SUMMARY & ASSESSMENT

By the end of June 2009, and on the eve of the arrival of the US surge troops, there had been an already significant 3,271 opposition attacks that year. By the end of June 2011, as those same troops plan for withdrawal amid cautious applause, the Q.2 attack total has grown by 119% to a staggering 7,178 operations (p.7) or approximately 40 per day. Conflict related civilian fatalities have grown by nearly 106% over the same period, with approximately 1,856 people killed in the first six months of this year alone. Security for aid workers has inevitably deteriorated in lock-step with 73% more incidents than last year, thirteen killed, twenty four wounded and many dozens abducted against the backdrop of intense conflict, a proliferation of irregular forces, political uncertainty and rising armed crime (p.3 & 5). Critics of US President Obama’s landmark decision to bring the military surge to an end by July 2012 are overlooking a simple truth – it is not working. By all measures, Afghanistan is a more violent country today than in it was in 2009.

So, with transition underway, what can we expect for the future? If the forces of the IEA remain intact and the foreign military commitment has now peaked, is it reasonable to assume that the situation today will be as good as it gets? And, to the extent that a political settlement has already been accepted as the end-state, is the war not, in effect, over even though months of fighting (and dying) remain ahead?

In the short term (15 months), it is clear that war will retain Clausewitz’s political purpose. For the IMF, conventional force maneuvers will slowly be replaced with smaller scale Special Operations and a redoubling of efforts at community defense initiatives. The ANSF will be expected to take up the slack with initial signs in Kabul looking promising (p.8) yet unrepresentative of how much more challenging that will be elsewhere.

Armed Opposition Groups, for whom the withdrawal is already granting their main war aim, are likely to keep up the pressure mostly in an effort to deny IMF the ability to publically claim military success. We expect AOG violence to become increasingly directed at Afghan parties only and to strike more effectively as the climate of uncertainty facilitates tectonic shifts in Afghanistan’s personality politics. Similarly, we expect a rise in indigenous violence as the boundaries and interests of newly formed irregular forces coalesce.

For the immediate term then, the start of withdrawal does not promise anything but more of the same, with aid workers suffering collateralally, accidentally or ignorantly in an overall escalation of violence. That July to December coincides with a routine seasonal downturn may make the fist tranche of withdrawals less contentious than the second.

In the medium term however, the withdrawal offers a hope of improved humanitarian space to the extent that it prompts de-escalation and settlement between the main parties, a subject of much current speculation and little fact. In such a scenario, the IEA have demonstrated that they will allow, and even encourage, NGO activity subject to monitoring. Alternatives to this scenario plausibly include an ongoing Government/IEA struggle or the emergence of dynamic factional conflict.

Nic Lee, ANSO Director, Kabul July 2011

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Part 1.

NGO TRENDS
1.1 NGO Incident Trends

Total NGO incident levels are up 73% on the Q.2 2010, but are consistent with longer terms trends (below left). Both AOG and criminally authored incidents have grown (below & below right) with criminal incidents coming out of three years of Q.2 decline. Increased conflict levels causing collateral damage & a deteriorated AOG chain-of-command causing local commanders to take decisions inconsistent with IEA policy, are assessed as driving the AOG trend. An expansion of criminal networks, especially in the Greater North where 38% of all crimes against NGOs occurred, is driving the latter trend. Demining remains the most effected program sector overall, being the victim in about 17% of all events.
1.2 NGO Incident Mapping

ANSO: Major NGO incidents, by province, by Q.2 2011

The location of NGO incidents continues to be reflective of both demographic concentration and context deterioration. The percentage of total incidents in the Greater North has grown from 23% in 2009 (not shown) to 36% in 2011 suggesting NGOs have suffered from AOG and criminal expansion in these areas. There are no discernable patterns in the victim agencies profiles. The percentage occurring in the East has similarly grown from 26% in 2009 (not shown) to 31% this year. This growth can be more specifically associated to context deterioration in Kunar, Nuristan and Nangahar - related to AOG expansion and political/tribal conflict - and to a sub-group of NGOs working in health sector.
1.3 NGO Incident Types

The total number of serious incidents impacting NGOs has grown in absolute terms (right) and as a percentage of all security incidents (below left).

Abductions have increased by approximately 85% over 2010* as AOG continue their efforts to ‘actor-map’ the terrain. The impact of this tactic remains relatively mild however with most released in under 72 hours in explicit acceptance of their activity and presence. Abduction of NGO workers represents less than 3% of all abductions (852) this quarter.

IED strikes involving NGOs have remained at constant levels despite NGOs best efforts to reduce road travel. Accidental, or more accurately ignorant, targeting is to blame in most cases with inexperienced IED operators not understanding the difference between an NGO vehicle and a security target. Otherwise IEDs have been used by criminals to intimidate NGO staff at their compounds.

Small arms fire incidents, and the number of aid workers killed in them, have grown by an alarming rate (4 to 13 cases and 1 to 9 deaths). Unpacking these we find all manner of events from being caught in a cross fire, escalation of force shootings, fatal armed robberies, and plain criminal murders. Underlying all causes is the general deterioration of conditions and NGO exposure to it. We still assess that AOGs do not attack NGOs as a matter of national policy, but rather at the decision of the local representative.

ANSO: Serious NGO incidents (abduction, IED and small arms) as a percentage of all NGO incidents, @ Q.2 09-11

ANSO: Trends in serious NGO incidents, Q.2 2009-2011

ANSO: NGO workers killed (KIA) by IED/VBIED & small arms fire (all authors), @ Q.2 2010-2011

* We have consciously excluded from this figure three additional cases of temporary mass abduction, involving 59 NGO workers, as they would inaccurately distort the figures. These events represent tactical ‘outliers’ rather than normal patterns of behavior. Including these victims a total of 83 staff have been abducted, but the risk analysis remains the same.
Part 2.

State of the Conflict
The number of AOG initiated attacks has grown by 42% over the Q.2 of 2010 (above) and 119% since the US military surge began in June 2009 (right). This count includes genuine combat operations only (IEDs, ambushes, indirect fires, suicide attacks etc) and does not include any non-kinetic activity (threats, abductions) or criminal incidents.

The monthly attack rate for June 2011 surpassed the peak of the conflict last year, which was seen around the September parliamentary elections, and has established a new record high.

Throughout 2010 and for 2011 to date, the data shows no deviation from the established pattern (going back to 2006) of continuous growth starting in February and likely to peak in Aug/Sep this year.

The elementary consistency of this data suggests that there has been an effective counter-adaptation, by AOG, to the additional pressure of the IMF surge. We call this co-evolutionary dynamic the “perpetually escalating stalemate” and it suggests that disengagement and de-escalaion may stand a chance of achieving what staying & fighting never could—delegitimizing the insurgency, which at its heart a struggle against the foreign presence, by removing its reason for being and compelling local settlement.
2.2 Provincial Attack Rate Mapping - 2009 vs 2011

The maps show the AOG attack volume at the end of the Q.2 for 2009 and 2011, and how insecurity in the province was/is rated.

Severe deterioration in nearly all areas is observable. The changes per ISAF Regional Command area are as follows:

**RC-NORTH** up 113% mostly driven by smaller bands of AOG in the tri-provincial area of Faryab, Sar-i-Pul and Jawzjan.

**RC-CAPITOL** down −33%. The only command area to record an improvement and to have already transitioned to ANSF.

**RC-EAST** up 86% with Loya Paktya plus Ghazni (P2K+G?) deteriorating by 167% and parts of Nuristan and Kunar returning to full AOG control.

**RC-SOUTH** up 94% with AOG sustaining resistance to OP HAMKA-R in Kandahar.

**RC-SOUTH WEST** up 362% with HELMAND being the most significantly deteriorated province since 2009 (see p.9)

**RC-WEST** up 44% mostly as a result of AOG activity in Badghis.

Countrywide, the average daily attack rate (all/180) has grown from 19.6 to 40.9 per day.

* Nurestan is so dominated by AOG that few reports come out. It remains rated extremely insecure.
2.3 Attack Rate Change per Province Q.2 2009 vs 2011

The table compares actual AOG attack numbers per province, at the Q.2 stage, for pre-surge and 2011. The pie charts show the percentage of total attacks occurring within each ISAF Regional Command Area at the Q.2 stage for the same period. They show that the percentage of all attacks occurring in RC South West, which comprises just Helmand and Nimroz provinces has risen from just 9% in 2009 to 20% in 2011. Interestingly other command areas have seen relatively stable percentages of the whole, despite the fact that the whole “pie” has grown by more than 100%. RC-EAST continues to see the most attacks.
2.4 Transition Areas & Population Centers

The table (right) shows the AOG attack rate per Phase 1 Transition area for the Q.2 2009 and 2011.

Unsurprisingly Panjshir province, Bamiyan province, Mazar-i-Sharif district and Herat district continue to record such low levels of incidents so as to make them obvious and uncontentious picks. Of these four, Herat is the one most likely to experience some additional AOG effort to discredit the process as seen already with the complex attack on the PRT on May 30th.

Kabul province (excluding Surobi) shows a solid improvement since 2009 mostly as a result of effective ANSF activity. The city was already transitioned to ANSF lead in 2008 and so its inclusion in the Phase 1 list is somewhat misleading. Attacks here will continue to be aimed at high profile assassinations and creating the public perception of insecurity rather than a genuine effort to take and control territory/population.

With the caveat that we have counted the district rather than the city level data, arguably the two most important transition districts, Lashkargah in Helmand and Mitharlam in Laghman have both seen attacks nearly double since 2009 making their proposition for transition seem surprising and somewhat politically motivated.

Sitting in the centre of the most heavily insecure province in the country (see above right), the transition of Lashkargah in particular must be nothing more than a political statement, the Afghan equivalent of the Vietnam era ‘strategic hamlets’. Being founded on the temporary application of overwhelming US force & technology, any current sense of security will likely prove artificial and unsustainable.
Acronyms:
IEA - Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Taliban)
AOG - Armed Opposition Groups (specifically Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Taliban); Haqqani Network and Hezb-i-Islami Hekmatyar (HHI))
IMF - International Military Forces (specifically ISAF, USFOR-A, PRTs and SOF)
ANSF - Afghan National Security Forces (mostly Police & Army)
IED - Improvised Explosive Device (home made bomb)
IDF - Indirect Fire (rockets, mortars)
CAS - Close Air Support (airstrike)
EOF - Escalation of Force (shooting a vehicle at a check post that fails to stop)
SAF - Small Arms Fire (from a machine gun such as AK47)

REPORT ENDS

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