Key events

♦ At approximately 0850hrs on 2 March, a suicide attacker detonated a car bomb in between two Australian embassy armoured vehicles along Jalalabad road outside the Green Village gate in PD9, Kabul, killing a civilian and injuring 22 others, including two Australian security contractors. No group claimed responsibility for the attack.

♦ At least three people, including the Haj and Religious Affairs provincial director, were killed and 16 were injured when a suicide bomber detonated his explosives vest near the director’s vehicle in PD1, Jalalabad city, at approximately 1510hrs on 7 March. Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack.

National overview

President Ghani’s peace proposal, including an offer to recognize the Taleban as a legitimate political party, unveiled at the second Kabul Peace Process meeting in the capital on 28 Feb dominated political developments this week. The Taleban have not yet made an official comment on the proposal, although the group’s chief spokesman replied to an “Open Letter” published in the New Yorker magazine urging the Taleban to accept talks with the Kabul government. The Taleban reply said “our country has been occupied, which has led to an American-style supposed Afghan government being imposed upon us,” the legitimacy of which cannot be recognized, adding the Kabul Process is simply aimed at seeking the Taleban’s “surrender.” Despite a reluctance from the insurgents to compromise and continuing high profile attacks this week, President Ghani reiterated his calls for a peaceful resolution to the conflict during a speech in Parliament which reopened after a 45 days long winter recess. Ghani has made several peace offers to the Taleban since 2014, but the militants are yet to issue a direct response. Meanwhile, compounding concerns over the deteriorating security environment in Afghanistan, particularly in Kabul following a series of high profile attacks in late January and persisting lower level bombings, US intelligence agencies warned there is a threat of further deadly insurgent attacks. The US Director of National Intelligence told the Senate Armed Services Committee on 6 March the Taleban will seek to undermine public confidence by conducting intermittent high profile attacks in urban areas, increasing influence in rural terrain, threatening district centres and challenging vulnerable Afghan forces locations. This has further underlined the volatility of the security environment in the country, with insurgent violence, including in the capital, anticipated to increase as inclement weather subsides.
**Kabul City, 2 Mar 2018:**
A civilian was killed and 22, including two Australians, were injured when an SVBIED detonated in between two Australian embassy armoured vehicles in PD9.

**Spin Boldak, 7 Mar 2018:**
A suicide attacker detonated a VBIED outside the police HQ, with two insurgents subsequently storming the compound. At least four policemen and all assailants were killed.

**Behsud, 6 Mar 2018:**
Two civilians were killed and seven injured when an IED magnetically attached to a fuel tanker detonated. Around 40 shops in the area burned down as a result of the explosion.

**Jalalabad City, 7 Mar 2018:**
At least three people, including the Haj and Religious Affairs provincial director, were killed and 16 injured when a suicide bomber detonated his explosives vest near the director’s vehicle in PD1. Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack.
Central
- **Kabul City**: 7 March 18, ately, opponents are planning to conduct armed and suicide attack over US embassy in Kabul City in a better time, it is said that (5) suicide attackers and a number of Pakistani fighters will take part in the mentioned attack and will use some amount of unknown ammunitions, currently the suicide attackers and the ammunition are available in Maidan Shahr area the center of Wardak province.
- **Musahi District**: 7 March 18, Plan of emplacing mines on the crossing route of security forces in the mentioned District.

East
- **Khost City**: 7 March 18, Plan of suicide and motor bomb attack over Chapman Operational Base located in the mentioned City. Recently, Taliban by using several suicide attackers and vehicles full of explosives, are planning to conduct suicide and motor bomb attack over the mentioned Base located in Khost City in an unclear time.
- **Bati Kot District**: 7 March 18, A huge number of armed Taliban led by Doctor Basharmal, have been gathered in Habibullah house in Daka areas, are planning to organize and conduct aggressive attacks, targeting security CPs or the mentioned DC HQ, its mentionable the attack will be carried out as soon as possible.

North
- **Mazar-e-Sharif City**: 7 March 18, (01) ISIS suicide and explosive planner and responsible around Shibirgha City of Jowzjan province named Ahmad AKA Omair, in coordination with another ISIS group member named Toor Belal, intend to conduct BBIED and VBIED attacks, targeting Afghan New Year celebration and/or Government Facilities in Mazar-e Sharif and Kabul Cities.
- **Mazar-e-Sharif City/ Chamtal District**: 7 March 18, Mawlawi Haqyar Taliban judge in the areas of Cham Tal District of Balkh province is keeping a suicide attacker and in coordination with Saifullah known as Matiullah deputy governor of Taliban are trying to outline and execute suicide motor bomb attack in the areas of the mentioned District or the mentioned City.

West
- **Farah City**: 7 March 18, INS are planning to lay IEDs and launch attack, targeting ANSF in Nawbahar and Shahr-e Kohna areas of Farah City. Hafiz Nek Mohammad, the Taliban in charge around Pusht-e Rod District has deployed his men to lay several IEDs along Nawbahar and Shahr-e Kohna areas roadway, in order to target ANSF vehicles.
- **Bala Boluck District**: 7 March 18, Plan of emplacing mines on the crossing route of security forces in the areas of Farah Road.

South
- **Khakrez/Spin Boldak/Arghistan Districts**: 7 March 18, Recently, Amal affiliated to Taliban group has planned to organize and execute motor bomb explosive attacks over the cores of the mentioned Districts by using few Humvee vehicles full of explosives.
- **Qalat City/Shah Joy District**: 7 March 18, INS intend to launch BBIED attack over a Governmental base around Qalat City and/ or Shah Joy District.
Following last week’s Islamic State SVEST attack in PD9 that killed three people and injured five, a suicide attacker detonated a car bomb in between two Australian embassy B6 armoured vehicles in PD9 on 2 March, killing a young girl and injuring 22 people. Two Australian security contractors were among the wounded. No group has claimed responsibility for the 2 March attack. The limited impact of the blast suggests the explosive device was smaller than what would constitute a large scale VBIED, with the attack likely opportunistic. Mobile opportunistic attacks have been used by insurgents in the past, with devices frequently placed on petrol tank locations for added effect. The targeting of B6 vehicles in such attacks is not common due to the inability of smaller IEDs to inflict serious damage on such vehicles. That said, further similar attacks cannot be ruled out particularly given that lower level attacks, by nature, are more difficult to detect. In other developments, the current phase of relatively subdued activity in the capital continued throughout the reporting period. Security forces search and arrest operations also continue to be reported. Most notably, authorities confirmed on 4 March, two Islamic State operatives were detained in connection to the August 2017 Zaman mosque attack in Kabul that killed at least 20 people and injured over 50. Locals have called for the suspects’ execution, amid persisting tensions over deteriorating security conditions in the capital given continuing attacks despite enhanced security measures in the aftermath of deadly insurgent attacks in late January that killed over 100 people. The threat of civil unrest and associated violence amid a general atmosphere of insecurity remains credible. Meanwhile, insurgent violence is anticipated to rise with the improvement of weather conditions which will enable easier transportation of men and materials from remote or cross border areas.
Security conditions in central Afghanistan remained relatively stable this week. Hostile activity was concentrated in Wardak province. Notably, militants fired light and heavy weapons at an army checkpoint in Sayedabad district on 2 March, injuring an Afghan soldier. Insurgent attacks on security outposts were also recorded in Jaghatu district and Chack district on 5 March; there were no reported casualties. Attacks on security forces also continued to be reported in Kapisa province. Taliban opened fire on checkpoints in Tagab district’s Shah Kott area and Joybar area on 2 and 5 March respectively, with no reported casualties. In the wider Kabul province, a civilian was killed and another injured when an IED magnetically attached to a private vehicle detonated in Khaldari village, Paghman district, on 2 March. On the same day, a civilian was injured by unidentified gunmen in Paghman’s Doda Mast village, while unknown assailants also shot and killed two civilians in the district’s Abdul Ali village. Later on 7 March, insurgents opened fire on a security forces vehicle in Surobi district; there were no reported casualties.

The reporting period featured a limited number of violent incidents elsewhere in central Afghanistan. Of note, an IED detonated in Shinwari district, Parwan, on 1 March. There were no reported casualties. Two civilians were also shot and killed in Charikar city, Parwan, on 2 March due to a personal dispute. In Logar, insurgents fired heavy weapons at a police checkpoint in Baraki Barak district on 2 March, with no reported casualties. Although overall levels of hostile activity in the region have remained relatively low in recent weeks, both criminality and insurgent activity continue to pose a credible threat throughout central Afghanistan.
Several clashes between security forces and insurgents were recorded in Faryab province, which accounted for the majority of violent incidents reported in the region this week. Notably, heavy clashes were reported in Pashtun Kot, where police personnel were forced to retreat during a Taleban assault on a security outpost on 2 March; a policeman was killed. Another officer was killed in an attack in the same area on 4 March. Also of note, officials said on 5 March, NATO troops will be deployed in Maymanah into the coming week. NATO activity will include advisory roles and air support. Meanwhile, a number of attacks were recorded in Kunduz. Notably, on 2 March, two civilians were injured when insurgent fired at a security outpost in PD2, Kunduz city. Following heightened hostile activity during the previous reporting period, violent incidents decreased in Jowzjan this week. Most notably, coalition airstrikes in Darzab district destroyed an IS HQ and killed nearly 20 militants on 3 March.

Sporadic violent incidents were recorded throughout the rest of the region, amid heavy rains and snow. In Baghlan, an insurgent was killed and two injured during a clash with security forces in Baghlan-e-Markazi district on 5 March. The Baghlan highway was also closed this week due to heavy snow in the Salang area. In Balkh, a policeman was wounded and four insurgents, including a Taleban local commander, were killed during a clash in Dawlatabad on 5 March. Also of note, although tensions remain heightened over the ousting of senior Jamiat-e-Islami party leader and Balkh governor, Atta Mohammed Noor, talks with the government have reportedly progressed. Interior Minister Wais Barmak said on 4 March the dispute is expected to be resolved, as the government has accepted some of Jamiat’s demands.
Eastern Afghanistan accounted for the majority of violent incidents recorded in the country this week. Hostile activity was concentrated in Nangharhar and Ghazni provinces. Notably in Nangharhar, at least three people, including Haj and Religious Affairs provincial director Abdul Zahir Haqqani, were killed and 16 injured in a SVEST attack in PD1, Jalalabad city on 7 March. The assailant approached Haqqani’s vehicle on foot before detonating his device. Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack. Haqqani, a vocal critic of the Taliban and Islamic State, had previously survived a number of attempts on his life. Hundreds blocked the Kandahar-Kabul highway for days in Ghazni after gunmen wearing army uniforms raided a house in Qarabagh district on 2 March, killing two, injuring two and kidnapping another two people. Several were also allegedly injured when security forces opened fire on protestors on 5 March; authorities denied the claims. An Interior Ministry delegation visited the area, with protestors having agreed on 7 March to suspend civil action for seven days pending investigations.

Hostile activity across the rest of the region corresponded to established trends, with violent incident levels having remained heightened in Kunar, Laghman, Paktika and Paktiya provinces. Elsewhere, authorities in Khost located and cleared a HUMVEE laden with four tons of explosives in Ismail Khel district on 6 Mar. Disruptions were also reported along the Kabul-Khost highway on 3 March, when hundreds blocked the road protesting against the alleged killing of three civilians and arrest of several others during operations by pro-government militias in the province. Meanwhile, coalition aerial activity continued across the region, with airstrikes reported in Nangharhar, Paktiya and Paktika; at least 18 militants were killed.
Heavy fighting continued to be reported in Farah province, with hostile activity having increased by 38% from the previous reporting period. Violent incidents were concentrated in Bala Boluk district. Of note, three policemen were killed and three injured when militants opened fire on a security checkpoint on 5 March. Three Afghan soldiers were killed and three wounded during an insurgent attack on a highway security checkpoint in Golaye Haji area on 6 March. Communications in the area were also disrupted during the clash. A civilian was also killed when insurgents fired machine guns targeting a security outpost in Clinic Farah Rod area on 7 March. Overall, concerns over deepening insecurity in Farah persist. The Taleban raid on an army base in Bala Boluk on 23 Feb that killed at least 18 soldiers along with persisting insurgent offensives in the district and the wider province continue to undermine the credibility of security forces, also indicating the insurgency has gained the momentum.

The reporting period featured a limited number of violent incidents throughout the rest of the region. Notably, in Badghis, four policemen were killed during a clash with insurgents at a security checkpoint in Moqur district on 4 March, while an Afghan soldier was killed and two wounded when their vehicle ran over an IED in Qadis district on 7 March. In Herat, Taleban ambushed a security patrol in Shindand district on 7 March. Three insurgents were killed and two wounded. Two Afghan soldiers were also injured during the clash. Insurgents also attacked a security outpost in Chahar Sada district, Ghor, on 7 March, with no reported casualties. In other developments, weather conditions remained poor across Ghor province for a consecutive week, with the Afghan Meteorological Department having issued a heavy rains/snow warning.
The security environment in southern Afghanistan remains volatile. Joined air and ground operations continued in the region this week. Notably, at least 15 insurgents were killed and 16 injured while a HUMVEE and several other vehicles and weapons were destroyed during Afghan Air Force strikes in Khas Uruzgan district, Uruzgan, on 3 March. Heavy fighting also continued to be reported in both Uruzgan and Helmand provinces. Of note, at least 13 insurgents were killed in a clash with security forces in Khas Uruzgan district, Uruzgan, on 1 March. In Helmand, additional security personnel were deployed to Nahr-e Saraj district to consolidate control over highway 601. Three insurgents were killed and one injured, while an IED was defused, during a clash with militants in the area on 3 March. Another two insurgents were killed and three captured during a clash in the same area on 6 March.

A number of prominent incidents were reported throughout the rest of southern Afghanistan, although overall levels of hostile activity remained relatively low this week. In Nimroz, a civilian was injured when a motorcycle laden with explosives detonated while a security convoy was passing by in Durahi area of Delaram district on 3 March. On the same day, insurgents briefly seized control of Surkh Nawar security checkpoint in Daikundi. A policeman was killed and another injured during the clashes. Two civilians were also kidnapped by suspected Taleban gunmen in the same area on 7 March. In Kandahar, at least four policemen were killed during a combined SVBIED and SAF attack on the police HQ in Spin Boldak on 7 March. At approximately 2030hrs, a suicide attacker detonated a VBIED at the gate following which two gunmen stormed the compound. All assailants were killed. The Taleban claimed responsibility for the attack.
Politics & Security

- **Afghanistan drone strike kills 20 Pakistani Taliban, officials say** – Reuters – A suspected U.S. drone strike on a training camp in an isolated part of Afghanistan’s eastern province of Kunar on Wednesday killed more than 20 Pakistani Taleban preparing to launch suicide attacks in Pakistan, officials said. Two Pakistani intelligence officials said the attack, carried out in a village called Saresha Sultan Shah, killed at least two senior figures in the movement, besides someone believed to be a trainer of suicide bombers. The Pakistani Taleban, also known as Tehrik-i Taliban Pakistan or TTP, is separate from the Afghan Taleban and combines a number of groups that fight the government of Pakistan. The U.S. State Department has put it on a list of foreign terrorist organizations. The Pakistani intelligence officials said Wednesday’s drone strike in Kunar, an undeveloped and thickly forested province on the two countries’ border, took place during a visit by senior TTP figures prior to sending the militants into Pakistan. A spokesman of the NATO-led Resolute Support mission and U.S. forces in Afghanistan headquarters in the capital, Kabul, did not confirm the report... [Full Article]

- **Araghchi calls for closer coop. with Afghanistan to counter threats** – Mehr – Iranian Deputy FM Abbas Araghchi stressed the necessity of closer bilateral cooperation with Afghanistan in order to counter common threats, especially terrorism, during a meeting with Afghanistan’s Defense Minister Ahmad Tamim Asey on Wednesday in Tehran. Araghchi praised the Afghan president’s prudence in opening a new chapter in defense cooperation between the two countries. He added peace, stability and security in both countries are interrelated... [Full Article]

- **Afghanistan Makes Strong, Sustained Health Gains Despite Continuing Insecurity** – World Bank – A new World Bank report finds that Afghanistan has shown improved health outcomes since 2003, with health services that have remained resilient even in highly insecure provinces. The report entitled Progress in the Face of Insecurity: Improving Health Outcomes in Afghanistan, finds however that the uptick in insecurity since 2010 has slowed some gains. The number of children dying before their 5th birthday dropped by 34 percent from 2003 to 2015, from 137 to 91 deaths per 1,000 live births, according to UN estimates. Rates of childhood stunting-- where children who have had insufficient nutrition from birth to age 3 are too short for their age--have declined at the rate of 2 percent per year, faster than a global median of comparable countries which saw an average decline of 1.3 percent per year. The report finds that such health gains have been made possible by expanded frontline health services and a stronger health system... [Full Article]
Economics & Business

- **Switzerland's Aid To Be Spent Through National Budget** – TOLO – On 6 March 2018, Swiss Ambassador Thomas Kolly and Afghanistan's Minister of Finance Eklil Hakimi signed a framework agreement in Kabul on technical and financial cooperation and humanitarian aid. The Memorandum reiterates funds raised by Switzerland will be spent on development projects and for technical and humanitarian assistance in line with the national budget. As part of its commitment to Afghanistan, at the Brussels Summit on Afghanistan in 2016, Switzerland pledged to provide $35 million in aid to Afghanistan annually. Switzerland has provided more than $500 million in aid to Afghanistan over the past 16 years. Finance Minister Eklil Hakimi said a follow up conference on the commitments made to Afghanistan during the Brussels Summit will be held in Switzerland in November in which sectoral ministers from donor nations will discuss their commitments... **Full Article**

- **Turkish Firm To Invest In Helmand Energy Project** – TOLO – A Turkish company will invest $114 million USD in the second phase of the Kajaki Dam in Helmand province according to a memorandum of understanding signed between the Afghan Ministry of Finance and the Turkish company on Tuesday. The project will be completed within the next two and a half years. Finance Ministry spokesman Hamid Abdul Rahimzai said the second phase of the dam will be implemented within the framework of public-private partnership. He said the dam will have a capacity of 150 megawatts of electricity upon its completion. Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS), the Afghan utility company, will purchase each kilowatt of electricity for 7.5 cents from the Turkish company in the next 20 years after the project is completed, said Wahidullah Tawhidi, spokesman for DABS... **Full Article**

- **Pakistan loses 50% market share in Kabul** – Dawn – India has successfully penetrated Afghanistan’s market, leading to a reduction of Pakistan’s market share of over 50% over the past two years, the Chairman of the Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry Zubair Motiwalla told Dawn on Friday. Kabul has been the traditional market for Pakistani exports but that is changing as cheaper products from China and India have flooded Afghanistan. Motiwalla said Peshawar is the main victim of the declining trade with Afghanistan where people have incurred large scale losses. Out of 200 flour mills, about 100 have been closed down due to a drastic fall in the export of flour to Afghanistan, he added. According to Pakistan’s Bureau of Statistics, exports to Afghanistan dropped to $1.271bn in FY17 from $1.437bn in FY16. Exports in the first quarter of 2017-18 stood at $319 million... **Full Article**

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**Kazakhstan Grants US Access to Ports for Afghan-Bound Goods** – Eurasianet

Lawmakers in Kazakhstan have approved an agreement allowing the United States to use two of the nation’s Caspian ports as transit points for shipping nonmilitary material to Afghanistan. By gaining access to the ports of Aktau and Kuryk, the United States will gain an additional option in circumventing Russia, which has previously also provided transit options for NATO supplies to Afghanistan. Speaking on March 7, Kazakhstan’s Foreign Minister Kairat Adrakhmanov repeatedly stressed the nonmilitary nature of the goods to be delivered through the route, which will run from Azerbaijan, across the Caspian Sea, to eastern Kazakhstan before entering Uzbekistan, which has railway links with northern Afghanistan. Adrakhmanov said that a transit deal has been in place between Kazakhstan and the United States since 2010. More than 700 containers of goods have been delivered over that period, generating 200 million tenge ($625,000) in revenue from local transportation companies, Adrakhmanov said. Kazakhstan’s support comes at a timely moment. The United States is engaged in a two-fronted action against two crucial partners in the Afghanistan transit issue... **Full Article**
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