter about the US “exit strategy” for Afghanistan, a senior official briefing the media on the Pentagon report bristled. “We don’t have an exit strategy,” he said. “We have a transition strategy. The US commitment to Afghanistan is continuing, enduring, and long-lasting.”

In other words, the ruling establishment and its military have no intention of leaving Afghanistan. They are determined to continue their bloody efforts to annihilate the Afghan resistance in order to secure Washington’s control of the country and further US designs on establishing hegemony in the oil-rich and strategically vital region of Central Asia.



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