

# Pentagon ramping up US military and intelligence operations in Afghanistan

Thomas Gaist  
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The US Defense Department has initiated a renewed escalation of its air war in Afghanistan, recent statistics published by the Pentagon show.

US forces launched more than 100 aerial strikes in June, according to US military statistics, more than double the number launched in any previous month this year.

A drone strike in Afghanistan's Wardak province Thursday morning killed at least 8 alleged insurgents. Another US strike killed at least 30 people in the eastern province of Nangarhar on Wednesday, making for a total of 100 killed in Nangarhar during the past week.

A series of strikes in Khost and Baghlan provinces have killed at least 59, including women and children, since the beginning of July, drawing condemnation from United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon.

Some 150 militants affiliated with the Taliban and other insurgent groups have been killed by US drones during the past two weeks, according to Turkish Weekly.

In addition to the redoubled air onslaught, US intelligence personnel have increased operations in support of the Kabul government during recent months. "Coordination and intelligence sharing with the Americans has increased in recent months," an unnamed Afghan security official told the *New York Times*.

The increased US military and intelligence activity in Afghanistan comes under conditions where swelling insurgencies led by the Taliban and including a recently formed faction of Islamic State (IS) are threatening to destabilize the US-backed government in Kabul.

The Afghan government of President Mohammad Ghani, established last year as part of a US-orchestrated power-sharing arrangement, has suffered humiliating

blows at the hands of the Taliban since the beginning of the new year.

Last month, Taliban fighters successfully infiltrated the security perimeter around the Afghan parliament, setting off several explosions and engaging in a prolonged gun battle just outside the legislative chamber, where Afghan MPs were in the middle of discussions.

One week later, Taliban fighters attacked a NATO convoy as it passed in front of the US Embassy in Kabul, setting off a huge explosion and killing at least five people. "Despite growing violence, political instability and the emergence of Islamic State in this country, Afghanistan will not collapse as a country," President Ghani vowed on June 30, just hours before the attack.

This Sunday, a suicide attack outside a NATO and CIA base in the southeast of the country killed at least 33, including 12 children, according to Euro News.

The escalation comes as the IS affiliate in Afghanistan has reportedly taken over several districts, often coming into conflict with the Taliban. "One day militants cross over from Pakistan with Daesh flags and dictate terms over locals, the next day Taliban militants come from the same place and spread terror," one Afghan official said.

A surge of US drone strikes in June narrowly prevented IS militants from storming the provincial capital of Jalalabad, an Afghan MP told the *Times*.

Despite claims of an "end" to US-led combat operations in Afghanistan, Washington is determined to maintain its grip over the country through liberal doses of military violence, dispersed by a combination of air, ground, and intelligence operations.

Under conditions of growing conflict with Moscow and Beijing over Central Asia, Washington cannot

accept the defeat of its pliant government in Kabul. Imposed at gunpoint by occupation US forces, the regime forms a linchpin of US efforts to dominate and restructure the regional political order.

The Pentagon plans to maintain a larger basing presence than previously acknowledged and to begin a new escalation of “counter-terror” combat missions by US ground units, US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter acknowledged in February.

Any additional forces will bolster the more than 10,000 US troops still remaining in Afghanistan, where they operate without any UN mandate and enjoy sweeping immunity against criminal charges stemming from combat operations.

Among these, some 5,000 of them are serving under the exclusive authority of the Pentagon’s Special Operations Command (SOCOM). The US government troops are reinforced by more than 20,000 American private mercenaries, who operate from an extensive network of US bases.

Led by teams of US Navy SEALs, Army Rangers, and CIA paramilitary groups, this small army is continuing to wage a “secret war” against the Afghan masses, launching a steady tempo of raids, targeted killings and kidnappings in villages and towns across the country, according to statements by Afghan officials.

“The official war for the Americans—the part of the war that you could go see—that’s over. It’s only the secret war that’s still going. But it’s going hard,” an Afghan official told the *Times* in February.



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