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## Violence Up Sharply in Afghanistan

By ROD NORDLAND

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KABUL, Afghanistan — With an average of an assassination a day and a suicide bombing every second or third day, insurgents have greatly increased the level of violence in Afghanistan, and have become by far the biggest killers of civilians here, the [United Nations](#) said in a [report](#) released publicly on Saturday.

The report also confirms statistics from the [NATO](#) coalition, which claimed a continuing decrease in civilian deaths caused by the United States military and its allies. At the same time it blames stepped-up military operations for an overall increase in the violence.

Especially alarming were increases in suicide bombings and assassinations of government officials in a three-month period ending June 16, and a near-doubling of roadside bombings for the first four months of 2010 compared with the same period in 2009.

“The number of security incidents increased significantly, compared to previous years and contrary to seasonal trends,” the report said, adding that most of this was a consequence of military operations in the southern part of the country, particularly Helmand and Kandahar Provinces, where increased NATO military operations have been under way since February.

Most victims of the increased violence continue to be civilians, and the proportion of those killed by insurgents, rather than the government or its NATO allies, rose to 70

percent from mid-March through mid-June. In the previous three months, the United Nations blamed insurgents for 67 percent of civilian deaths.

The most striking change has been in suicide bombings, whose numbers have tripled this year compared with 2009. Such attacks now take place an average of three times a week compared with once a week before. In addition, two of three of those suicide attacks are considered “complex,” in which attackers use a suicide bomb as well as other weapons. Half the suicide attacks, the United Nations said, occur in southern Afghanistan.

“The shift to more complex suicide attacks demonstrates a growing capability of the local terrorist networks linked to [Al Qaeda](#),” the report said.

It depicted a concerted effort by insurgents to deliberately single out civilians. “Insurgents followed up their threats against the civilian population with, on average, seven [assassinations](#) every week, the majority of which were conducted in the south and southeast regions,” it said.

This represented a 45 percent increase in assassinations over 2009.

A third of all violent episodes were from [improvised explosive devices](#) or roadside bombs placed by the insurgents. The number of such devices rose by 94 percent from January through April 2010 compared with the same period in 2009, which “constitutes an alarming trend,” the report said. The decline in civilian casualties attributed to NATO and government forces continued a trend seen since last year, despite the increased tempo of the conflict this year, particularly in the south.

Without providing statistics, the report singled out “escalation of force” episodes for casualties inflicted by the coalition. These are episodes in which civilians are killed at military checkpoints or near military convoys, often because they fail to understand or to heed orders. The report, which was released by the United Nations secretary general, [Ban Ki-moon](#), cited the military’s efforts to minimize such casualties, including a public information campaign, nonlethal warning methods and “a reiteration of the July 2009 tactical directive by the commander of the International Security Assistance Force limiting the use of force.” The commander, Gen. [Stanley A. McChrystal](#), has emphasized the reduction of civilian casualties as a crucial goal of the war effort.

Previously, airstrikes had been the leading factor in civilian casualties caused by NATO’s military forces, but there was no mention of that in the current United Nations report. General McChrystal has also sharply limited the use of close air support where there is a risk to civilians.

In an unrelated news conference in Kabul on Saturday, a spokesman for NATO, Brig. Gen. Josef Blotz, gave a similar assessment, although it was based on a different set of NATO statistics on civilian casualties. During the past three months, General Blotz said, civilian casualties caused by the coalition over all dropped by 44 percent compared with the same period in 2009, while those caused by the insurgents increased by 36 percent.

Perhaps more significant, the number of episodes involving civilian casualties caused by the coalition dropped 7.8 percent, General Blotz said. This suggested that fewer civilians were being killed in each encounter as well.

The United Nations report also noted that 332 children were killed or maimed from mid-March to mid-June as the result of the conflict, mainly in areas where military activity had increased, including Helmand Province as well as eastern and northeastern provinces. Sixty percent of the children were killed by insurgent attacks, it said; 24 children died in cross-fire between the sides.

In addition, attacks on schools increased throughout the country, most as a result of attacks by antigovernment elements, the report said.

The secretary general's report, which was given to the Security Council last week, also noted the Afghan government's efforts to hold a consultative [peace jirga](#) and to prepare for elections in September.