Afghanistan
Security situation

Country of Origin Information Report

September 2020
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Cover photo: © Al Jazeera English, Sangin, Helmand, 4 November 2012, url CC BY-SA 2.0
The IED Threat. The bomb disposal team of the Afghan Army 215 Corps neutralises an IED in Sangin, Helmand. With roadside bombs the largest threat in Afghanistan, the few teams that have been trained are being relied heavily on to keep the roads safe for troops and civilians.
Acknowledgements

EASO would like to acknowledge the following national asylum and migration departments as the co-drafters of this report:

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- France, Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless persons (OFPRA), Information, Documentation and Research Division (DIDR)
- Poland, Department of Refugee and Asylum Proceedings

The following national asylum and migration departments reviewed this report:

- Germany, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF)
- Slovakia, Migration Office, Department of Documentation and Foreign Cooperation

The following external organisation reviewed parts of this report:

- ACCORD – Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation

It must be noted that the review carried out by the mentioned departments, experts or organisations contributes to the overall quality of the report, but it does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of EASO.
Contents

Acknowledgements .............................................................................................................. 4
Contents ................................................................................................................................. 5
Disclaimer .............................................................................................................................. 10
Glossary and abbreviations ............................................................................................... 11
Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 14
  Methodology ........................................................................................................................ 14
  Sources ................................................................................................................................. 15
Structure and use of the report ............................................................................................ 17
Map ....................................................................................................................................... 18
1. General description of the security situation in Afghanistan ........................................ 19
  1.1 Background of the conflict ......................................................................................... 19
    1.1.1 Overview of recent conflicts in Afghanistan ......................................................... 19
    1.1.2 Political landscape ............................................................................................... 20
    1.1.3 Peace talks ........................................................................................................... 22
    1.1.4 International context ............................................................................................ 25
  1.2 Actors in the conflict ................................................................................................. 28
    1.2.1 Pro-government forces ....................................................................................... 28
    1.2.2 Anti-Government Elements ............................................................................... 30
  1.3 Recent security trends and armed confrontations ..................................................... 30
    1.3.1 Armed clashes and assaults ............................................................................... 31
    1.3.2 Improvised Explosive Devices .......................................................................... 32
    1.3.3 High-profile attacks ............................................................................................ 33
    1.3.4 Targeted killings and conflict-related abduction ............................................... 34
    1.3.5 Aerial attacks and bombings ............................................................................. 36
    1.3.6 Search operations ............................................................................................... 37
    1.3.7 Explosive remnants of war ............................................................................... 37
  1.4 Impact of the violence on the civilian population ...................................................... 38
    1.4.1 Civilian casualties ............................................................................................... 38
    1.4.2 State ability to secure law and order ..................................................................... 41
    1.4.3 Socio-economic conditions ............................................................................... 43
    1.4.4 Refugees, IDPs, returnees .................................................................................. 44
    1.4.5 Children .............................................................................................................. 47
  1.5 Geographical overview .............................................................................................. 49
2.9 Faryab ........................................................................................................ 120
  2.9.1 General description of the province ........................................................ 120
  2.9.2 Conflict background and actors in Faryab ............................................. 122
  2.9.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ............... 124
2.10 Ghazni ........................................................................................................ 130
  2.10.1 General description of the province ...................................................... 130
  2.10.2 Conflict background and actors in Ghazni ......................................... 131
  2.10.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ............ 133
2.11 Ghor ........................................................................................................... 136
  2.11.1 General description of the province ...................................................... 136
  2.11.2 Conflict background and actors in Ghor ............................................ 137
  2.11.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ............ 139
2.12 Helmand ..................................................................................................... 142
  2.12.1 General description of the province ...................................................... 142
  2.12.2 Conflict background and actors in Helmand ..................................... 144
  2.12.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ............ 145
2.13 Herat .......................................................................................................... 148
  2.13.1 General description of the province ...................................................... 148
  2.13.2 Conflict background and actors in Herat ......................................... 149
  2.13.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ............ 151
2.14 Jawzjan ..................................................................................................... 154
  2.14.1 General description of the province ...................................................... 154
  2.14.2 Conflict background and actors in Jawzjan ..................................... 155
  2.14.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ............ 158
2.15 Kabul province .......................................................................................... 162
  2.15.1 General description of the province ...................................................... 162
  2.15.2 Conflict background and actors in Kabul ....................................... 163
  2.15.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ............ 166
2.16 Kandahar .................................................................................................. 172
  2.16.1 General description of the province ...................................................... 172
  2.16.2 Conflict background and actors in Kandahar ................................... 174
  2.16.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ............ 175
2.17 Kapisa ....................................................................................................... 178
  2.17.1 General description of the province ...................................................... 178
  2.17.2 Conflict background and actors in Kapisa ....................................... 179
  2.17.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ............ 181
2.18 Khost ......................................................................................................... 185
2.27.2 Conflict background and actors in Paktya ................................................................. 260
2.27.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ................................. 262
2.28 Panjsher ........................................................................................................................ 266
  2.28.1 General description of the province ............................................................................. 266
  2.28.2 Conflict background and actors in Panjsher ................................................................. 267
  2.28.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ..................................... 269
2.29 Parwan ............................................................................................................................ 271
  2.29.1 General description of the province ............................................................................. 271
  2.29.2 Conflict background and actors in Parwan ................................................................. 272
  2.29.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ..................................... 274
2.30 Samangan ....................................................................................................................... 279
  2.30.1 General description of the province ............................................................................. 279
  2.30.2 Conflict background and actors in Samangan ............................................................. 280
  2.30.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ..................................... 281
2.31 Sar-e Pul ......................................................................................................................... 285
  2.31.1 General description of the province ............................................................................. 285
  2.31.2 Conflict background and actors in Sar-e Pul ............................................................... 286
  2.31.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ..................................... 287
2.32 Takhar ............................................................................................................................ 291
  2.32.1 General description of the province ............................................................................. 291
  2.32.2 Conflict background and actors in Takhar ................................................................. 292
  2.32.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ..................................... 294
2.33 Uruzgan ......................................................................................................................... 300
  2.33.1 General description of the province ............................................................................. 300
  2.33.2 Conflict background and actors in Uruzgan ............................................................. 301
  2.33.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ..................................... 302
2.34 Wardak ......................................................................................................................... 304
  2.34.1 General description of the province ............................................................................. 304
  2.34.2 Conflict background and actors in Wardak ................................................................. 306
  2.34.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ..................................... 310
2.35 Zabul ............................................................................................................................. 316
  2.35.1 General description of the province ............................................................................. 316
  2.35.2 Conflict background and actors in Zabul ................................................................. 317
  2.35.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population ..................................... 318
Annex 1: Bibliography ............................................................................................................. 321
Annex 2: Terms of Reference ................................................................................................. 445
Annex 3: Addenda and Corrigenda ......................................................................................... 447
Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (2019).\(^1\) The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced. To the extent possible and unless otherwise stated, all information presented, except for undisputed or obvious facts, has been cross-checked.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

‘Refugee’, ‘risk’ and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither EASO nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

The target users are asylum caseworkers, COI researchers, policymakers, and decision-making authorities.

The drafting process (including reviewing) for this report was finalised on 31 July 2020. Any event taking place after this period is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the Methodology section of the introduction.

Addenda and Corrigenda: On 9 October 2020, this report was re-published in order to correct some factual errors and to add some relevant information which was missing in the original version. The list of corrections and additions made can be found in Annex 3.

### Glossary and abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAN</td>
<td>Afghanistan Analysts Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>Afghan Citizen Card</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGEs</td>
<td>Anti-Government Elements are individuals and armed groups involved in armed conflict with, or armed opposition against, the government of Afghanistan and/or international military forces. Examples of such groups include the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic Jihad Union, Lashkari Tayyiba, Jaysh Muhammed and groups identifying themselves as Islamic State/’Daesh’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALCS</td>
<td>Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANASOC</td>
<td>Afghan National Army Special Operations Command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANSF/ANDSF</td>
<td>Afghan National Security Forces/Afghan National Defense And Security Forces, an umbrella term which includes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ABF (Afghan Border Force);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ALP (Afghan Local Police);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ANA (Afghan National Army);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- AAF (Afghan Air Force);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ANP (Afghan National Police);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ANCOF (Afghan National Civil Order Force);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ASF (Afghan Special Forces);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ANA TF (Afghan National Army Territorial Force);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- NDS (National Directorate of Security)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQ</td>
<td>Al Qaeda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attrition</td>
<td>Attrition is unplanned and planned total losses, including Dropped from Rolls, Killed in Action, Separation, and Other losses [disappearance/captured, disability, death (not in action), retirement, exempted (i.e. AWOL or permanent medical), or transfer to the ANA/ANP];</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWOL</td>
<td>Absent Without Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian</td>
<td>UNAMA refers to international law for a definition of ‘civilians’: persons who are not members of military/paramilitary forces or members of organised armed groups with continuous combat function and are protected against direct attacks unless and for such time as they directly participate in hostilities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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4 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url], p. 42
5 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url], p. 43
Dropped from Rolls personnel are those soldiers and police who leave the organisation prior to the end of their contract for reasons that include desertion or being absent without leave for over a month.\(^7\)

_Eid ul-Fitr_ ‘Festival of breaking the fast’ that marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan

Ground engagements include kinetic ground operations, stand-off attacks, crossfire and armed clashes between parties to the conflict. Ground engagements include attacks or operations in which small arms, heavy weapons and/or area weapons systems, i.e. mortars and rockets are fired.\(^8\)

Command-Operated IEDs – Radio or remote-controlled IEDs operated from a distance that can enable operators to detonate a pre-placed device at the precise time a target moves into the target area. Magnetic-IEDs are IEDs attached by a magnetic or other device and are a sub-category of command-operated IEDs.

Victim-Operated IEDs – These detonate when a person or vehicle triggers the initiator or switch which could be a pressure plate (PP-IED) or pressure release mechanism, trip wire or another device, resulting in an explosion.

Other IEDs – This category includes command-wired IEDs and timed-IEDs and IEDs where the trigger/switch type for detonation could not be determined.

Suicide IEDs – Separately from data on IEDs, UNAMA documents civilian casualties resulting from complex and suicide attacks. Suicide IEDs are generally either Body-Borne IEDs (BB-IEDs) or Suicide Vehicle-Borne IEDs (SVB-IEDs). Body-Borne IEDs refer to situations where a suicide bomber wears an explosive vest or belt while Suicide Vehicle-Borne IEDs is defined as the detonation of a vehicle rigged with explosives by a driver or passenger inside the vehicle, or the detonation of a BB-IED by the driver or a passenger while inside the vehicle.\(^9\)

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\(^7\) USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, _url_, p. 43


\(^9\) UNAMA, Afghanistan, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices, October 2018, _url_, p. 10
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Military Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMU</td>
<td>Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS, ISKP</td>
<td>Islamic State, also called ISIS, ISIL or Daesh. Islamic State in Afghanistan is referred to as Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khost Protection Force</td>
<td>A ‘campaign force’ that was established after 2001 under international (CIA/US special forces) control. There are long-standing allegations against the Khost Protection Force of extrajudicial killings, torture, beating and unlawful detentions.(^{10})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIA</td>
<td>Killed in Action(^{11})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LeJ</td>
<td>Lashkar-e-Jhangvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LeT</td>
<td>Lashkar-e-Tayyiba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loya Paktia</td>
<td>‘Greater Paktya’, an area encompassing the provinces of Paktya, Paktika and Khost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUG</td>
<td>National Unity Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSIA</td>
<td>National Statistics and Information Authority (formerly Central Statistics Organisation, CSO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODI</td>
<td>Overseas Development Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFS</td>
<td>Operation Freedom’s Sentinel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGF</td>
<td>Pro-Government Forces. Afghan National Security Forces and other forces and groups that act in military or paramilitary counter-insurgency operations and are directly or indirectly under the control of the government of Afghanistan(^{12})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRT</td>
<td>Provincial Reconstruction Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Unit/Red Brigade</td>
<td>In 2015, the Taliban established a ‘special forces’ unit named Red Unit or Red Brigade (‘sra qet’a’ in Pashto). They are better equipped and trained and are generally used as a ‘rapid reaction force’.(^{13})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>Resolute Support; a NATO-led mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIGAR</td>
<td>Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAAC</td>
<td>Train, Advise, and Assist Command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTP</td>
<td>Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNAMA</td>
<td>United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USDOD</td>
<td>United States Department of Defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USOS</td>
<td>United States Department of State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ushr</td>
<td>An Islamic tax (normally 10 %) on certain products, for example agricultural products.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{10}\) Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url](url)

\(^{11}\) USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url], p. 32

\(^{12}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url], p. 64

\(^{13}\) Times (The), Helmand teeters after Taliban storm in with British tactics, 21 August 2016, [url]
Introduction

This report was co-drafted by EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) sector and specialists from the COI units and asylum offices listed in the Acknowledgements section.

The report aims to provide information on the security situation in Afghanistan, which is relevant for the assessment of international protection status determination, including refugee status and subsidiary protection, and in particular for use in EASO’s country guidance development on Afghanistan. The terms of reference can be found in Annex 2.

Methodology

This report is an update of the EASO COI report Afghanistan Security Situation first published in January 2015 and updated annually.¹⁴

For the assessment of the need for international protection, the terms of reference for this report have been developed with a focus on the key elements from Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive (QD).

Based on various sources consulted by EASO¹⁵, these key elements can be broken down into topics and/or indicators. Examples include: parties to the conflict; intensity level of the violence; nature of the violence; regional spreading of the violence; targets of the violence; risk of collateral damage; use of arms and tactics; possibility to reach areas – security of transport (roads and airports); and indirect effects of the violence/conflict.

Based upon a study of all the mentioned sources, a list of elements and indicators was drafted, which served as a basis for the terms of reference (see Annex 2). In order to make a well-informed assessment of the fear of persecution or risk of serious harm, information is needed on these security-related elements and indicators on a regional, provincial or even district level in the country of origin.

EU+ countries¹⁶ COI specialists, policy and decision experts and UNHCR gave input on the terms of reference.

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources. The reference period for the description of latest trends and illustrative incidents is from 1 March 2019 until 30 June 2020. Some additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 31 July 2020.

This report is produced in line with the EASO COI Report Methodology (2019)¹⁷ and the EASO COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2019).¹⁸ In order to ensure that the drafters respected the EASO COI Report Methodology, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the countries and organisations listed as reviewers in the Acknowledgements section. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report.

¹⁴ EASO COI reports are available via EASO’s website: url
¹⁵ The elements, topics and indicators were identified by various sources that have a different position in the legal hierarchy and provide different levels of detail: The Qualification Directive (Recitals and articles); Case law from the Court of Justice of the EU in Luxembourg; National State Practice (National legislation; National case law; National policy and first instance decision practice); Case law from the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg; Opinions of experts, academics and specialised organisations; See the following EASO publications: EASO, Article 15(c) Qualification Directive (2011/95/EU) A judicial analysis, December 2014, url; The Implementation of Article 15(c) QD in EU Member States, July 2015, url
¹⁶ EU+ countries are the EU Member States plus the associated countries Norway and Switzerland.
¹⁷ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, June 2019, url
¹⁸ EASO, Writing and Referencing Guide for EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, June 2019, url
Sources

For data on civilian casualties, the two main sources used in this report are the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and NATO Resolute Support (RS) mission/ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR). In addition, to illustrate examples of incidents which caused civilian casualties in some provinces, information from The New York Times’ Afghan War Casualty Report was used. The Afghan War Casualty Report is a weekly and monthly bulletin compiling ‘all significant security incidents confirmed by New York Times reporters throughout Afghanistan’. As New York Times clarifies ‘the report includes government claims of insurgent casualty figures, but in most cases these cannot be independently verified by The Times. Similarly, the reports do not include Taliban claims for their attacks on the government unless they can be verified.’

Information from Voice of Jihad, the Taliban’s official website, was also used in the report mainly to illustrate examples of incidents causing civilian casualties in some provinces.

UNAMA:
This report relies extensively on data and information provided by UNAMA in their reports on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Afghanistan. UNAMA uses a robust methodology to verify reported incidents by corroborating and cross-checking incidents, conducting on-site investigations, and consulting a broad range of credible and reliable sources. For verification of each incident involving a civilian casualty, UNAMA requires at least three different and independent sources. Unverified incidents are not included in its reporting.

ACLED:
ACLED is a project collecting, analysing and mapping information on crisis and conflict in Africa, south and south-east Asia and Middle East and provides datasets on conflict incidents. Its methodology applied for coding and monitoring of the data is explained in details in its Codebook. As ACLED points out, the reader should, however, be aware of some limitations in the data. These limitations are:

‘the first is that most of the data is gathered based on publicly available, secondary reports. This means that the data is in part a reflection of the coverage and reporting priorities of media and international organisations. One of the effects of this is that it may under-estimate the volume of events of non-strategic importance (for example, low-level communal conflict, or events in very isolated areas). We work to address this possibility by triangulating data sources to include humanitarian and international organisation reports, rather than media alone; and by conducting ground-truthing exercises in which we present data to local organisations and partners to assess its validity among people working directly in conflict-affected contexts.’

Therefore, ACLED’s figures in this report are to be considered as an estimate and indication of trends in violence over a given period of time.

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19 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report, n.d., url
20 Voice of Jihad, [English], n.d., url
21 UNAMA’s full description of their methodology can be found at: UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, pp. i-ii
22 Bjelica, J. and Ruttig, T., UNAMA Mid-Year Report 2017: Number of civilian casualties still at “record level”, 18 July 2017, url
23 ACLED, About Acled, n.d., url
24 ACLED methodology, see ACLED Codebook url
25 ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Guide for Media Users, January 2015, url, pp. 9-10
For Afghanistan, ACLED covers political violence and protest spanning from January 2017 to the present. Each week, ACLED researches and reviews about 60 sources in English and Dari/Farsi on political violence in Afghanistan and collects the information into a database.26

ACLED codes security incidents as follows:

- **Battles**: violent clashes between at least two armed groups. Battles can occur between armed and organised state, non-state, and external groups, and in any combination therein. Sub-events of battles are armed clashes, government regains territory and non-state actor overtakes territory. The sub-event type ‘Armed clash’ occurs when ‘armed, organized groups engage in a battle, and no reports indicate a change in territorial control’.
- **Violence against civilians**: ‘violent events where an organised armed group deliberately inflicts violence upon unarmed non-combatants. “Violence against civilians” includes attempts at inflicting harm (e.g. beating, shooting, torture, rape, mutilation, etc.) or forcibly disappearing (e.g. kidnapping and disappearances) civilian actors. The following sub-event types are associated with the “Violence against civilians” event type: “Sexual violence”, “Attack”, and “Abduction/forced disappearance”.
- **Explosions/remote violence**: events where an explosion, bomb or other explosive device was used to engage in conflict. They include one-sided violent events in which the tool for engaging in conflict creates asymmetry by taking away the ability of the target to engage or defend themselves and their location. They include air/drone strikes, suicide bombs, shelling/artillery/missile attack, remote explosive/landmine/IED, grenade, chemical weapon.
- **Riots**: a violent demonstration, often involving a spontaneous action by unorganised, unaffiliated members of society. They include violent demonstration, mob violence.
- **Protests**: public demonstration in which the participants do not engage in violence, though violence may be used against them. It includes peaceful protests, protest with intervention, excessive force against protesters.
- **Strategic developments**: information regarding the activities of violent groups that is not itself recorded as political violence, yet it may trigger future events or contribute to political dynamics within and across states. It includes agreements, change to group/activity, non-violent transfer of territory, arrests.27

Data on violent incidents reported in Chapter 2 of this report is based on EASO analysis of ACLED public data extracted on 7 July 2020. For the purpose of this report, only the following types of events were included as violent incidents in the analysis of the security situation in Afghanistan: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians. The ACLED data, and maps derived from such data, used in this report refer to the timeframe between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.

**On territorial control by the Taliban** in Afghanistan, information collected and presented in a map by the Long War Journal (LWJ) was used in this report, alongside additional sources researched to the extent possible to corroborate the LWJ findings.

**LWJ:**
The LWJ is a project by the non-profit policy institute the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD).28 The LWJ’s Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan is based on open-source information, such as press reports and information provided by government agencies and the Taliban. The LWJ classifies the level of control as follows:

“Unconfirmed” district [...] has some level of claim-of-control made by the Taliban, but either has not yet been—or cannot be— independently verified by LWJ research. A “Contested” district may mean that the government may be in control of the district center, but little else, and the Taliban controls large areas or all of the areas outside of the district center.

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26 ACLED, Methodology and Coding Decisions around the Conflict in Afghanistan, (Version 3) March 2020, url
27 ACLED, Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Codebook, October 2017, url, pp. 7-14
28 LWJ, About us, n.d. url
“Controlled” district may mean the Taliban is openly administering a district, providing services and security, and also running the local courts.\textsuperscript{29}

On internal displacement, the main source used is the ‘Internal Displacement due to Conflict’ data collection by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). The UNOCHA data reported in the displacement sections was extracted on the ‘accessed date’ indicated in the Bibliography.

Structure and use of the report

This report is not meant to be read as a whole. In the first part a general description is given on the security situation in Afghanistan including a geographical overview, which is then explained in greater detail in the second part, holding a regional description of geographic subdivisions (Kabul City and 34 provinces).

Provinces and districts

The provincial chapters in this report are organised alphabetically and have the following structure: a general description of the province contains information on the geography and population; the conflict background takes a longer term look at the security situation in a province, including the armed actors active in the province. A section on recent trends in the security situation describes the nature of the violence, targets, locations, and casualties within the timeframe from 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020. Finally, conflict-induced displacements are described in a separate section. Recent security incidents described in sub-sections should be read as illustrations of trends in the security situation and not as an exhaustive list of incidents.

Both the general and regional sections provide information from various sources on the relevant elements and indicators. Information on an indicator as such should never be taken as conclusive but as indicative for protection assessment and is to be read together with all other indicators and information on the region (or province, district).

There are a number of provinces and districts for which the administrative boundaries are unclear. For example, it is unclear whether the district of Gizab belongs to Uruzgan or Daykundi province.\textsuperscript{30} Nor is it clear whether the district of Gormach belongs to Badghis or Faryab province.\textsuperscript{31}

The Managing Director at Alcis, a company providing geographic information services with many years of experience in Afghanistan, contacted by OFPRA’s Information, Documentation and Research Division, stated in an e-mail in August 2017 that

‘there is not one unified agreed district and province boundary dataset currently in use. There are various ‘official’ versions. [...] The boundaries within these different datasets have changed over time. Some districts have been passed across to other provinces for administrative purposes. Some new districts have been created over time. Some areas within Afghanistan are still referred to as districts by locals of the area, even though they have never had boundaries created for them and never been treated as a district.’\textsuperscript{32}

In absence of an official list of districts, EASO chooses in principal to follow the administrative divisions of the provinces used by UNOCHA, as they produce very clear maps and use the same division systematically in all their publications.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{29} More information on the methodology used by LWJ can be found at: LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, Methodology, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{30} Norway, Landinfo, Respons. Afghanistan: Gizab-distriktet, 11 December 2014, url
\textsuperscript{31} Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, 22 February 2017, url
\textsuperscript{32} Brittan, R., Managing Director Alcis, e-mail to OFPRA, 16 August 2017
\textsuperscript{33} All relevant maps on Afghanistan by UNOCHA can be found at: UNOCHA, Maps/Infographics – Afghanistan, n.d., url
Map

Map 1: Afghanistan - administrative divisions, source: UNOCHA

34 UNOCHA, Afghanistan - administrative divisions, January 2014, url
1. General description of the security situation in Afghanistan

1.1 Background of the conflict

1.1.1 Overview of recent conflicts in Afghanistan

The so-called Saur Revolution on 27 April 1978 brought the Afghan communists to power.\(^{35}\) In 1979, the government of the former Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan to support the communist Afghan government headed by Babrak Karmal. The invasion was followed by a decade of armed conflict between the Afghan government, supported by Soviet troops, and armed opposition groups, often referred to as the ‘mujahideen’. These groups were divided into several different factions, but they all participated in a nation-wide armed uprising that lasted until the government finally collapsed in 1992, following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989.\(^{36}\)

After this collapse, a period generally referred to as ‘Civil War’ saw different mujahidin groups who had formed new alliances and fronts fighting for control of Afghanistan.\(^{37}\) War between the competing mujahidin factions and militias was characterised by severe human rights breaches.\(^{38}\) This led to the emergence in 1994 of a group called the Taliban, who brought stability in areas under their control, which won them support from segments of the population.\(^{39}\) They gradually gained more control and conquered Kabul in 1996. By 2001, the Taliban controlled most of the Afghan territory. But by the end of the year, as a consequence of the 11 September attacks in the US, they were ousted by a US-led military operation.\(^{40}\) The US gave its support to the mujahideen front opposing the Taliban, at that time known as Northern Alliance or Northern Coalition.\(^{41}\)

On 22 December 2001, based on the Bonn Agreement, an Afghan interim government was formed, led by Hamid Karzai\(^{42}\), a Pashtun, who also won the first presidential elections in October 2004.\(^{43}\) The Taliban had reorganised and increased their presence substantially by 2006 in Wardak, Logar, Zabul and Uruzgan provinces and began expanding along the western edge of Kabul province.\(^{44}\) Other anti-government elements (AGEs) operating in Afghanistan included Hezb-e Islami/Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HIG), the Haqqani Network\(^{45}\) and Al Qaeda affiliates, including Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).\(^{46}\) This

\(^{35}\) Clark, K., An April Day that Changed Afghanistan 2: Afghans remember the ‘Saur Revolution’, AAN, 27 April 2018, last updated 9 March 2020, [url]


\(^{40}\) CFR, The Taliban in Afghanistan, 4 July 2014, [url]

\(^{41}\) International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 17 June 2011, [url], p. 5


\(^{43}\) Guardian (The), The Afghan interim government: who’s who, 6 December 2001, [url]; NYT, Election of Karzai Is Declared Official, 4 November 2004, [url]

\(^{44}\) International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 17 June 2011, [url], p. 7

\(^{45}\) International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 17 June 2011, [url], pp. 14-15

\(^{46}\) UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 18 June 2014, [url], p. 6.
insurgency was characterised by mainly asymmetric warfare: AGEs used roadside and suicide bombs and complex\textsuperscript{47} attacks, intimidation of civilians and targeted killings to destabilise the country. This was countered by searches, clearance operations and bombings by the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and international military forces.\textsuperscript{48} According to the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), the security situation deteriorated after 2005. The conflict deepened throughout 2007 and 2008, directly affecting around a third of the country.\textsuperscript{49}

From 2010 onwards, the Taliban-led insurgency spread into all regions of Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{50} By the end of 2014, a transition of security responsibility from international troops to the ANSF was completed. The support for the further development of the ANSF continued ‘under a new, smaller non-combat NATO-led mission (“Resolute Support”).’\textsuperscript{51} After the 2014 international military withdrawal, the Taliban have rapidly expanded their presence countrywide.\textsuperscript{52} A 2017 report by UN Secretary General noted that the Taliban had been able to control larger parts of the country and the emergence of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant - Khorasan Province (ISKP) added ‘a new, dangerous dimension’ to the situation.\textsuperscript{53} In 2018, fighting intensified particularly in the east, south-east and in some areas within the south. The Taliban ‘made territorial gains in sparsely populated areas, and advanced their positions in areas that had not seen fighting in years’.\textsuperscript{54} Human Rights Watch noted that although the Taliban claimed to target government and foreign military facilities only, their indiscriminate use of force killed and injured hundreds of civilians.\textsuperscript{55}

On 29 February 2020, after more than 18 years of conflict, the US and the Taliban signed an ‘agreement for bringing peace to Afghanistan’ (for more details on the so-called Doha agreement see \textit{1.1.3 Peace Talks}).\textsuperscript{56} During the ‘reduction in violence’ (RiV) week, from 22 to 28 February 2020, a drop in security incidents was recorded between the pro-government forces and the Taliban.\textsuperscript{57} However, after the RiV ended with the signature of the Doha agreement, the Taliban stated that ‘the war would continue’ not against foreign troops, but against the Afghan government.\textsuperscript{58} The Taliban’s Military Commission reportedly sought assurances from the main Taliban leadership that fighting will continue regardless of the agreement.\textsuperscript{59} Violence resumed immediately after the RiV ended.\textsuperscript{60}

\subsection*{1.1.2 Political landscape}

The disputed 2014 presidential election resulted in a political compromise which led to the establishment of the National Unity Government (NUG), under the presidency of Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah. Divisions within the government, particularly between Ghani and Abdullah and their camps, severely compromised the NUG’s effectiveness.\textsuperscript{61} According to AAN, in January 2017, ‘its complex power-sharing arrangements [have] paralysed governance in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{47} See \textit{Glossary}
\item \textsuperscript{48} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict Midyear Report 2014, July 2014, \textit{url}, pp. 5, 9, 21
\item \textsuperscript{49} UNAMA, Afghanistan, Annual Report On Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2008, \textit{url}, p. 1
\item \textsuperscript{50} UN, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, \textit{url}, p. 2
\item \textsuperscript{51} NATO, Inteqal: Transition to Afghan lead, updated on: 7 January 2015, \textit{url}
\item \textsuperscript{52} International Crisis Group, Afghanistan: Growing Challenges, 30 April 2017, \textit{url}
\item \textsuperscript{53} UN, Special report on the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 10 August 2017, \textit{url}, p. 3
\item \textsuperscript{54} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, \textit{url}, p. 8
\item \textsuperscript{55} HRW, World Report 2019 - Afghanistan, 17 January 2019, \textit{url}
\item \textsuperscript{56} BBC News, Afghan conflict: US and Taliban sign deal to end 18-year war, 29 February 2020, \textit{url}
\item \textsuperscript{57} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, First Quarter Report: 1 January- 31 March 2020, June 2020, p. 3; AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended? 21 March 2020, \textit{url}
\item \textsuperscript{58} AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended? 21 March 2020, \textit{url}
\item \textsuperscript{59} UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, \textit{url}, para. 4
\item \textsuperscript{60} Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, 3 March 2020, \textit{url}
\item \textsuperscript{61} Foreign Policy, NUG One Year On: Struggling to Govern, 29 September 2015, \textit{url}
\end{itemize}
Afghanistan. A series of violent events in Kabul in May-June 2017 caused a political crisis, resulting in a ‘significant shift in the political climate’ marked by a rift between President Ghani and key members of the Jamiat-e Islami party. The crisis also resulted in the consolidation of power within the NUG and in the first eight months of 2017, the government made progress on high-level appointments, which had previously been a source of tension.

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) set a date for the next parliamentary and district council elections in July 2018. However, as a result of security challenges and voter registration reforms the long-delayed parliamentary elections were rescheduled again to October 2018. Parliamentary elections were held in 32 provinces on 20-21 October 2018. Voting in Kandahar was delayed by a week after the assassination of the provincial police chief in a Taliban-claimed attack two days before the original date of the elections. Voting in Ghazni was postponed indefinitely due to security issues and disagreements around constituencies.

Although voter turnout in Kabul and other urban centres was reportedly high, technical and organisational problems occurred at some of the roughly 4 900 polling stations across the country. In some polling stations machines registering fingerprints and portrait photos aiming to prevent double voting did not function properly while in others election staff had difficulties handling them.

In December 2018, the IEC announced a three-month delay for the presidential election which was originally scheduled for 20 April 2019. In March 2019, the elections were postponed again, due to ‘problems with the voting process’. Presidential candidates included incumbent Ashraf Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, former national security adviser, Muhammad Hanif Atmar and also Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Interior Minister Amrullah Saleh, once a strong critic of the President stepped down from his position to join Ghani’s team as a candidate for the post of vice-president. Appointing Saleh was an effort from the ethnic Pashtun Ghani to neutralise a political opponent and to get the support of the Tajiks, among whom Saleh has a strong backing.

On 28 September 2019, the presidential elections were finally held, with the lowest election turnout recorded since the Taliban were ousted in 2001. In the immediate aftermath of the elections, both frontrunners, incumbent Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, declared victory, which resulted in the following five months of political impasse. After almost three months since the elections, and with delays due to allegations of fraud, irregularities, attacks and technical problems with biometric devices used for voting, on 22 December 2019, the IEC announced the preliminary results showing 50.64 % of the votes (923 868) in favour of Ghani and 39.52 % of the votes (720 990)

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63 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, url, p. 2
64 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, url, p. 2
65 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 June 2017, url, p. 2; UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, url, p. 2
66 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, url, p. 13
67 Al Jazeera, Afghanistan’s elections: All you need to know, 19 October 2018, url
68 Tolo News, Ghazni Elections Could Be Held With Presidential Elections, 27 October 2018, url
69 CNN, Kandahar goes to the polls in Afghan parliamentary vote delayed by violence, 27 October 2018, url
70 Tolo News, Ghazni Elections Could Be Held With Presidential Elections, 27 October 2018, url
71 Diplomat (The), Afghan Parliamentary Elections Marred by Technical Troubles and Insecurity, 21 October 2018, url
72 France24, Afghan presidential election delayed until July 20, 30 December 2018, url
73 Reuters, Afghanistan presidential election postponed to September, 20 March 2019, url
74 Adili, A.Y., Afghanistan’s 2019 elections (2): Who is running to become the next president?, AAN, 11 February 2019, url
75 NYT, Afghan Presidential Race Takes Shape as Ghani’s Challengers Emerge, 18 January 2019, url
76 Reuters, Afghanistan’s Ghani launches bid for second presidential term, 20 January 2019, url
77 BBC, Afghanistan presidential election: Rivals declare victory after record low turnout, 30 September 2019, url
78 Adili A. Y., End of post-election impasse? Ghani and Abdullah’s new power-sharing formula, AAN 20 May 2020, url
79 Reuters, Afghan election runoff likely amid thousands of complaints: officials, 23 December 2019, url
in favour of Abdullah Abdullah. This latter rejected the preliminary results, stating they were based on fraud. The election turnover was estimated to be over 1.8 million, with 31.5% being composed of women.

After three days since the announcement of the preliminary results, IEC said to have registered around 16,500 complaints. The final results were announced in February 2020, confirming almost exactly the preliminary outcome. Incumbent Muhammad Ashraf Ghani was declared the winner, with 50.64% of votes. His rival Abdullah Abdullah, who was second with 39.52% of votes, rejected the results, declaring himself the winner; he announced his intention to form an alternative, ‘inclusive’ government, and in the following weeks started appointing some provincial governors. On 9 March 2020, both Ghani and Abdullah held separate inauguration ceremonies taking the oath of office as the president of Afghanistan.

After months of tension, on 17 May 2020, President Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, finally signed a power-sharing agreement. Under agreement, Abdullah is to lead the peace negotiations, becoming the leader of the High Council of National Reconciliation with executive authorities; in addition he has the right to appoint 50% of the cabinet, including for some key ministries, while provincial governors will be appointed based on ‘a rule agreed upon by the two sides’. However, as of 13 June 2020, AAN’s researcher Ali Yawar Adili and co-Director Thomas Ruttig observed that it was not clear yet whether such a rule had been put in place, noting that a cabinet had yet to be fully formed.

### 1.1.3 Peace talks

After the collapse of the Doha peace talks in June 2013, talks did not resume before the new president, Ashraf Ghani, was inaugurated in September 2014. In January 2015, the Taliban stated that its preconditions for entering peace talks were the end of foreign military presence, the establishment of an Islamic government and the implementation of sharia. After the death of Mullah Omar was revealed in July 2015, a power struggle broke out within the Taliban which, at least in part, prevented further progress in the peace talks.

In January 2016, the US, Afghanistan, Pakistan and China formed a Quadrilateral Coordination Group to take forward the peace talks. However, the Taliban refused to engage with this process. In

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80 BBC, Afghanistan presidential election: Ghani set for second term after initial results, 22 December 2019, [url](https://www.bbc.com/); TKG, The preliminary results of the Afghan presidential elections announced, 22 December 2019, [url](https://www.tkgnews.com/)

81 Reuters, Afghanistan’s Ghani claims narrow win in preliminary presidential vote results, 22 December 2019, [url](https://www.reuters.com/)

82 Reuters, Afghan election runoff likely amid thousands of complaints: officials, 23 December 2019, [url](https://www.reuters.com/)


84 Adili A. Y., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (28): ECC starts final, decisive phase of complaints procedure, AAN, 20 January 2020, [url](https://www.aan.com/)

85 Ruttig T., Afghanistan’s 2019 Elections (30): Final results... and parallel governments?, AAN, 19 February 2020, [url](https://www.aan.com/)

86 IEC, Afghanistan 2019, Presidential election, n.d., [url](https://www.iec.org.af/)

87 Ruttig T., Afghanistan’s 2019 Elections (30): Final results... and parallel governments?, AAN, 19 February 2020, [url](https://www.aan.com/); Reuters, Ghani named winner of disputed Afghan poll, rival also claims victory, 18 February 2020, [url](https://www.reuters.com/)


89 NYT, Ghani Takes the Oath of Afghan President. His Rival Does, Too, 9 March 2020, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/)

90 A Adili A. Y., End of post-election impasse? Ghani and Abdullah’s new power-sharing formula, AAN 20 May 2020, [url](https://www.aan.com/)

91 A Adili A. Y., End of post-election impasse? Ghani and Abdullah’s new power-sharing formula, AAN 20 May 2020, [url](https://www.aan.com/); Tolonews, Ghani and Abdullah Sign Agreement to Break Political Deadloc, 17 May 2020, [url](https://www.tlonews.com/)

92 Adili A. Y., Ruttig T., Between Professionalism and Accommodation: The slow progress on the new cabinet, AAN, 13 June 2020, [url](https://www.aan.com/)


94 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 27 February 2015, [url](https://www.un.org/), p. 3

95 Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/), p. 4

September 2016, the government signed a peace deal with Hezb-e Islami/Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HIG). Describing HIG as a ‘fading insurgent group’, Borhan Osman explained in 2016 the likely effect of this deal on the battlefield as ‘unlikely to significantly lower the current levels of violence’. In 2017, President Ghani offered the Taliban a ‘last chance’ for reconciliation at the ‘Kabul-process’, ‘an international conference aiming to set the stage for peace talks and restore security in Afghanistan’. However, according to a September 2017 report of the UN Secretary General ‘no discernible progress has been made in fostering negotiations between the Government and the Taliban.’

In February 2018 the Afghan government presented very ‘concrete proposals for peace talks with the Taliban’ which, according to AAN, was ‘the most complete peace offer that has been publicly announced since 2001’. Although President Ghani’s peace plan was offered ‘without any preconditions’, it was made clear that issues as women’s rights or the basic values of the constitution were not up for negotiation. While the proposal included the prospect of establishing a Taliban office in Kabul, the possibility of a ceasefire and also lifting the sanctions on those Taliban leaders who would join the negotiation, the Taliban accused Ghani of ‘missing the point’ namely their key demand on the withdrawal of foreign troops. In June 2018, ‘President Ghani called a unilateral halt to all offensive government actions’ over the Muslim holiday of Eid ul-Fitr which the Taliban also joined. However, the Taliban rejected the President’s idea of extending the ceasefire and continued to refuse official negotiations with the Afghan government.

International diplomatic efforts intensified towards peace with the appointment of Zalmay Khalilzad as the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation in September 2018 and with Russia hosting a meeting in November 2018 on the peace process that was attended by 11 countries and the Taliban as well. Both tracks of negotiations continued in 2019. The Moscow meeting in the beginning of February 2019 brought together the Taliban delegation led by chief negotiator, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai and senior Afghan politicians led by former President Hamid Karzai. The talks were scheduled just a week after the US and the Taliban finished six days of negotiations in Qatar.

According to Thomas Ruttig, co-Director of AAN, while in Doha progress was being made in the form of an agreed draft framework, the negotiations so far did not involve the Afghan government, one of the main three parties to the conflict, since their inclusion is blocked by the Taliban. The next round of talks, the highest level negotiations yet, began on 25 February 2019 between the insurgent group and the US involving Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban’s deputy leader.

A consultative Loya Jirga – a gathering of Afghan politicians and tribal, ethnic and religious leaders - was initially planned in Kabul in March 2019 with the goal of creating a framework for the Afghan government to engage in peace negotiations with the Taliban. The Loya Jirga was eventually postponed. In September 2019, US President Donald Trump declared the US-Taliban negotiations
‘dead’\textsuperscript{109}, after the Taliban killed a US soldier; however, the discussions between the two sides resumed within weeks behind the scenes.\textsuperscript{110}

On 29 February 2020, in Doha, the US and the Taliban signed the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{111} The main points outlined in the Doha agreement include guarantees by the Taliban on not providing protection to groups, such as Al Qaeda, that pose a threat to the US and its allies; guarantees by the US and their NATO allies to withdraw from Afghanistan; the question of ceasefire and the intra-Afghan negotiations.\textsuperscript{112} However, the Afghan government was not involved in the deal, with the Taliban later refusing to engage with their negotiating team, leading to questions about the viability of the agreement, which is described as a ‘negotiated political settlement’ rather than a comprehensive peace deal.\textsuperscript{113}

Simultaneously with the Doha Agreement, the US signed a joint declaration\textsuperscript{114} with the government of Afghanistan, as an attempt to involve the Afghan government in the discussions, enabling political settlement and a permanent ceasefire, while also affirming continued support to the Afghan security forces and refraining from intervention in domestic affairs.\textsuperscript{115}

According to the Doha Agreement, all foreign military forces should withdraw from Afghanistan through a phased approach over 135 days, while in exchange, there should be mechanisms to prevent Afghanistan being used by group/individual security threats to the US and its allies (specifically the Taliban and Al Qaeda).\textsuperscript{116} The Agreement also stipulates that the modalities for a permanent ceasefire are to be negotiated in intra-Afghan negotiations, with a mutual release of prisoners proceeding such negotiations as a measure for confidence-building. Under the deal, the Afghan government is to release up to 5 000 Taliban prisoners; in exchange for 1 000 Afghan soldiers and police officers held by the Taliban. The prisoners release is described as a ‘core demand of the Taliban’ and a delicate issue for the intra-Afghan talks.\textsuperscript{117} AAN observed that there are ‘few obligations’ placed on the Taliban in the Agreement, adding that Taliban prisoner release deals also led to concerns of a return to violence.\textsuperscript{118}

As of mid-June 2020, the Afghan government said to have released 3 000 prisoners, while the Taliban has freed 500. President Ghani also announced the decision to release additional 2 000 in order to pave the way for peace talks with the group.\textsuperscript{119} However, at the time of finalising this report, there was

\textsuperscript{109}Ruttig T., US-Taliban Agreement Still in the Air: Disputes about a ‘ceasefire’ versus ‘reduction of violence’, AAN, 30 January 2020, last updated 9 April 2020 \url{url}

\textsuperscript{110}BBC News, Afghan conflict: US and Taliban sign deal to end 18-year war, 29 February 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{111}The full text in English of the US-Taliban agreement, referred in this report as the ‘Doha agreement’ is available at: AAN, Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America, 29 February 2019, \url{url}; For a detailed explanation of the Doha Agreement and stipulations, see: UNSC, Eleventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2501 (2019) concerning the Taliban, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{112}BBC News, Afghan conflict: US and Taliban sign deal to end 18-year war, 29 February 2020, \url{url}; Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, 3 March 2020, \url{url}; Zeino E., Peace versus Democracy? Afghanistan between Government Crisis and a U.S. Peace Deal with the Taliban, Pajhow, 6 April 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{113}US, CRS, Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy: In Brief, 1 May 2020, \url{url}, pp. 3-4; see also for further details on the deal’s provisions: Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, 3 March 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{114}The full text (in English, Dari, Pashtu) of the Joint Declaration between the US and the Afghanistan government is available at: AAN, Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan, 29 February 2020 \url{url}

\textsuperscript{115}Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, 3 March 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{116}Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, AAN, 3 March 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{117}Zeino E., Peace versus Democracy? Afghanistan between Government Crisis and a U.S. Peace Deal with the Taliban, Pajhow, 6 April 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{118}Afghanistan Times, More violence feared as freed Taliban inmates may return to the battlefield, 14 June 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{119}RFE/RL, Afghan President Says Taliban Prisoner Release To Be Completed Soon, 11 June 2020, \url{url}
reluctance among both Afghan and Western officials about releasing hundreds of Taliban prisoners considered as ‘too dangerous’.  

According to the Security Council, reporting in May 2020,

‘the Taliban remain internally disciplined enough to be a formidable fighting force, there are divisions within the group, which make compromise with its adversaries difficult, and its messaging remains hard-line. The group also appears well prepared for the 2020 fighting season and raising the tempo of its attacks on Afghan government targets while trying to avoid provoking the United States. Differences in interpretation of the agreement could lead to periodic crises in its implementation. Hard-line Taliban believe that they can and will still achieve their aims by force.’

At the time of drafting this report, there was little clarity as to the scope of the intra-Afghan negotiations. Five political groups put forward proposals, with the main themes being: ‘structural framework, phases of the negotiation process and institutional arrangements’.  

In mid-June 2020, the Taliban and the Afghan government finally agreed on Doha as the venue for their first session of high-level ‘intra-Afghan dialogue’, but held off confirmation pending disagreements over prisoner releases. At the beginning of July 2020, Abdullah Abdullah announced an official visit to Pakistan as part of the efforts to initiate the intra-Afghan talks, described as ‘imminent’.

1.1.4 International context

In 2017, the US decided to slow down its troop withdrawal and, in August 2017, President Donald Trump promised to deploy more American troops to Afghanistan to continue to train Afghan forces. However, in late December 2018, media reported that President Trump decided to withdraw around 7 000 troops from Afghanistan, about half of the remaining US force there. As of December 2018, there were an estimated 14 000 US troops in Afghanistan. Around 8 500 of them were part of the Resolute Support (RS) Mission, a 17 000-strong international NATO force tasked to train and advise the Afghan military. As of June 2020, the RS troops in Afghanistan were around 16 000, 8 000 of which were US troops. The total number of US troops present in the country at the moment of the Doha Agreement, in February 2020, was estimated to be between 12 000 and 13 000.

As part of the bilateral agreement signed between the US and the Taliban on 29 February 2020, the US agreed to reduce their troops from over 12 000 to 8 600 within 135 days (by mid-July 2020); NATO and other coalition forces would also reduce their presence proportionally; with the commitment of a total withdrawal of all US and NATO troops within 14 months (by April 2021), depending on ‘action on the obligations’ by the Taliban.

On 18 June 2020, the US stated they had fulfilled their commitment

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122 Adili A. Y., Hossaini K., Looking ahead to Intra-Afghan Negotiations: A scrutiny of different political groups’ plans for peace, AAN, 30 April 2020, [url](https://aan.org/en/content/looking-ahead-to-intra-afghan-negotiations)  
124 Tribune, Afghanistan’s Abdullah Abdullah to visit Pakistan soon, 5 July 2020, [url](https://tribune.af/2020/07/05/afghanistans-abdullah-abdullah-to-visit-pakistan-soon/)  
129 NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, June 2020, [url](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/section_27005_27011_27030_27040_27041_27042_27043_27044_/content/310983.htm) p. 1  
130 Ruttig, T., From Doha to Peace? Obstacles rising in the way of intra-Afghan talks, AAN, 3 March 2020, [url](https://aan.org/en/content/from-doha-to-peace-obstacles-rising-in-the-way-of-intra-afghan-talks)  
under the Doha Agreement of reducing their troops in Afghanistan to 8,600. As for the timeframe set for the full withdrawal of all US and foreign troops, US General Frank McKenzie, who oversees US forces in the region, said it was an ‘aspirational’ commitment.132

In June 2020, NATO said they would reduce their troops from around 16,000 to around 12,000 during the course of the following months, in a ‘step-by-step and conditions-based process, reflecting the progress seen on the ground’. At the same time, NATO Allies and Resolute Support Mission confirmed their financial support to the Afghan security forces until the end of 2020.133

In 2016–2017, Afghanistan’s relations with Pakistan were tense134 and remained tenuous in 2018.135 Both countries have been blaming each other for sheltering terrorists136 and escalating border tensions resulted in Pakistan building a fence on the border to prevent the movement of militants.137 USDOD noted that even though Pakistani military operations disrupted some militant safe havens, certain groups, such as the Taliban and the Haqqani Network enjoyed freedom of movement in Pakistan.138 Following Imran Khan’s inauguration as Prime Minister of Pakistan in August 2018, the two countries continued efforts to improve their relations.139 As part of a ‘confidence-building measure’ and showing that Pakistan opted for a constructive role in the Afghan peace talks, Islamabad released Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar who had been imprisoned since 2010. Mullah Baradar was appointed as a new leader for the Taliban’s political office in Qatar, effectively making him the chief negotiator on behalf of the insurgent group for the peace talks with the US.140 However, in January 2019, President Ghani suggested that Pakistan was a safe haven for militants and their cross-border activities by saying that the ‘keys to war are in Islamabad, Quetta, [and] Rawalpindi’.141

During the US-Taliban negotiations, Pakistan played a key role helping to bring the Taliban to the table.142 In January 2019, during a visit to Pakistan, US Senator Lindsay Graham openly acknowledged Pakistan’s efforts to help the Afghan peace process.143 Pakistan’s foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi took part at the signing of the agreement in Doha, ‘warmly congratulating both sides’.144

Signs of improvement in the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan reportedly came with the visit by Pakistan’s military and intelligence chiefs to Kabul on 9 June 2020, which was described as an ice breaker for the relations between the two countries.145 The visit occurred within the context of intra-Afghan peace dialogue which was set to start in mid-June.146 At the beginning of July 2020, Abdullah Abdullah announced an official visit to Pakistan as part of the efforts to initiate the intra-Afghan talks.147

In 2017, there were several accounts of both Russia and Iran actively supporting the Taliban.148 Although Russia denied organising talks between Taliban representatives and an Afghan delegation

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132 AP, US has hit agreed troop-cut target of 8,600 in Afghanistan, 18 June 2010, url
133 NATO, NATO-Afghanistan relations, June 2020, url, p. 2
134 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 3 March 2017, url, p. 4
135 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, url, p. 23
136 Daily Pakistan, Pakistan desires peace, stability in Afghanistan: Khawaja Asif, 2 September 2017, url
137 Dawn, Pakistan holds ‘keys to war’, says Afghan president, 31 January 2019, url
139 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, url, p. 7
141 Dawn, Pakistan holds ‘keys to war’, says Afghan president, 31 January 2019, url
142 Afzal M., Will the Afghan peace process be Pakistan’s road to redemption?, Brookings, 25 June 2020, url
143 VOA, Taliban, US Open Afghan Peace Talks in Qatar, 21 January 2019, url
144 Afzal M., Will the Afghan peace process be Pakistan’s road to redemption?, Brookings, 25 June 2020, url
145 Tribune, Afghanistan’s Abdullah Abdullah to visit Pakistan soon, 5 July 2020, url
146 AA, Pakistan’s military, intelligence chiefs visit Kabul, 9 June 2020, url
147 Tribune, Afghanistan’s Abdullah Abdullah to visit Pakistan soon, 5 July 2020, url
148 Business Insider, Russia appears to now be helping out the Taliban, 27 January 2017 url; Washington Post (The), Russia is sending weapons to Taliban, top U.S. general confirms, 24 April 2017 url; Wall Street Journal (The), Iran Backs Taliban With Cash and Arms, 11 June 2015 url; VOA, Afghan Lawmakers to Investigate Growing Ties Between Taliban, Russia and Iran, S
led by Hamid Karzai, Moscow hosted meetings on the peace process in November 2018 and February 2019 and according to RFE/RL it is ‘highly unlikely such a high-profile event would be allowed to take place in Moscow without the Kremlin's blessing’. Interviewed by the Washington Post, Carter Malkasian, a former senior adviser to American military commanders in Afghanistan, observed that Russia had cultivated relations with certain Taliban elements, mainly in northern Afghanistan, since the beginning of 2015. Russia’s interest in keeping relations with the Taliban was partly due to their concerns over the threat posed by Islamic State groups in the region, but also because of their desire to see the US withdraw from Afghanistan.

At the end of June 2020, the New York Times revealed that Russian military intelligence unit offered bounties to militias linked to the Taliban for killing US and coalition forces in Afghanistan. US intelligence officials told the New York Times that the White House had already been briefed about the intelligence and the US National Security Council had discussed this issue at an interagency meeting in late March 2020. Following this revelation, both Russia and the Taliban denied the existence of the bounty program. US President Trump and his aides denied being ever briefed on the intelligence.

USDOD reported that Iran continued to pursue economic ties with the Afghan government, through trade, border security, and investment in shared railroad infrastructure; while at the same time continuing to provide support to the Taliban. Tehran viewed the Taliban as a useful tool to resist US influence on its border. Providing military equipment to them was seen as putting enough pressure on the United States without the risk of military retaliation. Iran has tried to strengthen its relationship with some Taliban factions also through economic, diplomatic, and security activities. However, following the US-Taliban agreement in Doha, in Tehran there are fears that some of most extreme elements of the Taliban – mostly Sunni who are not well disposed towards predominantly Shia Iran – can take power in a new central government which might result from infra-Afghan talks.

In an article analysing the latest developments in Afghanistan, in the light of the US-Taliban agreement and its impact on the democratic achievements of the country, Dr Ellinoir Zeino, noted that ‘Afghanistan remains politically, militarily and financially dependent on foreign allies and vulnerable to external conflicts of power and interests.’

149 RFE/RL, ‘Intra-Afghan’ Talks Under Way In Moscow Amid Continuing Violence, 5 February 2019, url; Al Jazeera, Taliban: Russia meeting ‘not about direct talks’ with Kabul, 9 November 2018, url
150 Washington Post (The), Russian bounties to Taliban-linked militants resulted in deaths of U.S. troops, according to intelligence assessments, 28 June 2020, url
151 NYT, Russia Secretly Offered Afghan Militants Bounties to Kill U.S. Troops, Intelligence Says, 26 June 2020, updated 1 July 2020, url; NYT, Trump Got Written Briefing in February on Possible Russian Bounties, Officials Say, 29 June 2020, url; NYT, Suspicions of Russian Bounties Were Bolstered by Data on Financial Transfers, 30 June 2020, updated 3 July 2020, url
152 Washington Post (The), Russian bounties to Taliban-linked militants resulted in deaths of U.S. troops, according to intelligence assessments, 28 June 2020, url
154 USIP, Iran and Afghanistan’s Long, Complicated History, 14 June 2018, url
155 Foreign Affairs, What Iran Wants in Afghanistan, 8 July 2020, url
156 Zeino E, Peace versus Democracy? Afghanistan between Government Crisis and a U.S. Peace Deal with the Taliban, Pajhokw Afghan News, 6 April 2020, url
1.2 Actors in the conflict

1.2.1 Pro-government forces

Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)

The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) or Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) are comprised of the Afghan National Army (including the Afghan Border Force, Afghan Air Force, Afghan Territorial Army, Afghan National Civil Order Force), Afghan National Police (including Afghan Local Police), and the National Directorate of Security (including the Afghan Special Force). For more information on the Afghan security institutions, including their mandate and structure, integrity, and the main reported cases of violations perpetrated by these security forces, see EASO COI Report Afghanistan, State Structure and Security Forces, August 2020.

Pro-government militias

UNAMA defines pro-government armed group as follows:

‘An organized armed non-State actor engaged in conflict in support of the Government and distinct from Afghan national security forces and criminal groups. Pro-Government armed groups do not include the Afghan Local Police, which fall under the command and control of the Ministry of Interior. These armed groups have no legal basis under the laws of Afghanistan and are not within the formal military structures of the Government of Afghanistan. In some cases, armed groups receive direct/indirect support of Government of Afghanistan or other States. This definition includes, but is not limited to, the following groups: “national uprising movements”, local militias (ethnically, clan- or otherwise-based), and civil defence forces and paramilitary groups.’

A specific local security structure that has existed in Afghan society for hundreds of years is the arbaki, community or tribal armies. From the beginning of the insurgency, different paramilitary initiatives have been developed and formalised to support the Afghan government and assist the formal armed forces of Afghanistan. The government and international military forces have also relied on militias that are not part of any formal government entity, for conducting searches, night raids or executions. The formalised paramilitary initiatives have all ceased except for the ALP, now operating within the official security structures. The ‘term [arbaki] is now used for the ALP in many parts of the country.’

In 2015, the government developed a National Uprising Support Strategy to cover areas in Afghanistan where ANSF presence was limited. The NDS reportedly hired village or tribal elders to ‘propose “national uprising” group members, who NDS subsequently vets’. The strength of these armed groups varied from 22 to 500 fighters, commanded by NDS or ANP. The Afghan government, NDS and CIA are known to arm strongmen to fight the Taliban and other militants, but some militia leaders use their new power to fight local turf wars. According to the LA Times, various militias and personal armed groups also battle amongst themselves over political influence.

Reuters indicated that in the past years, more than 30,000 villagers were paid and armed by the government with the support of international forces to fight as militia groups against the Taliban across the country. Although the government disbanded militia groups and stopped paying them, many maintained their fight against the Taliban and ISKP. ‘The Taliban consider pro-government militia

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158 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url], p. 91
159 Seraj, A., Opinion: The Arbaki can secure Afghanistan better than the US, 5 November 2014, [url]; HRW, Just Don’t Call It a Militia, September 2011, [url], pp. 13-14.
160 HRW, Just Don’t Call It a Militia, 12 September 2011, [url]; Habib, E., The Morphing of the Andar Uprising: transition to Afghan Local Police, AAN, 2 April 2013, [url]
162 LA Times, Afghanistan tries to clean up its militias, 31 October 2016, [url]
forces a big threat because they have strong intelligence networks, often both sides know each other’s families."163

AAN’s co-Director Kate Clark described the Khost Protection Force as a ‘campaign force’ that was established after 2001 under international (CIA/US special forces) control. Similar militias include the Kandahar Strike Force and Paktika’s Afghan Security Guards. There are longstanding allegations against the Khost Protection Force of extrajudicial killings, torture, beating and unlawful detentions.164 UNAMA added that the Khost Protection Force functions outside of the regular military command and control structures.165 In April 2020, Kate Clark noted:

‘Despite the many pitfalls associated with local defence forces … when they work, they work extremely well, producing determined fighters with local knowledge who protect the civilians in their areas and often stand their ground more than regular troops because they have nowhere else to retreat to.’166

**International military forces**

UNAMA explains the scope of the term ‘International Military Forces’ as follows:

“‘International military forces’ include all foreign troops forming part of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission as well as US Forces-Afghanistan who, in addition to participating in the Resolute Support Mission, are also engaged in counterterrorism operations as part of Operation Freedom’s Sentinel. The term also encompasses Special Operations Forces and foreign agencies.”167

From 2010, there was a gradual transition of security responsibilities from international forces to ANSF.168 On 31 December 2014, ISAF’s mandate expired and on 1 January 2015, this led to the transition from NATO’s ISAF combat mission to a new non-combat mission, Resolute Support, with a focus on training, advising and assisting ANSF.169 According to NATO, in February 2020, the total Resolute Support Mission strength was 15,937, with the goal to train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces.170 In total, 38 countries contribute to RS with the US, Germany and the UK as the largest contributors.171

In March 2020, Stars and Stripes reported that the US troops have started to move out from their bases in Helmand (Bost Airfield), Laghman (Gamberi base) and Herat province.172 On 1 July 2020, USDOD indicated that nearly 13,000 US military personnel were serving in Afghanistan as part of the US Operation Freedom’s Sentinel (OFS) mission during the reporting period173, around 8,000 of them were assigned to the NATO RS mission.174 The USDOD added that by mid-July 2020, the number of US military personnel would reduce to 8,600 personnel in Afghanistan.175

163 Reuters, Taliban kill 14 pro-government militia in Afghanistan: Officials, 28 August 2019, [url]
164 Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, [url]
165 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url], p. 57
166 VOA, 26 pro-government Afghans killed in fighting, 21 April 2020, [url]
167 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015, February 2016, [url], p. 80
168 NATO, Inteqal: Transition to Afghan lead, updated on: 7 January 2015, [url]
170 NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, 18 June 2020, [url], p. 2
171 NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, 18 June 2020, [url], p. 1
172 Stars and Stripes, US troops have left bases in Helmand, Laghman provinces, officials say, 13 March 2020, [url]
173 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url], p. 10, footnote 3
174 NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, 18 June 2020, [url], p. 2
175 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url], p. 10, footnote 3
1.2.2 Anti-Government Elements

Information on the main Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) in Afghanistan, primarily the Taliban and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), including their *modus operandi*, structure, activities and targeted attacks can be found in *EASO COI Report Afghanistan, Anti-Government Elements (AGES), August 2020*.

1.3 Recent security trends and armed confrontations

According to ACLED data, between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 there were 15,287 security incidents recorded in Afghanistan, of whom 10,127 were coded as battles, 4,587 remote violence and 573 incidents of violence against civilians.

Figure 1. Afghanistan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data.

According to several UN reports, issued between June 2019 and June 2020, the security situation in Afghanistan remained volatile during the mentioned period. In their annual report released in February 2020, UNAMA indicated that:

‘there were significant fluctuations in violence throughout the year [2019], coinciding with gains and setbacks made during negotiations between the Taliban and the United States of America in Doha. The first half of the year was characterized by an intense campaign of airstrikes by international military forces and search operations by Afghan forces, particularly by the National Directorate of Security Special Forces.’

On 29 February 2020, the US and the Taliban signed an agreement for bringing peace to Afghanistan. After signing the deal, the Taliban almost immediately resumed and intensified attacks against ANDSF. The group carried out more than 4,500 attacks in 45 days across Afghanistan. According to several UN reports, issued between June 2019 and June 2020, the security situation in Afghanistan remained volatile during the mentioned period.
to the US, the Taliban have not launched any attacks on international forces since the deal was made in February; however, they have increased their attacks on Afghan government forces\textsuperscript{183}, with sources reporting over 76 attacks in 24 provinces within a week of signing the agreement.\textsuperscript{184} The US also resumed ‘defensive’ air strikes\textsuperscript{185}, the first of which came five days after the deal.\textsuperscript{186} AFP stated that since the US-Taliban agreement, Taliban attacks have been less frequent in cities but have continued to target Afghan government forces in rural areas; for example, a Taliban attack killed 11 pro-government militiamen in June 2020.\textsuperscript{187}

As indicated by the UN Security Council, on 19 March 2020, the Afghan acting Minister of Defence announced an ‘active defence posture’ in response to the Taliban attacks. ‘The day after high-profile attacks ‘high-profile attacks on 12 May targeting a hospital in Kabul and a funeral in Nangarhar, Mr Ghani announced that the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces would return to an “offensive posture”, with a resumption of operations against the Taliban.’\textsuperscript{188}

Between 24-26 May 2020, a three-day ceasefire was declared between the Taliban and the government on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr (Islamic holiday).\textsuperscript{189} After the brief ceasefire, sources cited by Long War Journal (LWJ) indicated that the Taliban increased their attacks again in June 2020, stepping up assaults on government forces.\textsuperscript{190} Tolonews cited the Afghan government claiming ‘the Taliban initiated on average 30 attacks on the Afghan security forces each day after the Eid-ul-Fitr ceasefire.’\textsuperscript{191} Within the first week of June, according to the MoI, 222 attacks were carried out in 29 provinces by the Taliban.\textsuperscript{192} In June 2020, Tolonews quoted Afghan officials stating that ANDSF and the Taliban were fighting each other in Takhar, Jawzjan, Paktia, Helmand, Ghur, Kunduz, Badghis, Kandahar, Samangan, Faryab, Ghazni, Logar, Herat and Badakhshan provinces of Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{193} Widespread fighting between the ANSF and AGEs over the control of the Afghan highways was also reported in June 2020. The source indicated that as a result of [continued] fighting between the Taliban and AGEs, insecurity has significantly increased on the highways, including on the Kabul-Logar-Paktia, Kabul-Baghlan, Baghlan-Kunduz, Pul-e Khumri-Samangan, Kabul-Jalalabad and Kabul-Kandahar highways.\textsuperscript{194}

### 1.3.1 Armed clashes and assaults

In 2019, UNAMA observed the lowest number of civilian casualties caused by ground engagements since 2013. During the period between 1 January to 31 December 2019, ground engagements in Afghanistan reportedly caused 3,057 civilian casualties, including 763 killed and 2,294 injured, which represents 10% decrease compared to 2018. However, ground engagement remained the second leading cause of civilian casualties after suicide and non-suicide IEDs attacks, which represents 29% of all attacks.\textsuperscript{195} During the first six months of 2020, between 1 January to 30 June 2020, ground

\textsuperscript{183} Reuters, Taliban Militants Kill Afghan Regional Police Chief in Latest Attack, in RFE/RL/Gandhara 8 May 2020, [url]

\textsuperscript{184} NYT, Taliban ramp up attacks on Afghans after Trump says “no violence”, 6 March 2020, [url]; Reuters, U.S. Forces conduct air strikes on Taliban in Afghanistan, 5 June 2020, [url]

\textsuperscript{185} Military Times, US resumes airstrikes against Taliban to halt attack on Afghan forces, 4 March 2020, [url]; See also: Reuters, U.S. Forces conduct airstrikes on Taliban in Afghanistan, 5 June 2020, [url]

\textsuperscript{186} Military Times, US resumes airstrikes against Taliban to halt attack on Afghan forces, 4 March 2020, [url]

\textsuperscript{187} AFP, Bomb Blamed on Taliban Kills 11 Pro-govt Afghan Militiamen, in RFE/RL/Gandhara, 6 June 2020, [url]; Attack blamed on Taliban kills seven Afghan policemen, in New International, 14 June 2020, [url]

\textsuperscript{188} UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for the international peace and security, A/74/897–S/2020/549, 17 June 2020, p. 5

\textsuperscript{189} Gandhara, Afghanistan’s mass release of Taliban prisoners revives peace process, but seen as “big gamble”, 28 May 2020, [url]; NYT, Afghans sides agree to rare ceasefire during Eid al-Fitr, 24 May 2020, [url]; BBC, Afghanistan: Taliban announce three-day Eid ceasefire with government, 24 May 2020, [url]

\textsuperscript{190} Roggio, B., Taliban ramps up attacks after ending unilateral ceasefire, 16 June 2020, [url]

\textsuperscript{191} Tolonews, After ceasefire, Taliban average “30 attacks per day”: sources; 4 June 2020, [url]

\textsuperscript{192} Tolonews, 171 Govt forces killed in a week in Taliban attacks: officials, 15 June 2020, [url]

\textsuperscript{193} Tolonews, ANDSF fighting Taliban in 15 provinces amid peace efforts, 26 June 2020, [url]

\textsuperscript{194} Tolonews, Fierce widespread fighting surges to control highways, 7 July 2020, [url]

\textsuperscript{195} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url], p. 68
engagements remained the leading cause of civilian casualties, which represented 35% of total civilian casualties (1,195 civilians casualties including 336 deaths and 859 injured).\footnote{196}{UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, midyear report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 5}

During the last quarter of 2019, Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) carried out 8,204 attacks in Afghanistan.\footnote{197}{SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 68; OFS, Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 1 October – 31 December 2019, 5 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 12}

In May, June and July 2020, several armed clashes took place between the Afghan government forces and AGEs, for example in Kunduz,\footnote{198}{ToloNews, “3 police, 5 Taliban killed” in Kunduz clashes, 15 May 2020, \url{url}} Paktia and Paktika,\footnote{199}{TKG, Clashes in Paktia and Paktika leave 35 Taliban fighters killed, 17 May 2020, \url{url}} Ghor,\footnote{200}{Ariana News, Nine police killed in Ghor, Kandahar clashes, 13 June 2020, \url{url}} Khost,\footnote{201}{Ariana News, Nine police killed in Ghor, Kandahar clashes, 13 June 2020, \url{url}} Kapisa,\footnote{202}{Ariana News, Kabul, Kapisa clashes, 15 June 2020, \url{url}} Kandahar,\footnote{203}{Ariana News, Nine police killed in Ghor, Kandahar clashes, 13 June 2020, \url{url}} Kapisa,\footnote{204}{Ariana News, Nine police killed in Ghor, Kandahar clashes, 13 June 2020, \url{url}} and Laghman.\footnote{205}{Khaama Press, Taliban militants suffer heavy casualties in Kapisa clashes, 15 June 2020, \url{url}}

### 1.3.2 Improvised Explosive Devices

Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are unconventional explosive weapons that can take any form and can be activated in different ways, targeting soldiers and civilians alike.\footnote{206}{SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 68; OFS, Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 1 October – 31 December 2019, 5 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 12} IEDs can be operated by the victim (Victim Operated IEDs) or by the attacker (Command-Operated IEDs). Command-Operated IEDs are radio or remote-controlled allowing operators to detonate a pre-placed device at a specific time. Victim-Operated IEDs can be activated in different ways, targeting soldiers and civilians alike.

Although pressure plate IEDs are typically used by AGEs to target security forces, they are planted on public roads routinely used by civilians. Accordingly, their use is inherently indiscriminate as the ‘effects cannot be directed against a specific target’.\footnote{207}{SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 68; OFS, Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 1 October – 31 December 2019, 5 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 12}

UNAMA indicated a surge in harm to civilians from non-suicide IED attacks during the period from 1 January to 31 December 2019, which caused 2,258 civilian casualties including 507 deaths and 1,751 injured. Attacks caused by these devices represented a 24% increase compared to 2018. 22% of overall civilian casualties were caused by Non-suicide IEDs, which is more than suicide attacks, including complex attacks as the second leading cause of civilian casualties behind ground engagements. The Taliban and Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP) reportedly increased their non-suicide IEDs attacks in 2019. ‘Civilian casualties attributed to the Taliban from this tactic increased by 21% whereas those attributed to ISKP increased by 183%’. Magnetic IEDs and remote controlled-IED attacks reportedly increased in 2019, which caused 48% and 38% more civilian casualties compared to 2018. In 2019, civilian casualties including 275 deaths and 375 injured were reportedly caused by pressure-plate IEDs, which is 14% decrease compared to 2018. 96% of these casualties were attributed to the Taliban, which represented 265 deaths and 356 injured.\footnote{208}{SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 68; OFS, Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, 1 October – 31 December 2019, 5 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 12}

According to UNAMA, during the period of 1 January to 30 June 2020, IEDs attacks were the leading cause of the civilian casualties by AGEs, which resulted in 688 civilian casualties including 217 deaths and 471 injured. The widespread use of pressure-plate IEDs (operating as improvised anti-personal weapons)
On 31 July 2019, a bus hit an IED on the highway between Kandahar and Herat, killing at least 34 civilians and wounding other 17, and on 4 January 2020, one civilian was killed when an IED attached to a vehicle exploded in 10th Police District of Mazar-e Sharif City, in Balk province. Recently, on 8 July 2020, a police vehicle was hit by an IED in Golaye (square) Jamhuriat in PD 11 of Kabul City.

In February 2020, the Taliban published a magazine titled *Haqiqat* (fact), in which it was indicated that an IED could be planted by the Taliban fighters on a public road to target the enemy as long as civilians are informed in advance.

### 1.3.3 High-profile attacks

During the period from 1 January to 31 December 2019, UNAMA documented 2,832 civilian casualties including 817 deaths and 2,015 injured, which involved deliberate targeting of civilians, with a 31% decrease compared to 2018.

According to UNAMA, in 2019, suicide attacks, including complex attacks by the Taliban caused 1,499 civilian casualties, including 165 deaths and 1,334 injured, which represents 133% increase compared to 2018. During the period of 1 January to 30 June 2020, UNAMA documented 342 civilian deaths and 428 injured caused by deliberate attacks on civilians, which represented 21% of the overall civilian casualties.

Recent security incidents with high-profile attacks in 2019 and 2020 include:

- On 13 June 2019, a suicide attacker, which targeted a police vehicle in Police District 6 of Jalalabad City, killed five civilians and four local police officers, and wounded at least 12 people, including three children and three police officers.
- On 12 July 2019, nine people were killed, and twelve others wounded after a child was used to carry out a suicide attack in a wedding party in Pachiragam district of Nangarhar province. Reportedly, a pro-government militia commander was the target and ISKP group claimed the responsibility for the attack.
- On 27 July 2019, two civilians were killed including a woman and 30 others were wounded when a motorcycle bomb targeted a Khost Provincial Force convoy in the eastern part of Khost City.
- On 1 September 2019, a suicide bomber targeted a security news conference in Kunduz City killing 10 security forces, including the Kunduz police spokesman and five civilians. According to the source, the mentioned conference was organised following a Taliban’s attack on Kunduz City from multiple directions, killing 10 security forces.

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211 Al Jazeera, Dozens of civilians killed as the bus hit a roadside bomb, 31 July 2019, url
212 Khaama Press, IED claims one death in northern Balkh province, 4 January 2020, url
213 Tolonews, Blast hits police vehicle in Kabul city, 8 July 2020, url
218 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 7-13, 13 June 2019, url
219 BBC, Afghanistan war: child used in suicide attack, 12 July 2019, url
220 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-1 Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, url
221 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, url
• On 11 September 2019, a religious scholar, Mullah Mohammad Agha, who owned a madrasa (koranic school) in the Bakhto-Tangi village of Shawalikot district in Kandahar province, was killed by the Taliban.222

• On 18 October 2019, sixty-two people have been killed and dozens injured by a bomb explosion during Friday prayers at a mosque in Haska Mina district of Nangarhar province.223

Another source also reported on the incident indicating that a suicide bomber killed at least 73 civilians including the only doctor of Jowdara village, his two brothers and his two songs, and two of the mentioned village’s teachers.224

• On 25 October 2019, two civilians and three members of the National Directorate of Security Special forces unit were killed when a suicide bomber targeted a convoy of the agency in Jalalabad City. The source also noted that six agents and 15 civilians were wounded in the incident.225

• On 7 November 2019, Taliban fighters shot and killed four members of the Paktia province judiciary, including three judges and a staff member of the secretariat of the Paktia court, in Mohammad Agha district, while the victims were on their way to Kabul in a private vehicle. During the year 2019, UNAMA documented 17 deliberate attacks against members of the judiciary causing 20 deaths and 11 injured.226

• On 5 March 2020, religious scholar Maulvi Noor Pacha Hammad was killed in PDS of Kabul City.227

• On 22 June 2020, five employees of the Attorney General’s Office (AGO), who were also part of the US-Taliban agreement implementation team, were killed in Deh Sabz area of Kabul province.228

• On 27 June 2020, two employees of Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), Fatima Khalil, a donor liaison officer, and Jawid Folad, a driver, were killed after their vehicle was hit by an IED in Butkhak square in Police District 12 of Kabul.229

1.3.4 Targeted killings and conflict-related abduction

During the period of 1 January to 31 December 2019, UNAMA documented 218 incidents of conflict-related abductions that affected 1,006 civilians and caused 50 civilian deaths and five injured. During the aforementioned period, there was a 46% decrease in the number of civilians abducted compared to 2018, however, the number of abductees who were killed remained at the same level as in 2018. All the abduction-related incidents were attributed to the AGEs including majority to the Taliban – with the exception of three abduction incidents, which were attributed to pro-government armed groups. These incidents included the abduction of humanitarian workers, deminers, and healthcare workers.230

During the first quarter of 2020, UNAMA reported ‘an increase in civilian deaths from intentional targeting of civilians’ compared to 2019.231

During the period of 1 January to 30 June 2020, UNAMA documented 28 verified incidents of abduction of civilians that caused 68 civilian casualties including 40 deaths and 28 injured, which represented a five-time increase compared to the same period in 2019. UNAMA expressed its worry

222 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, url
223 BBC, Afghanistan mosque bombing kills 62 people, 18 October 2019, url
224 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, url
225 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, url
226 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 44
227 Pajhwok Afghan News, Religious scholar shot dead in Kabul, 21 March 2020, url
228 1TV, Five AGO killed in an attack on Kabul outskirts, 22 June 2020, url
229 AIHRC, Killing of two AIHRC employees in Kabul, 27 June 2020, url
about the increase in abductions of civilians by the Taliban that resulted in ill treatment and summary executions.\textsuperscript{232}

During the second half of 2019, several incidents of targeted killings and conflict-related abductions were carried out across the country, mainly by the Taliban, including the killing of a teacher, students, an \textit{Imam} (religious scholar), protestors, government employees, members of the ANDSF and their relatives, a pro-government village elder, a human rights activist, civilians accused of cooperating with the government or NATO forces.\textsuperscript{233}

Recent incidents of targeted killings and conflict-related abduction include:

- On 2 January 2020, an employee of Radio Samoun was killed in Lashkargah City of Helmand province.\textsuperscript{234} Following the incident, the body of the victim was found and it was discovered he had been tortured and shot several times.\textsuperscript{235}
- On 1 February 2020, Kabul Now (local media) reported that women, including young girls, were exchanged for weapons in parts of Ghor province, and the widespread use of weapons has increasingly caused deaths amongst women in the province.\textsuperscript{236}
- On 18 February 2020, Abdul Rahim Azimi, head of primary court in Injil district in Herat province was killed in an ambush by unknown gunmen in Shaidae village of Injil district.\textsuperscript{237}
- On 3 March 2020, the Taliban shot and killed a former soldier who was travelling by public transportation in the village of Takht-e Pol in Obe district in Herat province.\textsuperscript{238}
- On 4 March 2020, the Taliban killed a civilian accused of theft in the village of Mosaferan in Obe district in Herat province.\textsuperscript{239}
- On 5 March 2020, a tribal leader was reportedly killed by the Taliban in Toti-Chi village of Golran district in Herat province.\textsuperscript{240}
- On 6 March 2020, the Taliban reportedly kidnapped and later killed one civilian in the village of Daryaban in Obe district in Herat province.\textsuperscript{241}
- On 7 April 2020, the Taliban kidnapped and killed an Afghan territorial army member on the way in the village of Qarchaghi of Qadis district in Badghis province.\textsuperscript{242}
- On 9 April 2020, the Taliban kidnapped and killed five employees of the Afghanistan central bank on the way between Islam Qala border pass and Herat City.\textsuperscript{243}
- On 10 April 2020, the imam and sermon of Hazrat Ali mosque in Farah province was killed by unknown gunmen.\textsuperscript{244}


\textsuperscript{233} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2, 8 August 2019, \url{https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/08/world/afghanistan/afghan-war-casualty-report.html}.

\textsuperscript{234} Khaama Press, Media staff killed in Afghanistan’s southern province Helmand, 2 January 2020, \url{https://khaama.com/media-staff-killed-in-afghanistans-southern-province-helmand/}.

\textsuperscript{235} Kabul Now, Women exchanged for weapons in parts of Ghor, 1 February 2020, \url{https://kabulnow.com/2020/02/01/women-exchanged-for-weapons-in-parts-of-ghor/}.


\textsuperscript{237} NYT, Afghan war casualty report: March 2020, 26 March 2020, \url{https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/26/world/afghanistan/afghan-war-casualty-report.html}.

\textsuperscript{238} NYT, Afghan war casualty report: March 2020, 26 March 2020, \url{https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/26/world/afghanistan/afghan-war-casualty-report.html}.

\textsuperscript{239} NYT, Afghan war casualty report: March 2020, 26 March 2020, \url{https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/26/world/afghanistan/afghan-war-casualty-report.html}.

\textsuperscript{240} NYT, Afghan war casualty report: March 2020, 26 March 2020, \url{https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/26/world/afghanistan/afghan-war-casualty-report.html}.

\textsuperscript{241} NYT, Afghan war casualty report: March 2020, 26 March 2020, \url{https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/26/world/afghanistan/afghan-war-casualty-report.html}.

\textsuperscript{242} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report, April 2020, 30 April 2020, \url{https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/30/world/afghanistan/afghan-war-casualty-report.html}.


\textsuperscript{244} Pajhwok Afghan News, religious scholar gunned down in Farah, 10 April 2020, \url{https://pajhwok阿富汗新闻.com/2020/04/10/religious-scholar-gunned-down-in-farah/}.  

\url{https://www.pajhwok阿富汗新闻.com/2020/04/10/religious-scholar-gunned-down-in-farah/}. 

\url{https://www.pajhwok阿富汗新闻.com/2020/04/10/religious-scholar-gunned-down-in-farah/}.
• On 15 April 2020, four youths were reportedly wounded in Gharghai district in Laghman province after the Taliban opened fire on individuals playing cricket.245

• On 16 April 2020, the Taliban fighters shot and killed an Afghan police officer on his way to work in the village of Tagob-Esmail in Qala-i Naw City in Badghis province.246

• On 27 April 2020, a Taliban sniper shot and killed two police officers and wounded another in the village of Mirza-Ali in Qadis district in Badghis province. The police were targeted when they were bringing water from a well.247

• On 30 April 2020, unknown gunmen reportedly killed a provincial court judge in Police District 12 of Herat City.248

• On 7 May 2020, the Taliban reportedly destroyed, in an attack in Kamanj area, a bridge on Harirod river that connected Herat with Ghor provinces. The source also indicating that the Taliban set fire to a telecommunication tower in Kamanj belonging to Etisalat telecom firm and cited Qurban Ali stating ‘the Taliban have warned all telecom companies in Ghor province they will destroy their telecom towers unless they shut them off at night.’249

• On 6 June 2020, the Taliban kidnapped and killed a civilian man in Shaidan village in Dow Lina district in Ghor province.250

• On 1 July 2020, Kabul Now cited Muhibullah Muhib, spokesman for Farah police chief, stating that a schoolteacher named Hamidullah Rahmani was killed by the Taliban in Dehak village of Farah City.251

1.3.5 Aerial attacks and bombings

According to UNAMA, 219 air strikes were carried out by pro-government forces in 2019, which caused 1045 civilian casualties, including 700 deaths and 345 injured, with a 3% increase compared to 2018. The source also indicated that 10% of the overall casualties in 2019 were caused by the air strikes.252 While SIGAR cited RS (Resolute Support) indicating that 2% of the civilian casualties were caused by air strikes in 2019.253

According to UNAMA, during the first half of 2020, civilian casualties caused by air strikes represented 9% of the overall civilian casualties. UNAMA indicated that there has been a 43% decrease in overall civilian casualties by air strikes during the mentioned period, due to an important reduction in activity by the international military forces following the signing of the US-Taliban agreement in February 2020.254 At the same time, UNAMA expressed concerns over the increase in civilian casualties caused by Afghan Air Force, noting that during the first six months of 2020 the number of civilian casualties caused by Afghan Force’s airstrikes tripled compared to the same period in 2019. More than half of civilian casualties caused by all pro-government forces’ airstrikes during this period were women and children, with 65% of civilian casualties from airstrikes caused by Afghan Air Force alone. Numerous airstrikes by Afghan Air Force hit residential buildings, for examples: on 20 May in Marayyan district of Jawzjan province, two airstrikes hit two homes killing six civilians, including three children, one woman and two men; on the same day in Khan Abad district of Kunduz province, an airstrike hit a home killing three civilians (two women and one man) and injuring five (four children and one woman);
on 24 June in Balkh district of Balkh province, an airstrike hit a home killing four civilians (two children, one woman and one man) and injuring five others, including two children.255

On 6 May 2019, between 30 and 45 civilian workers were killed, including children, in clashes and air strikes by foreign troops on drug production factories in Gulistan and Bakwa districts of Farah province.256 On 1 September 2019, 13 civilians were killed in an air strike in retaliation to the Taliban’s attack on Gorziwan district of Faryab province.257 During the same period and in the same district of Faryab province, 12 civilians were killed in a US air strike on three residential houses while backing the Afghan forces who were fighting the Taliban in the area.258

1.3.6 Search operations

In February 2020, UNAMA noted:

‘s’search operations are a military tactic used in Afghanistan by Pro-Government Forces to capture or kill persons they believe to be Anti-Government Element targets, usually involving entering and searching homes or other civilian structures, and often carried out at night. Often referred to as “night raids”’.259

According to UNAMA search operations, which are also referred as ‘night raids’ caused 2 % more civilian casualties in 2019 compared to 2018. UNAMA indicated that during the period between 1 January and 31 December 2019, night raids caused 360 civilian casualties, including 278 deaths and 82 injured, mainly by NDS, Khost Protection Force and Paktika-based ‘Shaheen Forces’.260 During the first quarter of 2020, UNAMA documented an important decrease in civilian casualties from search operations by ANSF.261

On 24 August 2019, one civilian was killed and four others were wounded, including two women and two children when Afghan and foreign forces carried out a night raid in the Babos area of Pul-e Alam district in Logar province.262 Similarly, on 11 August 2019, at least 11 civilians were reportedly killed in a night raid carried out by NDS Special Forces in the Kolalgo area of Zurmat district in Paktia province.263

1.3.7 Explosive remnants of war

According to UNAMA, Explosive Remnants of War refer to UXO (unexploded ordnance)) and AXO (abandoned explosive ordnance). During the period between 1 January and 31 December 2019, UNAMA documented 520 civilian casualties, including 149 deaths and 371 injured caused by explosive remnants of war, with a 6 % increase compared to 2018. UNAMA also indicated that

‘children continued to be disproportionately harmed by explosive remnants of war which represent a significant contributing factor to child disability. In 2019, children accounted for almost 78 per cent of all civilian casualties from explosive remnants of war, with 403 child casualties (113 killed and 290 injured) including 360 boys. Children who survive encounters

256 Pajhwok Afghan News, dozens of civilians, forces killed in Farah, 6 May 2019, url; UNAMA, protection of civilians in armed conflicts, special report: airstrike on alleged drug-process facilities, 5 May 2019, url
257 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, url
258 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, url
259 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 91
260 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 64
262 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, url
263 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 9-15, 15 August 2019, url
with explosive remnants of war live with lasting detrimental impact on their quality of life due to loss of limbs or eyesight, other serious injuries, and psychological trauma.\textsuperscript{264}

During the period of 1 January to 30 June 2020, explosive remnants of war caused 6\% of the overall civilian casualties. UNAMA documented verified 218 civilian casualties including 59 deaths and 159 injured (‘80\% of whom were children’) from explosive remnants of war during the mentioned period.\textsuperscript{265}

In February 2020, Tolonews cited Abdul Jalil Sediqq, head of Mine Action Coordination, stating that in 2019 in Afghanistan ‘more than 110 civilians have been killed and at least 130 others have been wounded over the past year due to mines and other explosive materials originating from the Soviet invasion-era.’\textsuperscript{266} On 9 June 2019, one child was reportedly killed, and seven others were wounded when an unexploded mortar shell, which children were playing with, exploded in the Charada area of Wayez district in Ghazni province.\textsuperscript{267} In a similar incident in Laghman province, on 15 April 2019, seven children aged under 15 were killed while playing with unexploded mortar shell.\textsuperscript{268}

1.4 Impact of the violence on the civilian population

1.4.1 Civilian casualties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Civilians killed</th>
<th>Civilians injured</th>
<th>Total civilian casualties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2020 1Q – 2Q</td>
<td>1 282</td>
<td>2 176</td>
<td>3 458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>3 403</td>
<td>6 989</td>
<td>10 392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>3 804</td>
<td>7 189</td>
<td>10 993</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>3 440</td>
<td>7 019</td>
<td>10 459</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>3 527</td>
<td>7 925</td>
<td>11 452</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>3 565</td>
<td>7 470</td>
<td>11 035</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>3 701</td>
<td>6 834</td>
<td>10 535</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
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<td>2012</td>
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<td>4 821</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>3 133</td>
<td>4 709</td>
<td>7 842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2 794</td>
<td>4 368</td>
<td>7 162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2 412</td>
<td>3 557</td>
<td>5 969</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Source: UNAMA Protection of civilians in armed conflict

In 2019, UNAMA documented 10 392 civilian casualties, including 3 403 deaths and 6 989 injured as a result of the armed conflict, with a 5\% decrease compared to 2018. This decrease was due to the reduction in civilian casualties caused by the Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP), while civilian casualties caused by other actors increased, notably by the Taliban and International military forces.\textsuperscript{269}

\textsuperscript{264} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 30-3; 89
\textsuperscript{265} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict, midyear report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, url, p. 4; 7
\textsuperscript{266} Tolonews, 100 of civilian casualties caused by unexploded ordnance in 2019, 20 February 2020, url
\textsuperscript{267} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 7-13, 13 June 2019, url
\textsuperscript{268} Salaam Times, Unexploded mortar shell kills 7 children in Laghman 15 April 2019, url
\textsuperscript{269} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 5
The third quarter of 2019 was ‘particularly violent’, registering ‘the highest number of civilian casualties of any quarter since UNAMA began systematic documentation in 2009’. The main factors of such as a spike in civilian casualties were suicide and non-suicide IED attacks by AGEs, primarily by the Taliban, along with election-related violence. In the first half of 2019, the number of civilian casualties attributed to pro-government forces was higher than the one caused by AGEs; this is ‘a trend that UNAMA had not documented before 2019’.270

According to UNAMA, in 2019, Anti-Government Elements (AGEs), were responsible for 62 % of civilian casualties including 47 % caused by the Taliban and 12 % by ISKP and the remaining 3 % to undetermined and other AGEs. IEDs used by AGEs in both suicide and non-suicide attacks remained the leading cause of civilian casualties in 2019 at 42 %.271 UNAMA indicated that 10 % of the overall civilian casualties in 2019 were caused by air strikes, with majority (72 %) attributed to international military forces. According to UNAMA, 28 % of the civilian casualties in 2019 were caused by pro-government forces, including 16 % by ANSF, around 8 % by international military forces, nearly 2 % by pro-government armed groups, and just under 3 % by undetermined or multiple pro-government forces.272

Pro-government armed groups caused 184 civilian casualties including 102 deaths and 82 injured in 57 incidents and were responsible for seven conflict-related abductions throughout 2019. This represents a 2 % increase in civilian casualties caused by pro-government armed groups compared to 2018 and doubled compared to 2017. Civilian casualties caused by pro-government armed groups occurred mainly in the context of ground engagements (40 %) and search operations (34 %). The majority of these casualties were caused by Khost Protection Force and Shaheen Forces in Paktia, Paktika and Ghazni provinces, while the remaining civilian casualties mainly occurred in Takhar and Baghlan provinces.273 In 2019, UNAMA verified 12 incidents involving 25 civilian deaths as a result of operations by Khost Protection Force. This shows a significant decrease compared to 2018.274 The majority of civilian deaths attributed to the Khost Protection Force were caused by intentional shooting, mostly during search operations.275 In 2019, UNAMA attributed 559 civilian casualties including 227 deaths and 786 injured to international military forces.276

In 2019, AGEs were the continuing cause of the majority of civilian casualties through indiscriminate and deliberate targeting of civilians, in violation of international humanitarian law. In its annual report on civilian protection, UNAMA documented 10 392 civilian casualties in 2019277; of those, 6 447 civilian casualties (1 668 killed and 4 779 injured) were attributed to AGEs278, in particular 76 % to the Taliban, 19 % to ISIL-KP, and 5 % to undetermined AGEs.279

As a reaction to the figures released by UNAMA in their 2020 annual report, the Taliban published a statement on their official website, Voice of Jihad, rejecting the UNAMA reporting as ‘completely discriminatory’. Citing data by their special commission mandated to collect, register and prevent civilian casualties, the Taliban claimed that 83 % of all civilian casualties in 2019 were caused by the US and Afghan government forces, contrary to what stated by UNAMA.280

SIGAR cited RS (Resolute Support) reporting 1 268 civilian casualties in Afghanistan during the first quarter (1 January – 31 March) of 2020, with 32 % decrease compared to the last quarter (1 October -

270 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, pp. 5-6
271 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 6
272 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, pp. 8, 10
275 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 57
277 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, pp. 5-6
278 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 32
280 Voice of Jihad, Reaction by spokesman of Islamic Emirate towards civilian casualty report by UNAMA, 23 February 2020, url
31 December) of 2019. RS reportedly attributed 88% of the civilian casualties to AGEs, including the Taliban that caused 37%, ISKP 10%, and unknown insurgents 41%. According to SIGAR RS attributed another 7% to pro-government forces, including 6% to ANDSF and 1% to International military forces, and 5% to other or unknown forces. 281

Between 25 and 29 June 2020, AIHRC reported several security incidents in different provinces of Afghanistan that resulted in civilian casualties including the recent attack [29 June 2020] in old Bazar of Sangin district in Helmand province where in a rocket attack 27 civilians have been killed and 35 injured. 282

During the first quarter of 2020, the conflict in Afghanistan continued to be one of the deadliest in the world for civilians. 283 Between 1 January and 30 June 2020, UNAMA documented 3,458 civilian casualties including 1,282 deaths and 2,176 injured, with a 13% decrease compared to the same period in 2019. 284 This overall decrease was due to the significant drop in civilian casualties caused by air strikes by international forces and reduced activity by ISKP. 285 At the same time, during the first quarter of 2020, UNAMA stated to be ‘gravely concerned with the acceleration in violence observed in March 2020, mainly by the Taliban against Afghan national security forces, and the consequent increase in the number of civilian casualties and harm caused, particularly in the northern and northeastern regions’. 286 According to SIGAR, during the second quarter of 2020, civilian casualties increased by nearly 60% compared to the first quarter of the year, and by 18% compared to the same period in 2019. 287

Following the signing of the US-Taliban agreement in Doha, various sources reported a spike in violence and civilian casualties. 288 Despite periods of reduction in violence, during the first six months of 2020, violence has continued, with civilians bearing the brunt. 289 A report by the co-Director of the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), Kate Clark, concluded that ‘the only civilians to have benefitted from the US-Taliban deal appear to be those living in Taleban-controlled areas’ where the US and Afghan forces took a ‘defensive stance’ and stopped air strikes and night raids; while elsewhere many civilians have seen renewed attacks by the Taliban, among fear of ‘possible intensifying conflict’. 290

UNAMA reported that, during the first six months of 2020, pro-government forces were responsible for 28% of all civilian casualties and remained responsible for more child deaths than AGEs. 291 International military forces were responsible for 3% of overall civilian casualties. 292 During the same period, AGEs continued to be responsible for the majority of civilian casualties, with a total 58%; of which 43% were attributed to the Taliban, 9% to ISIL-KP and 6% to undetermined AGEs. 293

281 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020 , url, p. 69
282 AIHRC, Civilian casualties in the cattle market in Sangin district of Helmand province and in some other provinces of the country, 30 June 2020, url
286 UNAMA, Afghanistan, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, First Quarter Report: 1 January - 31 March 2020, June 2020, url, pp. 1, 3
287 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, url, p. 65
290 Clark, K., Voices from the Districts, The Violence Mapped (2): Assessing the conflict a month after the US-Taliban agreement, AAN, 8 April 2020, url
Commenting on this latest reporting by UNAMA during an interview with EASO, on 27 July 2020, co-Director at the AAN Kate Clark noted that ‘government forces do not always discriminate in their targeting, as seen in the recent UNAMA Protection of Civilians midyear report which detailed civilian casualties resulting from indirect fire and air strikes. The ANSF have never taken civilian casualties seriously. They have never done proper investigations and compensation. There is rarely any disciplinary action.’

1.4.2 State ability to secure law and order

More detailed information on the state structure and governance in Afghanistan, including on state judiciary, its capacity, integrity, effectiveness in prosecution can be found in EASO COI Report Afghanistan, State Structure and Security Forces, August 2020.

The World Justice Project’s (WJP) Rule of Law Index 2020 ranks Afghanistan 122 out of 128 countries295, allocating it to the last place in the ‘order and security’ factor.296 In its report for the first quarter of 2020, UNAMA noted ‘an increase in civilian deaths from intentional targeting of civilians’, as compared to 2019, referring particularly to March 2020 mass-shooting incidents by ISKP and targeted killings, abductions, and planting of IEDs by the Taliban.297 Commenting on the deaths of at least 23 civilians during a market festival in Sangin district, Helmand province, on 29 June 2020, the spokesman for the National Security Council (NSC) said that 24 civilians were killed or injured daily starting from 22 February 2020.298 The Asia Foundation 2019 survey revealed that 74.5 % of Afghans often feared for their personal safety, which is a 3 % increase from 2018 and the highest rate since the start of the survey.299

UNAMA reported that judiciary sector employees remained targeted in 2019, as 13 judges, three judicial staff, and 19 prosecutors were killed during the year, noting that ‘no case of an attack against the judiciary was ever sufficiently investigated to indict the crime.’ In the situation of ‘poor security and direct threats to judges’, female judges, in particular, were reported to feel reluctant ‘to work in remote districts.300 According to the Government and Media Joint Committee, referred to by the UN Secretary General, 116 cases of violence against journalists and media workers, in which 10 persons were killed and 21 injured, were reported in 2019.301 For the period from 1 January to 30 June 2020, UNAMA reported on attacks by AGEs on religious leaders (18 incidents), healthcare personnel (13 incidents), judiciary members (11 incidents), civil society activists (9 incidents), NGOs’ staff (8 incidents), and journalists (3 incidents).302 As reported in local media, the recent cases of violence toward media workers, human rights defenders, including AIHRC, and NGO employees comprise—but are not limited to—assassinations by unknown armed men303, IED blasts targeting vehicles304, and killing of family members.305 In February 2020, as reported by the UN General Assembly Security
Council, the Afghan cabinet endorsed the regulation prepared by the Government and Media Joint Committee to protect journalists and media workers. The Council reported also on the arrest of eight out of 18 persons suspected in threatening AHRRC human rights defenders involved in researching the practice of bacha bazi in Logar province.306

Following the explosion in a Sikh temple in Shorbazar area of Kabul in March 2020, ‘Sikhs and Hindus’ accused the government of negligence, as reported by local media.307 Similarly, the explosion in Wazir Akbar Khan mosque in Kabul at the beginning of June 2020 was reported to cause ‘strong anger and a public outcry over the fragile security situation in the country’.308

During 2019 and up till the first months of 2020, the city of Kabul faced an increase in criminality309, which started occurring even in relatively safe central areas310, turning the city into ‘one of the most dangerous places for businessmen, foreigners, local officials and ordinary people’.311 As noted by Foschini, the rise in criminal incidents ‘reflects a geographic expansion as well as new forms of criminality, including more violent crime and an increase in drug related crimes’.312 Crime cases reported by media comprised kidnapping of adults313 and children314, robberies and burglaries315, murder316, gunfire317, and accidental killing during a gunfight between criminal groups.318 Foschini noted on extortion schemes (bagi gir) practiced by organised crime groups, which target ‘a range of businesses from petrol stations to factories’ and the ability of crime groups to recruit new members because of unemployment or underemployment among the young men.319 According to Foschini, Kabul police faced corruption and a lack of staff to investigate criminal cases. Moreover, Foschini reported on tight relations between criminals and the police in some of the neighbourhoods, which prevented legal prosecution.320

Besides Kabul, the cities of Jalalabad, Herat, and Mazar-e Sharif were reported to face the ‘similar spikes in criminal activity.’ Kunduz was reported to face a deterioration in security situation ‘due to a lack of governance, a resurgent Taliban and an increasing crime rate’, while police were reported to be unable to stop robberies and extortions in the city.321 Following a land-related conflict, the local media reported that residents of Balkh province ‘accuse[d] security organs of their failure to control

308 Tolonews, Burial Held for Imam Killed by Blast, Public Outcry Continues, 4 June 2020, url
Tolonews, Kabul Residents Call on Security Forces to Crackdown on Crime, 22 February 2020, url
311 Bakhtiar, D., Kabul Accommodate the Richest and the Poorest – Never Feel Secure, Daily Outlook Afghanistan, 22 March 2020, url
312 Foschini, F., Kabul’s Expanding Crime Scene (Part 2): Criminal activities and the police response, AAN, 21 February 2020, last updated 9 March 2020, url
313 Ariana News, Kidnapping Gang Arrested in Kabul, Businessman Rescued, 26 December 2019, url
Tolonews, Crimes in Kabul’s ‘Most Secure Areas’ Alarm Residents, 24 May 2020, url
316 Tolonews, Seven Members Of One Family Murdered In Kabul, 27 May 2019, url; NYT, They Fight Suicide Bombers. But Can Afghan Police Fight Crime? 8 February 2020, url; Tolonews, 2 Killed in Kabul Amid Rising Crime in City, 20 March 2020, url
317 Tolonews, Nine Men ‘Mysteriously’ Killed in Kabul, 16 February 2020, url
318 Tolonews, Crimes in Kabul’s ‘Most Secure Areas’ Alarm Residents, 24 May 2020, url
320 NYT, They Fight Suicide Bombers. But Can Afghan Police Fight Crime? 8 February 2020, url
the situation’. The 2019 Asia Foundation survey founded that 38 % of Afghans named criminals/thieves as ‘a threat to the local area’, which is a 50 % increase compared with 2018. According to the 2019 Asia Foundation survey, 57.5 % of respondents trusted the Afghan National Army (ANA): 53 % believed that it helped to improve security and 52 % said that was protecting civilians; almost 60 % stated ANA was ‘honest and fair’.

### 1.4.3 Socio-economic conditions

In 2019, the Afghan economy remained largely dependent on international grants, which—besides covering nearly half of the government budget—financed around 75 % of total public expenditure and nearly 90 % of security expenditure as of 2019. The country has one of the world’s lowest employment-to-population ratios and 21 % of the country’s working population are considered underemployed. The World Bank characterised 80 % of employment in Afghanistan as ‘vulnerable and insecure’ and consisting of self-employment, day labour or unpaid work. UNICEF estimated the number of children engaged in child labour at 60 000 in 2017 and reported that 30 % of children in Afghanistan were engaged in child labour as of 2019.

In 2019, UNOCHA estimated that over 80 % of Afghans lived on less than the internationally applied poverty line (USD 1.90 per day). Noting that the deterioration in welfare became more widespread across the country, the World Bank reported that rural poverty had consistently higher than urban poverty; as of 2019, 82 % of the rural population was defined as poor. The ongoing conflict and displacement, high levels of unemployment and lack of income, and natural disasters were named by UNOCHA among the key drivers of acute food insecurity. According to the data by the Afghanistan Joint Market Monitoring Initiative (JMMI) collected in June 2020 to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the Afghan market, there was a decrease in the demand for food and non-food commodities accessed by JMMI, which revealed that in the purchasing power of Afghan households had diminished. The literacy rate was reported to increase to the figures of 43 % for adults and to 65 % for the youth as of 2018; however, it remained disproportionately high among girls, particularly in rural areas.

According to Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS) of 2016-17, which remains the most recent data at the time of the writing, most housing in Afghanistan consisted of irregular, detached, or semi-
detached houses or regular detached houses. The survey found that the large majority (72%) of Afghanistan’s urban population lived in slums or inadequate housing while an average urban household size was estimated at 7.3 persons. The 2020 BTI report found that most Afghans lacked a safe water supply, adequate sanitation, and hygiene, and the vast majority of the Afghan population had limited access to electricity, especially in rural areas. Analysing the conditions for 2019, UNOCHA reported that only 67% of the population had access to at least basic (improved) drinking water services, with huge disparities between urban (96%) and rural (57%) population groups.

1.4.4 Refugees, IDPs, returnees

Afghanistan remains the second largest country of origin of refugees in the world, with 2.7 million refugees in the first half of 2019. The majority of registered Afghan refugees are hosted by Pakistan (1.4 million) and Iran (951 100).

Protracted international displacement has defined Afghanistan’s history for long. Reportedly a third of the population were displaced, in the years following the Soviet invasion of 1979. Of the millions that fled to Iran and Pakistan, some returned to Afghanistan in the early 1990s. Afghanistan’s civil war and the advent of the Taliban reignited a new exodus to neighbouring countries. The ousting of the Taliban in 2001 coincided with the beginning of a massive wave of returns to Afghans. Between 2001 and 2015, UNHCR assisted 4.8 million Afghans to return and many more are believed to have returned without official assistance.

According to UNHCR, the return of over 5.2 million Afghan refugees since 2002 assisted by the agency has been ‘the largest voluntary repatriation programme in UNHCR’s history’. While voluntary repatriation has decreased in recent years due to deteriorating security situation and a continued lack of capacity to absorb returnees, Afghan refugees have continued to return.

In 2016 there was a spike in returns, with about 1 million documented and undocumented Afghans returned to Afghanistan. Over 610 000 people returned from Pakistan and Iran in 2017. During 2018, a total of 805 850 returns were registered from Iran and Pakistan, of which 773 125 were from Iran. In 2019, about 500 000 undocumented Afghans returned from Iran (about 485 000) and Pakistan (about 18 800). In 2020 (between 1 January and 4 July 2020), IOM recorded a total of 363 963 returns to Afghanistan, over 362 000 of which from Iran, and over 1 880 from Pakistan.

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340 Afghanistan, NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, url, pp. 210-214; see also Afghanistan, State of Afghan Cities 2015, Volume One, 2015, url, p. 86-87
341 Afghanistan NSIA (CSO), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, url, pp. XXXIII, 26
345 UNHCR, Mid-Year Trends 2019, 10 March 2020, url, p. 6
346 World Bank, Fragility and population movement in Afghanistan, 3 October 2016, url, p. 1
347 Middle East Research and Information Project, Afghanistan’s Refugee Crisis, 24 September 2001, url
348 World Bank, Fragility and population movement in Afghanistan, 3 October 2016, url, p. 1
349 UNHCR, The Afghanistan Situation: Strengthening International Solidarity & Achieving Solutions, 6 July 2019, url
350 UNHCR, Afghanistan; Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration: A synopsis; January 2020, January 2020, url
351 UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, url, p. 6
352 UNHCR and IOM, Returns to Afghanistan in 2017: Joint IOM-UNHCR Summary Report, 28 February 2018, url, p. 4
As of 1 April 2020, the World Bank reported that the returns of an estimated 1.7 million documented and undocumented Afghan refugees during 2016-2017 remains a pressure on Afghanistan’s economy and institutions, stating that both ‘internal displacement and large-scale return [...] pose risks to welfare for the displaced and for host communities’ within a difficult economic and security context.356

Internal displacements

According to estimations by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre’s (IDMC) 2020 Global Report, Afghanistan rates fifth among the ten countries with the highest number of IDPs due to conflict and violence, and first for the highest number of people still displaced as a result of natural disasters. As of 31 December 2019, a total of around 4.2 million people were displaced in Afghanistan; of which around 3 million were displaced by conflict and violence and around 1.2 million by natural disaster, especially drought and floods.357

During 2019, due to escalating fighting between the government forces and the Taliban as well as attacks by other armed groups, the number of new IDPs caused by conflict and violence increased to around 461 000, bringing the total number of conflict-induced displacement to around 3 million, the highest figure on record for the country.358 Throughout 2020, both ongoing conflict and natural disasters have continued to drive displacement and humanitarian needs, and many remain displaced as conflict and poverty prevent them from returning to their areas of origin. Due to conflict in their areas of origin, about 111 000 of the 245 000 people displaced in the Western provinces in 2018-19 mainly because of drought, were still displaced as of April 2020.359

Displaced people often live in precarious situation due to inadequate shelter, condition of food insecurity, insufficient access to sanitation and health facilities, as well as a lack of protection.360 Vulnerability forces people, including IDPs, to resort to negative coping mechanism such as early/forced marriages, child labour and begging. UN OCHA noted that this situation has been exacerbated by COVID19. Insecure housing is a main source of vulnerability for many Afghan, particularly IDPs, returnees and women and the risk of eviction is considered ‘especially real’ for returnees and those unable to pay their rent due to COVID-19.361

Deportations and voluntary returns

In 2019, about 505 000 undocumented Afghans returned from Iran (485 000 circa) and Pakistan (19 800 circa).362 Out of the around 485 000 who returned from Iran, about 273 000 were deported. Among those returning from Pakistan, about 2 600 were deported.363 Between 1 January and 4 July 2020, IOM recorded about 103 000 deportations from Iran, and 77 from Pakistan.364

Forced deportations of Afghan refugees by Iranian authorities have long been reported.365 In the first quarter of 2020, according to media sources Iranian officials were forcibly deporting refugees on a

356 World Bank, Afghanistan Overview, last updated 1 April 2020, url
357 IDMC, 2020 Global Report on Internal Displacement, 28 April 2020, url, pp. 11-12, 102
360 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacements (as of 26 April 2020), Actual displacements between 1 January 2020 and 18 April 2020, url
361 UNOCHA, COVID-19 and the Afghanistan Response HRP Revision – June 2020, 8 June 2020, url, p. 6
365 HRW, Unwelcome Guests: Iran’s Violation of Afghan Refugee and Migrant Rights, 20 November 2013, url; VOA, Iran Continues Deporting Undocumented Afghan Refugees, 21 May 2017, url; Aman F. Afghan migrants: Unwanted in Iran and at home, Atlantic council, 15 May 2020, url
daily basis, and following the new US sanctions they threatened more deportations. In May 2020, Afghan authorities said they were investigating reports of Iranian border guards beating, torturing and then forcing into a river up to 70 Afghan nationals who illegally crossed into Iran. Authorities in the province of Herat said they had retrieved 12 bodies from the Harirud River. On 3 May 2020, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) issued a press release confirming that such incident occurred on 1 May 2020 in Karez-e-Elyas village of Gulran district in Herat.

In 2018, there was a massive increase of returns from Iran, compared to 2017, mostly driven by the political and economic issues of the country. In May 2018, US President Donald Trump decided to withdraw from the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers and to reimpose sanctions on Tehran. As a result, Iran’s currency weakened and unemployment rose. Since Afghans mostly work in Iran’s informal economy, the demand for their work declined drastically. The imposition of new US sanctions in January 2020, following an escalation of tension between the US and Iran, reportedly triggered more returns to Afghanistan, due to the rise of living and healthcare costs, scarcity of jobs and rising hostility from local population towards undocumented Afghans.

As of 14 March 2020, spontaneous returns from Iran have reached new record totals due to fears over the COVID-19 outbreak. Reporting data by the Border Monitoring Team of the Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR), IOM estimated that over 53,069 undocumented Afghans returned from Iran, showing a 171% increase from the previous week (19,562).

Pakistan hosted over 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees, as of 18 March 2020. However, the actual number of Afghan refugees in the country might be higher than the official numbers, according to the Executive Director of the Society for Human Rights & Prisoners Aid (SHARP), Liaqat Banori, interviewed during a fact-finding mission by the Belgian COI unit Cedoca in February 2020.

In 2016 there was a spike in returns, with a total of 620,000 Afghans returned from Pakistan. Human Rights Watch stated that, in response to several deadly security incidents and deteriorating political relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Pakistani authorities ‘mounted a concerted campaign to drive Afghans out of the country’ in 2016. Between August 2017 and February 2018, the Pakistani government, in close collaboration with the government of Afghanistan and with the

367 New Humanitarian (The), US-Iran tensions push Afghans home to conflict, 6 February 2020, url.
369 AIHRC, Press Release: Reported Abuse and Drowning of Afghan Refugees Aiming to Cross the Border to Iran, 3 May 2020, url.
371 RFE/RL, Things Are So Bad In Iran That Afghan Migrants Are Going Home, 1 August 2018, url.
373 CNBS, US slaps new sanctions on Iran following strikes on US targets, 10 January 2020, url.
374 In January 2020, Iranian general Qassim Suleimani, considered as Iran’s most powerful military commander, was killed by a US drone in Iraq; which resulted in an escalation of tension between the US and Iran. BBC, Qasem Soleimani: US kills top Iranian general in Baghdad air strike, 3 January 2020, url.
378 During the interview with Belgian Cedoca in February 2020, Liaqat Banori stated that there is no proper and reliable data available on the population of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. According to his opinion, the actual number of Afghan refugees could be higher than the numbers given by UNHCR and the Government of Pakistan. For more information, see EASO COI Report Pakistan: Situation of Afghan Refugees, May 2020, url, p. 17.
support of IOM and UNHCR, carried out a country-wide exercise to identify undocumented Afghans. Some 880,000 previously undocumented Afghan nationals were identified during the exercise. The goal of the documentation exercise was to provide undocumented Afghans with identification credentials that will allow legalise and regularise their stay in Pakistan for a limited period of time. UNHCR reported that a total of 13,584 Afghans returned from Pakistan in 2018, noting that this was 76% lower compared to the number of refugees who returned from Pakistan in 2017.

In June 2019, UNHCR, Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed on a 12-point joint declaration, in conclusion of the 30th Tripartite Commission Meeting reaffirming the commitment by the three parties ‘to uphold the principle of voluntary repatriation, in safety and dignity, under the Tripartite Agreement’. (For more information see Sections 2.3.2 Return of registered Afghan refugees and 2.3.3 Return of unregistered Afghan refugees in EASO COI Report, Pakistan: Situation of Afghan refugees, May 2020).

As a precautionary measure linked to the outbreak of COVID-19A, UNHCR temporarily suspended the return of registered Afghan refugees from Pakistan, Iran and other countries as of 4 March 2020. As of 30 April 2020, voluntary repatriation from Iran was resumed by UNHCR upon request by the Iranian Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs.

In a press briefing held in April 2020, UNHCR’s spokesperson Babar Baloch stated that the outbreak of COVID-19 and the lockdown of economic activities have left many Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan with an inability to meet even their most basic needs, and that Afghans continue to return from both Iran and Pakistan despite persistent risks and insecurity in Afghanistan. UNHCR’s spokesperson further warned that ‘a dramatic increase’ in returns could risk creating overwhelming pressure on medical and social services in Afghanistan, in a context of rising poverty levels and ‘hundreds of thousands of people’ already living in displacement sites. In their 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview released in December 2019, UNOCHA stated that ‘the return of hundreds of thousands of citizens of Afghanistan from Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and Europe each year, combined with the loss of remittances which are vital to the survival of their families at home, is having a de-stabilising impact on peace, prosperity and security in Afghanistan.

### 1.4.5 Children

With 48% of its population being younger than 15 years, Afghanistan is one of the four countries in the world with the highest proportion of persons under the age of 15. In June 2020, UN General Assembly Security Council reported that Afghanistan remained ‘the deadliest conflict for children’, noting that 3,410 grave violations against 3,245 children were verified in 2019. Save The Children listed Afghanistan as one of the ten worst conflict-affected countries to be a child, underlining that Afghanistan had the biggest figures for killed and injured children.

According to UNAMA, children accounted for 30% of all civilian casualties in Afghanistan in 2019, which was a 2% increase from 2018. In 2019, UNAMA documented 3,149 child casualties (874 deaths...
and 2,275 injured), which was a 3% increase compared to 2018. While AGEs were responsible for the majority of child casualties in 2019 (1,535 casualties), which was a 14% increase compared to 2018, child casualties attributed to PGFs revealed a 2% decrease (1,032 casualties). With the figure of 39% of 1,213 casualties (270 killed and 943 injured), the leading cause for child casualties in 2019 were ground engagements between AGEs and PGFs. The indirect fire caused ‘the vast majority of these casualties’, followed by non-suicide IED attacks by AGEs, which displayed an 11% increase compared to 2018. Suicide and complex attacks affecting children increased by 67% compared to 2018, causing 460 child casualties (61 killed and 399 injured). The Taliban was responsible for 352 (a 324% increase from 2018) and ISKP for 92 child casualties (a 39% decrease compared to 2018) of this type.

Although there was a decrease in child casualties from air strikes in 2019, the year still revealed ‘the second highest number of child casualties from air strikes over the last decade’, after record-high levels were documented by UNAMA in 2018. PGFs were responsible for 341 child casualties from air strikes: 69% were attributed to international military forces, 27% to the Afghan Air Force, and 4% to undetermined PGFs. Even with a 5% decrease from 2018, ‘children continued to comprise the majority of casualties’ (almost 78% or 403 casualties) from explosive remnants of war and landmines. Furthermore, UNAMA reported on 39 child casualties, more than twice as many as in 2018, resulted from ‘cross-border incidents in Kunar, Zabul and Khost provinces’ and attributed to Pakistani Military Forces.

In July 2020, UNAMA reported that 1,067 child casualties (340 killed and 727 injured) were documented for the first half of 2020: ground engagements were reported as the leading cause of child casualties, followed by IEDs and explosive remnants of war.

According to a survey conducted by Save The Children in April 2019 in selected districts of Kabul, Balkh, Faryab and Sar-e Pul provinces, children lived ‘in fear of explosives, gun violence and the sound of attack helicopters on their way to and at school’ as well as going to the market or playing outside. As noted by UNAMA, children injured by explosive remnants of war ‘live with lasting detrimental impact on their quality of life due to loss of limbs or eyesight, other serious injuries, and psychological trauma’. In its 2019 report, UNOCHA found that conflict and natural disasters destroyed ‘normal structures that protect children at national, local and community level’, leading to ‘a high risk of separation of children from their families, psychosocial distress, recruitment into the armed forces and armed groups (particularly for boys), exploitation of boys and girls through child labour, early and forced marriages (especially for girls), denial of education opportunities, and sexual exploitation’.

In June 2020, UN Secretary General reported that the ANA used six schools for military purposes while one school was used by the government and pro-government forces. UNAMA verified 70 cases that affected ‘access to education’ in 2019: these incidents included targeted attacks on schools, targeting of educational personnel, including killing, injury, and abduction, and threats against education facilities and staff. The eastern and central regions displayed the majority of incidents (18 each) and

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394 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, p. 21
397 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, p. 21
399 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, p. 21
400 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, p. 23
404 Save The Children, Many Afghan Children are Afraid to go Outside, New Survey by Save The Children Finds, 19 November 2019, url
405 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, p. 31
406 UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, p. 68
407 UN, Children and armed conflict, Report of the Secretary General [A/74/845-S/2020/525], 9 June 2020, p. 6
were followed by the north-eastern region (12 incidents). During the incidents, nine students were killed and 29 injured.\footnote{UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 27}

Noting that the numbers of child recruitment must be higher than documented, UNAMA reported on the recruitment and use of 64 boys in 2019: 58 by the Taliban, 3 by the Afghan national security forces, and 3 by pro-government armed groups (Afghan Local Police and pro-government militias). The Taliban was reported to use children to plant IEDs, transport explosives, assist in intelligence gathering, carry out suicide attacks, and participate in hostilities.\footnote{UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 24} In the period between 1 January and 30 June 2020, UNAMA verified the recruitment of 23 children by the Taliban: 22 of them were recruited in the north-eastern region and one in the eastern region. According to UNAMA, there was an increase in the number of reports received by the mission in the connection of recruitment and use of children by the Afghan national security forces across the country. While UNAMA was still working on the verification of the reports, the children were allegedly used by Afghan National Police and Afghan Local Police as bodyguards and drivers and were engaged in combat roles at checkpoints; cases of sexual exploitation, including \textit{bacha bazi}, were also reported.\footnote{UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, url, p. 20}

In 2019, documented cases of sexual violence were reported to affect 13 boys and five girls and were attributed to the Taliban (14), Afghan National Police (3), and Afghan Local Police and pro-government militia (1). Two boys were reported to be used as \textit{bacha bazi}.\footnote{UN, Children and armed conflict, Report of the Secretary General A/74/845-S/2020/525, 9 June 2020, url, p. 5-6} AIHRC reported on sexual abuse occurring in schools and other locations in Logar province.\footnote{UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary General A/74/753-S/2020/210, 17 March 2020, url, p. 10}

The Child Rights Protection Law was enacted by President Ghani in March 2019. Defining ‘a child as a person who has not “completed” the age of 18’, the law aims to end recruitment and use of children as well as the practice of \textit{bacha bazi}, which is in line with the 2018 revised Penal Code.\footnote{UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2019, February 2020, url, p. 23} However, in March 2020, the ANN researcher Rohullah Sorush noted that the ratification of the legislation to protect the rights of children by the Wolesi Jirga (House of People) remained blocked due to a disagreement over ‘the definition of a child’ as ‘a small group of MPs, mostly religious scholars and/or with a jihadi background’ saw ‘the definition of a child as under-18’ as a contravention to the \textit{sharia}.\footnote{Sorush, R., Child Rights Protection Law in Afghanistan: Can the parliamentary chaos be resolved, AAN, 18 March 2020, url}

\section*{1.5 Geographical overview}

\subsection*{1.5.1 Urban-rural divide}

According to the Afghanistan National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA), around 71 % of the population (23.4 million) is estimated to live in rural areas and 24.4 % (8 million) in urban areas in 2020-2021; 4.6 % (1.5 million) of the population is officially estimated to pursue a nomadic way of life.\footnote{Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, url, p. iii} According to NSIA, urban areas display a higher population growth because of rural-urban migration.\footnote{Afghanistan, NSIA, Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2018-19, July 2019, url, p. 2}

According to the researcher Antonio Giustozzi, Afghanistan’s history is characterised by a structural urban-rural divide. While urban centres became hubs for administration, market-driven methods of production, taxation, education, judiciary, and reforms, the rural population was left aside from these
developments, which caused a feeling of resentment in rural inhabitants.\textsuperscript{417} Several sources describe the rural population as ‘more conservative’ and ‘traditional’ with many living ‘in absolute or near-absolute poverty’\textsuperscript{418} and facing realities of war ‘as a part of daily life’\textsuperscript{419} in contrast with urban dwellers, who are ‘more liberal’, have more opportunities to gain income and include a class of urban elites and persons engaged in ‘family politics’.\textsuperscript{420}

Asia Foundation 2019 Survey found that 79\% of urban respondents and 73\% of rural interviewees indicated insecurity/crime as a reason for pessimism about the direction in which the country is going. Pessimism due to concerns with the economy was mentioned by 52\% of urban respondents compared with 38\% of those living in rural areas. At the same time, rural respondents cited lack of infrastructure and/or services twice as often as urban interviewees (8\% compared to 4\%). Foreign intervention was seen as a reason for pessimism by 8\% of rural and 3\% of urban respondents.\textsuperscript{421}

In 2015, the Taliban set as an objective to ‘capture and hold towns and provincial capitals’.\textsuperscript{422} Following attempts of capturing provincial centres like Kunduz City, Lashkargah in Helmand, Pul-e Khumri in Baghlan, Farah City, Tarinkot in Uruzgan, and Maimana in Faryab in 2015, 2016 and 2017\textsuperscript{423}, in August 2018 Taliban insurgents carried out a large-scale attack on Ghazni City.\textsuperscript{424} As reported by the UN Secretary General in February 2019, ‘the Taliban succeeded in temporarily capturing 21 district administrative centres throughout the year, the second highest level since the security transition to the Afghan forces at the end of 2014.\textsuperscript{425} At the end of August and beginning of September 2019, the Taliban conducted large-scale offensives against provincial capitals of Kunduz, Pul-e Khurmi, and Farah.\textsuperscript{426}

According to the 2019 Asia Foundation survey, feeling fear of the Taliban and ISIL was expressed by 93\% and 95\% of the respondents.\textsuperscript{427} Almost 69\% of the respondents said that the Taliban posed a threat in their local area; rural inhabitants (almost 76\%) saw a threat in the Taliban twice often than respondents living in urban areas (around 37\%).\textsuperscript{428}

\subsection*{1.5.2 Regional differences}

According to the June 2020 report by the UN Secretary General, the southern region saw the highest number of incidents between February and May 2020; second highest figures were documented by UNAMA in eastern and northern regions. Overall, the incidents taken place in these three regions accounted for 59\% of all incidents.\textsuperscript{429} In the course of offensives against provincial capitals of the provinces of Kunduz, Pul-e Khurmi, and Farah, conducted by the Taliban in August-September 2019,
the attack on Kunduz ‘had the largest impact on civilians’, causing 99 casualties (20 killed and 79 injured), 55 of which were attributed to the Taliban and 44 to the Afghan national security forces. While the fighting was reported to decrease to the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 ‘in line with seasonal trends during the winter months’, the provinces of Kandahar, Helmand, Nangahar, and Balkh were the most active conflict areas between November 2019 and February 2020. During the period between March and June 2020, ‘the highest amount of conflict activity’ was reported in the provinces of Kandahar, Helmand, Wardak, and Balkh.

As reported by UNAMA, ISKP maintained its presence in some areas in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar. Following the start of a military operation in Achin district, Nangarhar province, in November 2019, ISKP fighters in the eastern region were reported to surrender. Civilian casualties resulting from ISKP attacks were documented in Kabul, Ghazni, Herat, Laghman, and Khost provinces. USDOS reported that ISKP resumed ‘terrorist attacks against ANDSF and Coalition Forces’ in February 2020; moreover, in spring 2020 the group conducted several large-scale attacks in Kabul.

In communication with EASO in 2019, a military analyst specialising in Afghanistan-related issues noted that the Taliban and ISKP pursued different strategies. While the Taliban fighters focused their attacks mostly against security forces and/or Afghan government employees, trying to avoid ‘collateral damage’ among the civilian population, ISKP targeted also Shias and non-cooperating civilians, aiming to reach high numbers of civilian casualties, which allowed for a high number of ‘collateral damage’. As found in a research study on ISKP’s ‘Kabul cell’ published by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) in June 2020, the two groups had also different recruitment systems. While the Taliban recruited ‘typically’ unemployed, madrasa-educated young Pashtuns from rural communities, ISKP had cells in urban centres and recruited men and women from middle-class families, with many university students of non-Pashtun origin, predominantly from Kabul City and the surrounding urban centres of Parwan, Kapisa, and Panjsher provinces. According to the research, ‘with the exception of a minority made up of original Kabulis and a number of Uzbeks from Jawzjan, Takhar, and Faryab provinces in the far north of the country, the membership of ISKP’s Kabul cell is composed of youth from the areas of muqawamat (anti-Taliban resistance)’, who have either settled in Kabul or visit it regularly.

In 2019, the provinces of Badakhshan, Badghis, Farah, Faryab, Ghazni, Kunduz, Laghman, and Nangarhar were ‘the main provinces of origin and displacement for conflict-affected communities’.

### 1.5.3 Government versus Taliban control

As stated by the AAN co-Director Kate Clark in May 2017, many assessments of territorial control in Afghanistan were made in recent years. Besides the disagreement over figures, there were also debates over the definition of the word ‘control’; moreover, assertions were made about the meaning of ‘loss of government control’, partly linked to deliberate withdrawals to areas deemed to be of more strategic importance. As noted by ANN expert Thomas Ruttig, there are different counts of the

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433 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, pp. 36-37
434 USDOS, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, url, p. 18
435 Military analyst, confidential communication, 14 January 2019, in EASO, Afghanistan – Security Situation, June 2019, url, p. 58
436 Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, Peaceworks No 62, 1 June 2020, url, pp. 2, 11. The research is based on 65 interviews with current and former ISKP members, their families, and friends, conducted in Kabul city, the surrounding provinces, and the provinces of Nangahar and Kunar in November 2019.
437 Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, Peaceworks No 62, 1 June 2020, url, p. 12
438 UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, url, p. 67
439 Clark, K., Looking at the ‘Nicholson plan’: A bid to tilt the Afghan war in the government’s favour, AAN, 24 May 2017, url
number of districts, ranging from 379 to 407\(^\text{440}\), which has to be considered when analysing assessments by different sources.

As reported by UN Secretary General, on 31 December 2019, the Taliban allegedly captured Darzab district in Jawzjan province after the withdrawal of the ANDSF. The Taliban also took the control over Arghandab district, Zabul province, while the ANDSF recaptured Guzargahi Nur district in Baghlan province, which was held by the Taliban since September 2019.\(^\text{441}\) In June 2020, the UN Secretary General reported that neither PGFs nor AGEs ‘achieved any significant territorial gains’ between March and June 2020. In March 2020, the Taliban recaptured Yamgan district, Badakhshan province, while in April the ANDSF overtook the districts of Khamyab and Qarqin in Jawzjan province, held by the Taliban for around two years.\(^\text{442}\) In June 2020, USDOS reported that the Afghan government maintained its control in ‘Kabul, provincial capitals, major population centres, most district centres, and most portions of major ground lines of communications (GLOCs)’, while the Taliban threatened district centres and contested ‘several positions of main GLOCs’.\(^\text{443}\) According to the Afghan authorities, ‘the Taliban carried out 422 attacks in 32 provinces’ during the third week of June, killing almost 300 Afghan security personnel, making the week the ‘deadliest’ in the course of the conflict.\(^\text{444}\)

An assessment of the Long War Journal (LWJ) mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, considered 133 districts of Afghanistan (33 %) to be under the control of GoA or have undetermined status, 189 districts (47 %) to be contested, 75 districts (19 %) to be held by the Taliban; one district was assessed as ‘unconfirmable Taliban claim of control’.\(^\text{445}\) According to the population figures, 15 million people were living in areas controlled by GoA or having undetermined status, while 13 million Afghans found themselves in contested areas and 4.5 million in the Taliban-controlled areas.\(^\text{446}\)

### 1.6 Mobility

According to UNAMA report for 2019, Afghan people’s movement was restricted by ‘threats on major roads and highways’, including Taliban-organised abductions, which created a climate of fear.\(^\text{447}\) Highway 1, or Ring Road, which is the most important highway and connects Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif, Herat, and Kandahar\(^\text{448}\) was reported to be partly destroyed and contaminated with IEDs by the Taliban during the offensive on Ghazni City in August 2018.\(^\text{449}\) The Taliban blocked the parts of the road between Baghlan and Balkh during the attacks on Kunduz in 2015 and 2018.\(^\text{450}\) Following the August 2019 offensives on Dasht-e Archi district, Kunduz province, and Pul-e Khurmi district, Baghlan province, the Taliban was reported to have blocked roads to Highway 1 in the direction to Kabul for more than two weeks.\(^\text{451}\) In July 2020, local media reported that several parts of the Baghlan-Balkh Highway,

\(^{440}\) Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, url


\(^{443}\) USDOS, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, url, p. 18

\(^{444}\) France 24, Taliban killed 291 Afghan security personnel in past week: govt, 23 June 2020, url

\(^{445}\) LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., url. The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

\(^{446}\) LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., url. The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.


\(^{448}\) Diplomat (The), Kabul’s Plan to Realize Afghanistan’s Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, url

\(^{449}\) UN News, ‘No safe way’ into battle-scarred Afghan city of Ghazni to deliver aid as traumatized children search for parents, 17 August 2018, url

\(^{450}\) Hewad, G., The 2015 insurgency in the North (4): Surounding the cities in Baghlan, AAN, 21 October 2015, url; Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 ANA soldiers killed in Kunduz attack, 26 April 2018, url

connecting Kabul with northern and north-eastern provinces, were blocked due to the Taliban-initiated clashes.\textsuperscript{452}

In 2019 and the first part of 2020, the incidents affecting mobility comprised clashes between PGFs and AGEs\textsuperscript{453}, checkpoints\textsuperscript{454}, abductions\textsuperscript{455}, and killings.\textsuperscript{456} IEDs planted on roads and highways were reported to cause casualties among civilians\textsuperscript{457}, military\textsuperscript{458}, and police.\textsuperscript{459} Travellers were reported to face ‘taxes’\textsuperscript{460} charged along main roads, which became a source of revenue for the Taliban.\textsuperscript{461}

According to USDOS, drivers, including taxi, truck and bus drivers, reported on checkpoints ‘operated by security forces and insurgent groups, who extorted money and goods from travellers’.\textsuperscript{462} The local media specified that the cases of extortion at checkpoints established by ‘Taliban insurgents as well as government forces’ became frequent on the Kandahar-Kabul, Kandahar-Herat, and Kabul-Torkham Highways\textsuperscript{463}, cases of extortion were reported also, for instance, on the highway connecting Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province, and Dar-e Suf district, Samangan province\textsuperscript{464}, and the Baghlan-Balkh Highway.\textsuperscript{465}

According to the Asia Foundation 2019 survey, almost 80\% of Afghans reported ‘some or lot of fear when travelling from one part of the country to another’. Some or lot of fear when travelling was particularly expressed by interviewees of Uruzgan (89\%), Faryab (87\%), Sar-e Pul, Khost, and Ghazni (86\% each), and Kabul (85\%). Among women, 34\% reported a lot of fear when travelling; this figure was higher in Ghazni (66\%), Panjshir (57\%), and Bamyan (48\%).\textsuperscript{466} Referring to the 2018 WOA Assessment, UNOCHA reported that 61\% of displaced households in Hilmand, Uruzgan, Zabul, Khost, and Paktia said that women felt ‘less safe when travelling to or at specific locations’ or could ‘be subject/vulnerable to violence’.\textsuperscript{467}

Afghanistan’s major population centres can be reached either by land or by air.\textsuperscript{468} In more remote areas, road conditions are often bad and the roads ‘are regularly closed due to flooding, landslides, snow or avalanches in high altitude areas’. As noted by UNOCHA, such provinces as Baghlan, Kunar, Logar, Maidan Wardak, Nuristan, Panjshir, Samangan, and Sar-e Pul ‘have no functioning airstrips and air traffic is regularly interrupted by poor weather’.\textsuperscript{469}

According to the airport map produced by the Austrian Country of Origin Information unit in March 2019, scheduled passenger services to domestic and international destinations exist from Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, and Mazar-e Sharif while domestic airports with scheduled passenger function in the provinces of Farah, Helmand, Nimroz, and Uruzgan.\textsuperscript{470}

\textsuperscript{452}Tolonews, Taliban Attacks Stop Traffic on Northern Highway: Sources, 6 July 2020, \textit{url}

\textsuperscript{453}AA, Taliban, Afghan forces clash in Balkh province, 18 March 2020, \textit{url}

\textsuperscript{454}Tolonews, Taliban Attacks Stop Traffic on Northern Highway: Sources, 6 July 2020, \textit{url}


\textsuperscript{456}NYT, A Country Where Driving Makes You a Target, 26 December 2019, \textit{url}


\textsuperscript{458}GardaWorld, Afghanistan: Multiple IED attacks in Khost and Daikundi provinces April 21, 22 April 2020, \textit{url}

\textsuperscript{459}Tolonews, 3 Police Killed in Herat Roadside Mine Blast, 5 July 2020, \textit{url}


\textsuperscript{461}Salaam Times, Afghan forces move to secure highways against Taliban’s 'customs tax' extortion, 14 December 2018, \textit{url}


\textsuperscript{463}Tolonews, Drivers Outraged Over Extortion on Highways, 17 January 2020, \textit{url}

\textsuperscript{464}Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces, Taliban extort money on Mazar-Dara-i-Suf road, 9 December 2019, \textit{url}

\textsuperscript{465}Tolonews, Taliban Attacks Stop Traffic on Northern Highway: Sources, 6 July 2020, \textit{url}

\textsuperscript{466}Asia Foundation (The), Afghanistan in 2019: A Survey of the Afghan People, 2 December 2019, \textit{url}, p. 63

\textsuperscript{467}UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, \textit{url}, p. 69

\textsuperscript{468}EASO, Afghanistan – Security Situation, June 2019, \textit{url}, p. 65

\textsuperscript{469}UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview – Afghanistan, December 2019, \textit{url}, p. 11

\textsuperscript{470}Austria, BFA-Staendendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019, available upon request at \textit{url} (accessed by EASO on 25 March 2019)
Hamid Karzai International Airport (KBL), known as Khwaja Rawash Airport\textsuperscript{472}, is located at a distance of 16 kilometres from Kabul city centre.\textsuperscript{472} In November 2019, a suicide car blast near the airport caused civilian casualties.\textsuperscript{473} Kandahar Airport, named Ahmad Shah Baba International Airport and serving as the country’s second main airport, is situated 16 kilometres south-east of Kandahar City.\textsuperscript{474} Herat International Airport (HEA) is situated 18 kilometres south of Herat City.\textsuperscript{475} Mazar-e-Sharif International Airport (MZR), or Mawlana Jalaluddin Muhammad Balkhi International Airport, is located 8 kilometres from Mazar-e-Sharif.\textsuperscript{476} In January 2019, an air corridor connecting Mazar-e-Sharif and Europe via Turkey was opened for cargo flights.\textsuperscript{477}

\textsuperscript{471} Sweden, Lifos, Lifosrapport: Inrikesflyg, I Afghanistan (version 3.1), 2 July 2019, url, p. 4
\textsuperscript{472} Hamid Karzai International Airport, Hamid Karzai International Airport, n.d., url, (accessed 10 July 2020)
\textsuperscript{473} Washington Post (The), 12 killed in Kabul suicide blast, including children, 13 November 2019, url
\textsuperscript{474} Ahmad Shah Baba International Airport, n.d., url (accessed 10 July 2020)
\textsuperscript{475} Afghanistan, Civil Aviation Authority, Aeronautical Information Publication, Aerodrom (AD) Part 3, Edition 89-2020, 21 May 2020, url, p. 100
\textsuperscript{476} Afghanistan, Civil Aviation Authority, Aeronautical Information Publication, 21 May 2020, url, p. 241
\textsuperscript{477} Pajhwok Afghan News, Mazar-i-Sharif-Turkey-Europe air corridor formally opens, 9 January 2019, url
2. Regional description of the security situation in Afghanistan

2.1 Kabul City

2.1.1 General description of the city

Kabul City is the capital of Afghanistan and of Kabul province, of which it is a separate district alongside 14 others. Kabul City expanded from 12 districts or city wards to 22 urban districts, which coincide with Kabul’s 22 Police Districts (PDs). According to estimates for 2020-21 by Afghanistan’s NSIA, Kabul City has a population of 4 434 550. However, exact population figures are disputed and estimates range from 3.5 million up to a possible 6.5 million inhabitants in 2020.

Kabul is by far Afghanistan’s most populous and influential city, characterised by an unprecedented demographic and urban growth. Massive returnee populations, IDPs and economic migrants have spurred this rapid growth, but the city’s infrastructure has not followed at the same pace. According to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, the Afghan capital’s ‘rapid and uncontrolled urbanisation has created new economic and security challenges inside the city’, with ‘the residual urban social fabric that helped to preserve a certain social order, guaranteeing some degrees of security, now disappearing fast’.

As described by several sources, the main problems currently afflicting the Afghan capital are inadequate housing and sanitation, overstretched basic services and resources, unemployment, land grabbing, poverty, traffic and limited accessibility, severe air pollution and criminality.

Kabul City is laid out as a circle consisting of three concentric rings: the first one includes Shahr-e Kohna, the old city, Shahr-e Naw, the new city, as well as Shash Darak and Wazir Akbar Khan, where many foreign embassies, international organisations and offices are located. The second ring consists of neighbourhoods developed in the 1950s-1980s to host the growing urban population, like Taimani, Qala-e Fatullah, Kart-e Se, Kart-e Chahar, Kart-e Naw and the microraiions (Soviet-style residential

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478 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Kabul Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
479 REACH, Area Based Community Profile: Kabul, Afghanistan, December 2017, url, p. 3
480 Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, url, p. 10
482 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, url, p. 8
485 Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, url, p. 5; APPRO, Migration and Urban Development in Kabul: Classification or Accommodation?, October 2012, url, pp. 6-8; Foschini, F., Kabul’s Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today’s Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, url
487 Foschini, F., Kabul’s Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today’s Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, url
districts). The outer, growing ring of the city expanded rapidly after 2001, mainly housing Afghans who have migrated to the capital since then and some high-profile residential compounds. Kabul City hosts an airport served by international and domestic scheduled passenger flights.

Kabul is an ethnically diverse city, with communities from almost all Afghan ethnicities. Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluch, Sikhs and Hindus all reside there, with no group clearly dominating. According to Foschini, central Kabul is ‘cosmopolitan’ and more mixed than in the past, with the constant movement of residents having a disruptive effect on social networks. Districts in Kabul’s outskirts are ethnically more homogenous. As people tend to move to areas where they already have family or into particular districts as part of a larger group with the same ethnicity, different city neighbourhoods have become associated with different ethnic groups. In these densely populated areas, a sort of ‘village society’ has emerged, whose dwellers know each other and have more direct connections with their province of origin than with central Kabul.

Because of its high concentration of government buildings, international organisations, diplomatic compounds and national and international security forces, the capital has a distinct security outlook. In the wake of several attacks in January 2018, the approval of a new security plan for the Afghan capital was announced and the Kabul Enhanced Security Zone (ESZ) was established. New and improved security measures have been implemented since then -including: additional temporary checkpoints, access surveillance, additional road blockades and increased patrolling, increased reconnaissance and intelligence activities. Kabul’s new security measures were reported to have exacerbated the city’s traffic problems and caused protests among residents. In June 2020, the implementation of a new security plan for Kabul City was reportedly ordered by President Ghani.

### 2.1.2 Conflict background and actors in Kabul City

Although the Afghan capital is under government control, Kabul remains a target for AGEs who continue to carry out attacks in the city. According to AAN analyst Thomas Ruttig, suicide and complex attacks in urban centres like Kabul ‘do not directly change the balance of power on the

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489 Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, April 2017, url, p. 6; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, url, pp. 5-27
490 Hamid Karzai International Airport [website], n.d., url
492 Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, url, p. 3
493 Foschini, F., and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, url, pp. 6, 58
494 APPRO, Migration and Urban Development in Kabul: Classification or Accommodation?, October 2012, url, p. 8; IGC, Urbanisation in Fragile Societies: Thinking about Kabul, 4 December 2019, url
495 Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, April 2017, url, p. 7; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, url, p. 3
496 Foschini, F., Kabul and the Challenge of Dwindling Foreign Aid, USIP, 10 April 2017, url, p. 5; Osman, B., A Black Week in Kabul (2): Who Are the Most Likely Perpetrators?, AAN, 7 June 2017, url
498 Hamid Karzai International Airport [website], n.d., url
500 Frontier Post (The), Kabul’s New Security Plan Irks Residents, 23 February 2018, url; Tolonews, WAK Residents Bear The Brunt Of Tightened Security, 5 March 2018, url
501 South China Monitoring Post, Life Inside Kabul’s Fortified Green Zone for Foreigners, 19 March 2019, url; NYT, After Bombing, Afghans Demand That Foreigners Leave Their Neighbourhood, 4 September 2019, url
502 Tolonews, [Twitter], posted on: 30 June 2020, url
503 USDOOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, url, pp. 2, 18
battlefield, but do have propaganda impacts.\footnote{Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and the Intimidation Campaign, Landinfo, 30 August 2019, \url{https://landinfo.org/post/afghanistan-talibs-intelligence-and-the-intimidation-campaign/}, p. 13} USDOD describes the objectives of militant groups conducting suicide attacks in Kabul as attracting international media attention, creating the perception of widespread insecurity and undermining the Afghan government’s legitimacy as well as the population’s confidence in the Afghan security forces.\footnote{UNSS, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, A/74/897, 22 February 2020, \url{https://undss.un.org/content/afghanistan}, p. 6}


ISKP is reported to have maintained an active cell in Kabul.\footnote{USDO D, Lead Inspector General (IC) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom’s Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 April - 30 June 2019, 20 August 2019, \url{https://www.dodie.osd.mil/Media/Press-releases/2019/08/29/2019-RFDS-Operational-Report}, p. 14} According to analyst Borhan Osman, ISKP’s Kabul cell is an ‘almost entirely Afghan phenomenon’, recruiting urban youth from diverse socio-
economic backgrounds (often from middle class-families) in the capital and in the surrounding provinces of Parwan, Panjsher and Kapisa. In contrast to the usually reported pattern of Pashtun recruitment into Afghanistan’s militant extremist groups, a majority of Kabul’s ISKP cell’s members and supporters reportedly come from predominantly Tajik areas.\textsuperscript{518} Osman points at the scarcity of reliable information about the Kabul cell’s operational methods. Instructions to organise and carry out attacks in the capital have reportedly often been relayed directly to small ISKP leadership circles in Nangarhar province. According to senior Afghan security officials, all the ISKP-claimed attacks in the capital depended on the same supply and logistics chain from a single network, also used for attacks by the Taliban (including the Haqqani Network), likely having the support of corrupt government security figures. According to Osman, the Taliban’s limiting of attacks in urban areas in the months following the Doha Agreement with the US on 29 February 2020 seems to have encouraged ISKP’s Kabul cell to seize the opportunity to gain greater visibility and to cast itself as an alternative force to the Taliban.\textsuperscript{519}

ISKP reportedly applies an effective recruitment strategy (often online, through social media)\textsuperscript{520} in the capital, conducting outreach activities in religious and academic institutions, including Kabul University.\textsuperscript{521} University professors recruiting for ISKP and first-grade students joining their ranks reportedly give the militant’s group’s cell in the capital an elite character. Mid-career professionals, business owners and well-educated urbanites are mostly recruited for logistical, financial or communication roles, often leading a double life.\textsuperscript{522} According to analyst Osman, the growing appeal of ISKP’s Salafi-Jihadist ideology among urban Afghan youth may explain the militant group’s resilience. The search for ideological ‘purity’, commitment to rigidly practicing Islamic Law, support for an anti-Shia sectarian agenda, strong in-group solidarity and egalitarian behaviour, enthusiasm for a global jihad and the ‘fantasy of living under the caliphate’ are suggested as pull-factors attracting Kabul’s youth to ISKP. A growing dissatisfaction with the current elite and the status quo of the Afghan political system is indicated as a push factor driving urban youth to search for a radical alternative.\textsuperscript{523}

In March 2019, the Haqqani Network was described as ‘maintaining a significant terror network in Kabul’.\textsuperscript{524} In recent years, the network is believed to be responsible for several complex attacks on government and international targets in heavily populated areas of the city.\textsuperscript{525} In June 2020, the UN Security Council reported on a ‘tactical accommodation’ between the Haqqani Network and ISKP in Kabul, referring to a certain degree of ‘involvement, facilitation or technical assistance’ of the Haqqanis in ISKP-claimed attacks in the capital.\textsuperscript{526}

Attacks in Kabul City often remain unclaimed or are conducted by unidentified armed groups.\textsuperscript{527} Analysts highlight the challenge in assessing the credibility of claims or denials of involvement in certain attacks -referring to indications that diverse pro-ISKP groups claim attacks that have not been

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\textsuperscript{518} Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, June 2020, \url{https://www.usip.org/publications/bourgeois-jihad-young-middle-class-afghans-join-islamic-state}, pp. 3-4, 11-14
\textsuperscript{519} Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, June 2020, \url{https://www.usip.org/publications/bourgeois-jihad-young-middle-class-afghans-join-islamic-state}, pp. 9-10
\textsuperscript{521} VoA, Afghanistan University Teacher, Students Among IS Operatives Arrested in Kabul, 8 July 2019, \url{https://www.voanews.com/afghanistan/university-teacher-students-among-is-operatives-arrested-kabul}
\textsuperscript{523} Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, June 2020, \url{https://www.usip.org/publications/bourgeois-jihad-young-middle-class-afghans-join-islamic-state}, pp. 4, 15-20
\textsuperscript{524} LWJ, UN: Al Qaeda Continues to View Afghanistan as a ‘Safe Haven’, 5 March 2019, \url{https://www.lawandjustice.org/2019/03/18/al-qaeda-continues-to-view-afghanistan-as-a-safe-haven/}
carried out by them and the Taliban often denying their involvement in attacks causing high numbers of civilian casualties.\(^{528}\)

In terms of the presence of government security forces, the responsibility for Kabul’s enhanced security zone has been transferred to the Kabul Security Force (KSF). ANP forces maintain responsibility for security within the city, with the special Crisis Response Unit (CRU 222)\(^{529}\) addressing (high-profile) attacks. The independent ANA division for the capital (111)\(^{530}\) secures the perimeter of the city. The capital NDS corps ensures that intelligence sharing remains focused on the prevention of high-profile attacks.\(^{531}\)

According to AAN analyst Foschini, security concerns in Kabul are not limited to AGE attacks alone, but include a significant rise in criminality. Foschini relates Kabul’s surging crime scene to growing unemployment, combined with the increasing influence of heavily armed and politically connected criminal networks\(^{532}\), as well as the impact of changing patterns in the social behaviour of Kabul’s youth. Foschini differentiates between targeted killings disguised as criminally-motivated attacks and common criminality in the city\(^{533}\): home raids and personally-driven murders\(^{534}\) in central city areas that used to be considered relatively safe\(^{535}\), organised petty theft on public transport, armed robberies\(^{536}\) and violent car-jackings, an increase in narco-trafficking and drug-related crimes\(^{537}\) in several city areas and kidnappings\(^{538}\) and extortion\(^{539}\) by organised criminal gangs.\(^{540}\) According to UNHCR, kidnapping is a major concern for many Kabul citizens.\(^{541}\) Foreigners and wealthy Afghans are indicated as the main targets.\(^{542}\) Several sources report on an ineffective police response to Kabul’s rapidly expanding crime scene.\(^{543}\) According to Foschini, there is a ‘modus vivendi’ between police and criminals’ in many city neighbourhoods, with powerful and deeply-rooted (political) interests often resulting in impunity.\(^{544}\) Mid-July 2020, the ‘Security Charter - Mobilizing the People in the Fight against Crime’ program was launched by the Afghan government, intensifying operations against criminal gangs and armed robbers in the capital region.\(^{545}\)

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530 USDO, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, url. pp. 13, 58
532 Tolonews, Criminal Networks Have Political Support: Andarabi, 12 June 2020, url.
534 Tolonews, 4 Members of One Family Killed in Kabul, 19 January 2020, url.
536 Tolonews, University Professor Wounded as Armed Robbery Increases in Kabul, 8 January 2020, url; Khaama Press, KP Reporter Traumatized after Being Robbed at Gunpoint close to Kabul Police Station, 24 March 2020, url.
537 Tolonews, Interior Ministry Pledges Crackdown on Drug Dealers, 7 February 2020, url.
538 Pajhwok Afghan News, 6-Member Gang of Kidnappers Busted in Kabul: NDS, 26 December 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Girl Rescued, 2 Suspected Abductors Held in Kabul, 14 June 2020, url.
539 Tolonews, Concerns Rise on ‘Increasing’ Threats to Business Community, 23 April 2019, url.
541 Finland, FIS/Migrationsverket, Afghanistan: Fact-Finding Mission to Kabul in April 2019 - Situation of Returnees in Kabul, 15 October 2019, url. p. 6
545 Tolonews, Police Target Paghman Gang Accused of Robbing Kabul Residents, 17 July 2020, url.
2.1.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.1.3.1 General

According to UNAMA, over half of all civilian casualties from suicide attacks in 2019 were counted in 15 such incidents in Kabul City.\(^{546}\) Afghan government departments and officials, the Afghan security forces and high-profile international institutions, both military and civil, were reported as the main targets for AGEs in Kabul City.\(^{547}\) UNAMA also expressed its concern on the targeting of judges and prosecutors, health care workers, aid workers and human rights defenders.\(^{548}\) Additionally, a pattern of intimidation and violence faced by media workers and telecommunication companies was reported.\(^{549}\)

ACLED collected data on 142 violent events in Kabul City\(^{550}\) from 1 March 2019 to 30 June from reports in open sources, of which 49 were coded as ‘battles’, 71 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ and 22 as ‘violence against civilians’.\(^{551}\)

Figure 3. Kabul City - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data\(^{552}\)

After an increase in the first half of 2018\(^{553}\), the number of high-profile suicide and complex attacks in Kabul started to decrease from the second half of 2018 and further into 2019.\(^{554}\) According to the UN Secretary General, this can be attributed to successful interdiction efforts and enhanced security measures by ANDSF forces in the capital.\(^{555}\) As in the whole of Afghanistan, violence in Kabul intensified during the third quarter of 2019\(^{556}\), with several suicide and complex attacks in the city in the months...

\(^{546}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 39


\(^{548}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, pp. 7-8


\(^{550}\) ACLED does not differentiate between Kabul City and Kabul district.

\(^{551}\) EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul City; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url

\(^{552}\) EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kabul City, url

\(^{553}\) Ruttig, T., Five Questions to Make Sense of the New Peak in Urban Attacks and a Violent Week in Kabul, AAN, 5 February 2018, url; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report - Increasing Harm to Afghan Civilians from the Deliberate and Indiscriminate Use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED’s), October 2018, url, pp. 4-5


\(^{556}\) NYT, Violence in Afghanistan Worsens as U.S.-Taliban Talks Plod On, 7 August 2019, url
of July, August and September. In the last quarter of 2019, as well as in the first months of 2020, fewer attacks were carried out in the capital. Since the second quarter of 2020, violence has reportedly increased. In June 2020, Tolonews reported on 30 magnetic IED and roadside bomb blasts in the Kabul City area between 20 March and 31 May 2020.

Examples of suicide and complex attacks carried out in Kabul City during the reporting period included: an ISKP-claimed suicide attack and subsequent siege targeting the Ministry of Communication in April 2019, causing more than seven casualties; a Taliban-claimed suicide attack against NGO Counterpart International in May 2019, killing 8 civilians and injuring 27; a Taliban-claimed complex attack on the logistics and engineering department of the Ministry of Defence in July 2019, causing a large impact on surrounding houses, businesses and schools, resulting in 151 civilian casualties; an unclaimed attack near the gates of Kabul University, in July 2019, resulting in more than 40 casualties; an ISKP-claimed suicide bombing of a bus with employees from the Ministry of Petroleum and Mines, also in July 2019, killing at least 11 and wounding dozens; a Taliban-claimed suicide bombing targeting the Green Village compound in the east of the city in September 2019, resulting in at least 16 people killed and injuring more than 100; an unclaimed attack targeting the maternity ward of an MSF hospital in the Hazara populated Dasht-e Barchi neighbourhood, in May 2020, killing 24 people and wounding another 23. According to analyst Borhan Osman, ‘high-profile attacks have become less frequent as the insurgents have shifted toward targeted assassinations’. An increase in targeted killings has been reported in Kabul City, with government officials referring to the rising fear of Kabul becoming like other Afghan cities, such as Kandahar in the south, where a decrease in large-scale attacks has been replaced by a sustained rise in targeted killings. Shootings by assassins riding on motorcycles, magnetic VBIEDs and remote IEDs are described as the tactics most often used for targeted killings. In May 2019, political advisor and former TV journalist Mina Mangal was assassinated by unknown assailants in PD 8. In separate attacks in July and November 2019, four prosecutors and one judge were killed.

561 Tolonews, 30 Blasts in Kabul in Over 2 Months, 2 June 2020, URL
562 Guardian (The), At Least Seven Dead as Attackers Storm Afghan Ministry Building, 20 April 2019, URL
564 RFE/RL, Six Killed, More Than 115 Hurt As Powerful Blast Rocks Kabul, 1 July 2019, URL; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, URL, p. 27
565 NYT, Suicide Bombing at University Kills 10 As Violence Surges in Afghanistan, 19 July 2019, URL
567 Guardian (The), Blast Hits Kabul after Briefing on US-Taliban Deal to Withdraw 5,000 Troops, 3 September 2019, URL
569 Osman, B., Intensifying Violence Dulls Afghans’ Hopes for Peace, International Crisis Group, 5 July 2019, URL
570 Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on: 17 May 2020, URL
571 NYT, American Aid Worker for U.N. Is Killed in Afghan Capital, 25 November 2019, URL
573 Al Jazeera, Afghan Parliament Advisor and Former Journalist Killed in Kabul, 11 May 2019, URL
and injured in different city districts. In August 2019 and in May 2020, an ISKP-claimed roadside IED blast targeted two minibuses from private TV station Khurshid, resulting in 4 deaths and 10 people injured. In October-November 2019, the district chief of Jaghatu district (Wardak province), a high school principal, an employee of the Ministry of Finance, the Badghis provincial police chief and an intelligence agent were gunned down in different areas of Kabul city. Also in November 2019, a grenade attack targeted a UN vehicle in PD 9, killing a foreign UN worker and wounding several civilians. In March 2020, a Logar provincial council member was killed by unknown gunmen in PD 8, the female mayor of Wardak province was attacked by unknown gunmen in PD 5 and the female head of the NDS Gender Department died in a magnetic IED blast attached to her vehicle. In June 2020, the governor for Nuristan province survived an attack by unknown gunmen on his convoy and an AIHRC employee and her driver were killed in an IED explosion targeting their vehicle.

Several attacks in Kabul in 2019 and 2020 were directed against the Afghan security forces. For example: a Taliban-claimed attack on a police checkpoint in PD 7 in May 2019, causing several ANP casualties; two attacks targeting the Marshal Fahim Military University in PD 5 in May 2019 and in February 2020, causing more than a dozen casualties each; a Taliban-claimed car bombing targeting the police station of PD 6 in August 2019, killing at least 14 people and injuring 100 or more; a Taliban-claimed VBIED attack in September 2019 targeting an ANDSF checkpoint in a fortified area near the Green Zone, killing at least 10 civilians, 2 foreign troop members and injuring more than 40 people; a Taliban-claimed suicide car bomb targeting the Chaharay Afghan Special Forces base on the outskirts of the capital, also in September 2019, causing several ANA casualties; the shooting of several policemen by unidentified gunmen near Dehmazang Square in June 2020; and a roadside bomb targeting a police vehicle in PD 11 in July 2020. Afghan officials, cited by NYT, pointed out that attacks on military targets in the city often result in a significant number of civilian casualties.

In contrast to previous years, UNAMA documented a 35% decrease in civilian casualties from sectarian-motivated attacks (mainly attributed to ISKP) in 2019. The single most deadly incident documented by UNAMA in 2019 was an ISKP-claimed suicide attack on the Dubai City Wedding Hall in

574 Pajhwok Afghan News, Maidan Wardak Judge Gunned Down in Kabul, 2 July 2019, [link]
575 Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 Prosecutor Killed, Another Wounded in Kabul, 6 July 2019, [link]; RFE/RL, Two Federal Prosecutors Shot and Killed Near Kabul, 16 November 2019, [link]
576 Tonews, Explosion Targets Media Workers in Kabul, Kills Two, 4 August 2019, [link]; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [link], p. 45
577 RFE/RL, Islamic State Claims Blast That Killed Afghan Journalist, Technician, 31 May 2020, [link]
578 Pajhwok Afghan News, Jaghato District Chief Gunned Down in Kabul, 13 October 2019, [link]
579 Pajhwok Afghan News, School Principal Gunned Down in Kabul, 14 October 2019, [link]
580 Pajhwok Afghan News, Ministry Official Gunned Down in Kabul, 17 October 2019, [link]
581 Pajhwok Afghan News, Badghis Police Chief Gunned Down in Kabul, 24 October 2019, [link]
582 Pajhwok Afghan News, Intelligence Agent Gunned Down in front of Kardan University, 14 November 2019, [link]
583 Al Jazeera, Blast Targets UN Vehicle in Afghanistan Killing One Foreigner, 24 November 2019, [link]
584 Tonews, Logar Provincial Council Member Killed in Kabul, 8 March 2020, [link]
585 Tonews, Afghan Female Mayor Attacked in Kabul, 22 March 2020, [link]
586 Tonews, Female Head of NDS Gender Dept Dies in Kabul, 31 March 2020, [link]
587 Tonews, Nuristan Governor Survives Gunmen Attack in Kabul, 21 June 2020, [link]
589 Al Jazeera, Gunmen Target Policemen in Deadly Kabul Checkpoint Attack, 20 May 2019, [link]
590 Al Jazeera, Suicide Bomber Targets Afghan Military Training Centre in Kabul, 30 May 2019, [link]
591 Guardian (The), At Least 5 Dead in Suicide Attack on Kabul Military Academy, 11 February 2020, [link]
592 Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 Killed, 146 Wounded in Kabul Bombing, 7 August 2019, [link]
593 BBC News, Afghanistan Violence: Car Bomb Attack in Kabul Kills 10, 5 September 2019, [link]
594 Al Jazeera, Taliban Suicide Attack in Kabul Kills Afghan Troops, 12 September 2019, [link]
595 Tonews, Gunmen Kill Policeman, Wound 2 More in Kabul, 22 June 2020, [link]
596 Tonews, Blast Hits Police Vehicle in Kabul City, 8 July 2020, [link]
597 NYT, Violence in Afghanistan Worsens as U.S.-Taliban Talks Plod On, 7 August 2019, [link]
598 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [link], p. 47
PD 6 in August. The ceremony was mainly attended by Shi’a Muslims, resulting in 234 civilian casualties. In March 2020, ISKP claimed another sectarian-motivated attack in the capital: two gunmen opened fire on a ceremony commemorating the murder of ethnic Hazara leader Abdul Ali Mazari, causing more than a hundred civilian casualties. Since the second half of 2018, Hazara residents in western Kabul have reportedly been seeking to arm themselves, taking over responsibility for security in their areas.

In 2019, UNAMA documented a 48 % decrease in civilian casualties from attacks targeting places of worship and religious leaders. Several such attacks were reported in Kabul City. In May 2019, a Taliban-attributed IED explosion inside the Al-Taqwa mosque killed 3 civilians, including well-known religious leader Mauwlawi Rayhan, and wounded 34 people. Also in May 2019, unknown gunmen shot and killed Mauwlawi Kamawal, a prominent religious and academic scholar who had called on anti-government forces to stop waging war. According to NYT reporters, these kinds of attacks on religious leaders reflect an enduring Taliban strategy, targeting people with religious influence in order to ‘exert their power far from the battlefield and mute those who could question their legitimacy’. At the end of March 2020, ISKP gunmen stormed a Sikh temple and housing complex in the Shorbazar area, taking 80 people hostage, killing 26 and injuring 11 more in an hours’ long siege. Referring to this incident, UNAMA reported on an increase in civilian deaths from intentional targeting of civilians during the first quarter of 2020, as compared to 2019. In May 2020, a prayer leader was shot by unidentified gunmen in his mosque in PD 6. In June 2020, two explosions inside the Wazir Akbar Khan mosque in the city’s Green Zone and inside the Sher Shah Suri mosque in Kart-e Char resulted in the death of two prayer leaders and several civilians.

A general low interest in voting was reported in Kabul for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019, just over a fifth of registered voters actually voted in the capital. The deadliest election-related incident recorded in Kabul was an unclaimed complex attack targeting vice-presidential candidate Amrullah Saleh’s office of the Green Trend political party in July 2019, causing 71 civilian casualties. The UN Secretary General reported a high tempo of small-scale attacks to prevent or disrupt the 2019 electoral process, with the highest number of security incidents on election day in Kunduz and Kabul City. According to UNAMA, however, no mass-casualty incidents were recorded on 28 September. The Taliban reportedly warned students and teachers not to work as...

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602 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict First Quarter Report: 1 January - 31 March 2020, April 2020, p. 4
604 UNAMA, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, p. 46
polling site staff through ‘night letters’ in some neighbourhoods in Kabul.\textsuperscript{614} In March 2020, several ISKP-claimed rockets hit the sites where both President Ashraf Ghani and his rival Dr Abdullah Abdullah took the oath of office as president.\textsuperscript{615}

Since autumn 2018, ANDSF forces have begun a concerted effort to dismantle AGE groups active in and around the Kabul metropolitan area\textsuperscript{616} with a new Command of the Joint Forces established in June 2020.\textsuperscript{617} Examples of such military operations included: the arrest of six ISKP media activists in April 2019\textsuperscript{618}; the arrest of six ISKP members, allegedly involved in kidnappings, transferring munition and relocating of militants to Nangarhar, in June 2019\textsuperscript{619}, the detainment of four ISKP operatives, including a lecturer and graduates from Kabul university, in July 2019\textsuperscript{620}; a raid on three ISKP cells in PDs 8, 11 and 15 in August 2019, resulting in the arrest and killing of several ISKP members\textsuperscript{621}; the arrest of nine ISKP sympathisers, providing financial support to the insurgence group, in February 2020\textsuperscript{622}; several raids on ISKP and Haqqani hideouts in PDs 8 and 11 in May 2020, resulting in the arrest of three prominent ISKP figures, including a region leader, and the killing of several other militants\textsuperscript{623}, and the arrest of two ISKP-affiliates, allegedly planning attacks on a hospital and media outlet in the city, in July 2020.\textsuperscript{624}

2.1.3.2 Displacement

According to UNOCHA assessments, no conflict-induced displacement was reported from Kabul district\textsuperscript{625} between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020, while during that same period Kabul district received 4,062 conflict-induced IDPs. The IDPs arriving in Kabul district came from a range of different provinces, such as Badakhshan, Baghlan, Bamyan, Balkh, Daykundi, Faryab, Ghazni, Jawzjan, Kapisa, Kunar, Kunduz, Laghman, Logar, Nangarhar, Samangan, Sar-e Pul, Takhar and Wardak. The largest group came from Kunar province (679) (mostly from Chapadara district) in the first half of 2019 and from Baghlan province (651) (mostly from Dahan-e Ghori district) throughout the whole reporting period.\textsuperscript{626} Mid-March 2019, UNOCHA recorded a peak of 140 IDPs coming from Mardyan district in Jawzjan province. In the beginning of June 2019, UNOCHA registered a peak of 133 IDPs coming from Khwaja Umari district in Ghazni province, after the district was recaptured from AGEs.\textsuperscript{627} He IDPs who have so far arrived in Kabul district in 2020 are from the provinces of Nangarhar, Kunduz, Logar and Baghlan, as well as a peak of 336 individuals from the region of the central highlands (provinces Bamyan and Daykundi) in January and February 2020.\textsuperscript{628}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{614} Adili, A. Y. et al., Afghanistan’s Election 2019 (9): Presidential Poll Primer, AAN, 25 September 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{615} NYT, Ghani Takes the Oath of Afghan President. His Rival Does, Too, 9 March 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{617} Khaama Press, Command Joint Forces Established to Root Out Terror Cells, Criminal Gangs in Kabul, 4 June 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{618} Khaama Press, 6 ISIS Media Activists Arrested in Kabul City, 4 April 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{619} Tolonews, Afghan Forces Arrest Six Daesh Members in Kabul, 9 June 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{620} VoA, Afghan University Teacher, Students Among IS Operatives Arrested in Kabul, 8 July 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{621} Tolonews, Afghan Forces Raid Militants Hideouts in Kabul, 7 August 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{622} Khaama Press, NDS Forces Arrest 9 ISIS Sympathisers from a Landmark Mall in Kabul City, 12 February 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{623} BBC News, IS Regional Leader Sheikh Khorasani ‘Arrested in Afghanistan’, 11 May 2020, \url{url}; Tolonews, ‘Key’ Daesh Leaders Arrested in Kabul: NDS, 11 May 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{624} Tolonews, NDS Prevents Attacks Targeting Media Outlet, Hospital in Kabul, 7 July 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{625} UNOCHA does not differentiate between Kabul City and Kabul district.
\textsuperscript{626} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{627} UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kabul - Meeting Summary, 25 June 2019, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{628} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}
\end{footnotesize}
According to AAN analyst Foschini, ‘more than half of Kabul’s residents were not born there.’\(^{629}\) Based on data from the first half of 2019, IOM ranked Kabul district at the sixth place of the top 25 districts hosting most returnees and IDPs.\(^{630}\) The total number of IDPs in Kabul is not known, as movement to and within the city is fluid and many return regularly to their area of origin during more peaceful periods.\(^{631}\) In February 2019, news agency Reuters reported that an estimated 100,000 displaced people have joined Kabul’s urban sprawl.\(^{632}\) There are different categories of IDPs in the city: (1) those fleeing armed conflict and insecurity, (2) returnees who could not return to their area of origin and live in secondary displacement, (3) those displaced from rural areas because of natural disasters, localized conflicts or a shortage of work, essential services and food, and (4) migratory groups/nomads such as Kuchis and Jogis residing in the city because conflict disrupted their migration patterns and livelihood or because of increasing impoverishment.\(^{633}\)

IDPs in Kabul often settle in areas at the outskirts of the city, such as Bagrami and PDs 8, 12, 13, 16 and 21,\(^{634}\) often mingling with other vulnerable groups such as the urban poor, returnees and economic migrants. The lack of adequate land and affordable housing in the urban area forces most new and protracted IDPs in Kabul to reside in tents, mud brick and tarpaulin shelters in one of the more than 55 informal and illegal settlements around the city. These are often referred to as ‘(Kabul) Informal Settlements’, ISETs or KIS, varying in size from dozens to hundreds of dwellings and including some of the poorest and most vulnerable households in the city.\(^{635}\) In August 2019, news agency Al Jazeera reported on growing frustration among residents of Kabul’s IDP settlements, stemming from a steadily deteriorating situation.\(^{636}\) The IDPs arriving and residing in Kabul reportedly add pressure on the community, basic services and social infrastructure, strongly affecting the absorption capacity of the city.\(^{637}\) Afghanistan’s capital has been facing a severe water shortage for some years now, seriously affecting already vulnerable groups like displaced people.\(^{638}\) According to UNOCHA, this could be a potential source of future community tension.\(^{639}\)

With limited job opportunities, few or no social protection nets, poor shelter/housing conditions, impeded access to education and healthcare and the continuous fear of eviction, displaced families in the KIS-sites face precarious living conditions and increased protection risks in their daily life. They are often forced into secondary displacement and negative coping strategies like child labour, drug use/addiction, early marriage and reducing quantity and quality of food.\(^{640}\) In May 2019, inhabitants

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\(^{629}\) Foschini, F., Kabul’s Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today’s Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, \url{url}

\(^{630}\) IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results Round 8 March-June 2019, 30 September 2019, \url{url}, pp. 2, 6

\(^{631}\) Metcalfe, V. et al., Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability in Kabul, June 2012, \url{url}, p. 8; Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, \url{url}, p. 3; Foschini, F., Kabul’s Expanding Crime Scene (Part 1): The Roots of Today’s Underworld, AAN, 11 February 2020, \url{url}

\(^{632}\) Reuters, Life in Kabul’s Squatter Camps Highlights Challenge for Any Afghan Peace, 15 February 2019, \url{url}


\(^{634}\) Al Jazeera, ‘Poor People’s Eid’: How Kabul IDPs Welcomed Muslim Celebration, 12 August 2019, \url{url}


\(^{636}\) Kazemi, S. R., Blue Gold: The Quest for Household Water in Kabul City, AAN, 30 August 2018, \url{url}; New Humanitarian (The), As Afghanistan’s Capital Grows, Its Residents Scramble for Clean Water, 19 February 2019, \url{url}; Al Jazeera, War, Drought, Diplomatic Rifts Deepen Afghanistan’s Water Crisis, 5 May 2019, \url{url}

\(^{637}\) UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2020, 17 December 2019, \url{url}, p. 43

\(^{638}\) Reuters, Life in Kabul’s Squatter Camps Highlights Challenge for Any Afghan Peace, 15 February 2019, \url{url}; NRC and IDMC, Global Report on Internal Displacement - Grid 2019, May 2019, \url{url}, pp. 35, 94; NRC and IDMC, Stuck in the Mud: Urban Displacement and Tenure Security in Kabul’s Informal Settlements, 2019, \url{url}, pp. 2-4, 10-12, 14-16; Al Jazeera, Life in
from several of Kabul’s informal settlements reported on signs of change, with their living areas slowly becoming more developed and organised. The Afghan Land Authority Arazi, in cooperation with UN Habitat, has started a registration project of Kabul’s ISETs, adding to a growing database of city areas being formalised.

Apart from internal displacement due to conflict, Kabul City sees large flows of Afghan refugees returning from neighbouring countries (Pakistan and Iran) or from Turkey (after deportation from Europe) putting further strain on the city’s services and its reintegration capacity. Many returnees end up in the capital because of relatively higher security than in their regions of origin and because of expectations of more job opportunities, better support services and prospects of social acceptance. Few tensions are reported, but an increased pressure on local resources, jobs, services, and facilities that feeds fear among both returnees and host communities is outlined by several sources. Most returnees in Kabul City depend on relatives for accommodation and other in-kind support. The importance of social networks is reported as vital for returnees. When originally not from Kabul and without a safety net or extended family in the capital, returnees face difficulties supporting themselves, finding jobs or renting accommodation. Hazara returnees coming to Kabul can generally count on better support, through a range of sophisticated social networks within their well-organised and cohesive community. Several sources report on the risk of recruitment of IDPs or inhabitants of informal settlements in Kabul by AGEs and the possible radicalisation of returnees and people deported from Europe.
2.2 Badakhshan

2.2.1 General description of the province

Badakhshan province is located in the north-eastern part of Afghanistan and has borders with Takhar to the west, Panjshir to the south-west and Nuristan to the south and south-east and international borders with Tajikistan, China, and Pakistan. Badakhshan province is divided into the following administrative units: Arghanjkhwah, Argo, Baharak, Darayem, Darwaz (Marmay), Darwaz-e-Balla (Nesay), Eshkshmesh, Fayzabad, Jorm, Keshem, Khash, Khwahan, Kofab, Kohistan, Koran wa Munjan, Raghestan, Shar-e-Buzorg, Shignan, Shaki, Shuhada, Tagab, Teshkan, Wakhan, Warduj, Yaftal-e-Sufia, Yamgan (Girwan), Yawan, and Zebak. Most of the province is mountainous. The provincial capital is Fayzabad.

According to estimates for 2020-2021 by NSIA, formerly Central Statistics Organization), the province has a population of 1,054,087, 77,154 of whom live in the provincial capital, Fayzabad. The main ethnic groups in the province are Tajiks and Uzbeks.

As of July 2020, scheduled passenger services between Fayzabad and Kabul were provided.
According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Badakhshan is a region for poppy cultivation in northern Afghanistan.658 It is also a transit zone for drug trafficking.659 The province is rich in mineral resources.660 The drug trafficking combined with the presence of lapis lazuli and gold mines fuels, finances and adds complexity to the security situation.661 For example the Taliban’s fight for control of Yamgan was linked to the district’s proximity to Koran wa Munjan district, where a large lapis lazuli mine is located.662 They managed to capture it in July 2019.663

2.2.2 Conflict background and actors in Badakhshan

Between 1996 and 2001, Badakhshan was among the few areas in Afghanistan remaining beyond Taliban control. An AAN report published in 2017 highlighted that the Taliban had become increasingly successful in Badakhshan since 2015, partly because of a changed recruitment policy which is – contrary to the Taliban strategy of the 1990s – more affirmative towards local non-Pashtuns, in particular Tajiks. Another reason for the Taliban’s successes in Badakhshan were political dynamics which have long been dominated by struggles between local powerbrokers.664

Due to the remoteness of the area, the Taliban have created bases for smuggling networks and financial operations in the north-east.665 As of 2 July 2020 an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Arghanjkhwah and Yamgan districts as ‘Taliban-controlled’, Fayzabad, Kofab, Shar-e-Buzorg, Wakhan, Yaftal-e-Sufia and Yawan districts as ‘government-controlled’ and the remaining districts in Badakhshan province as ‘contested’.666

Besides local Taliban fighters, Tajik, Uzbek, Uyghur667, and to a lesser extent Russian and Turkmen nationals were reportedly fighting in several districts of the province in 2017668, and continued to be present in 2019 and 2020.669 According to a working paper by the NGO The Liaison Office and the Bonn International Center for Conversion, published in June 2017, foreign fighters and their families settled in Badakhshan as a result of a Pakistan Army operation in North Waziristan, Pakistan, in 2014.670 Reportedly, they were likely to belong to smaller anti-government armed groups, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Al Qaeda. Furthermore, foreign fighters such as the above mentioned Uyghurs are embedded within local Taliban structures, fighting alongside Afghan AGEs.671 The same

658 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url], p. 19
660 Samuel Hall, Review of Country Strategy Badakhshan and Takhar, October 2010, [url], p. 6
661 NYT, Captives or Defectors? Taliban Fighters Tell Conflicting Tales, 7 November 2019, [url]; NYT, A Desperate Battle, and a Victory for Now, at a Remote Afghan Outpost, 26 September 2019, [url]
662 RFE/RL, Taliban Takes District Headquarters, Says It Will Not Negotiate With Afghan Government Team, 28 March 2020, [url]
664 Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (1): A case study from Badakhshan, AAN, 3 January 2017, [url]
665 Washington Post (The), In Afghanistan’s northeast, fears of a Taliban return, 19 October 2019, [url]
666 LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url]. The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.
668 Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url], p. 27
669 NYT, A Desperate Battle, and a Victory for Now, at a Remote Afghan Outpost, 26 September 2019, [url]; Khaama Press, 2 Chechen militants killed, wounded in Badakhshan artillery strikes, 25 March 2020, [url]; Tolonews, Badakhshan Governor Claims Taliban Has Ties with Foreign Fighters, 10 April 2020, [url]
670 Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, [url], p. 27
source indicated that the Badakhshan Taliban are a comparatively heterogeneous movement, facilitating ‘[...] a hybridization of the local insurgency in the name of the Taliban’. 672 Afghanistan Analysts Network however also stated that ‘[...] reliably identifying and tracking foreign fighters is virtually impossible [...]’. And ‘determining those fighters’ actual origins is equally difficult.’ 673 According to information submitted to the UN Security Council for its June 2019 report, in Afghanistan Central Asian groups were under the direct operational and financial control of the Taliban, with about 50 fighters of the Islamic Jihad Group in Takhar and Badakhshan provinces. 674 According to the same report Al Qaeda was trying to strengthen its presence in Badakhshan, in particular in Shighnan district. Badakhshan was mentioned as one of the three provinces where most of the 240 officially reported Al Qaeda fighters operating in Afghanistan were located. 675 The June 2019 UN report also mentioned 400 foreign fighters for the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), operating in Badakhshan676, mainly in Warduj and Raghastan districts, with financing based in the latter. 677 The ministry of Defense confirmed the presence of ETIM in Afghanistan in December 2019 to the Afghan newspaper Etilaatroz, without specifying a region or the number of members. According to the Etilaatroz article the movement seems to be active in the north-east and in Badakhshan in particular. Both the provincial governor and the Taliban denied the independent presence of ETIM in Badakhshan or Afghanistan. While the governor claimed that Uyghurs operate under the Taliban umbrella, the Taliban themselves dismissed reports of ETIM activity in Afghanistan as propaganda, meant to cause distrust. 678

A 2017 analysis of ISKP in Afghanistan indicates that ISKP presence was less intense in Badakhshan than in nearby Kunduz and Takhar provinces. 679 A researcher for the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS) mentioned small pockets of ISKP emerging in Takhar and Badakhshan provinces in August 2019. 680 Screenshots of ISKP tweets claiming the killing of a militia leader and former mayor in Fayzabad on 1 September 2019 and an attack on pro-government forces in Jorm district in May 2020 were shared on Twitter. 681

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Badakhshan province is under the responsibility of the 217th ANA corps after ANA’s 20th Division, previously under the ANA 209th Corps, was reassigned in April 2019 to become a new corps, the 217th Corps. 682 The 217th Corps has its headquarters in Kunduz. 683 As of 30 April 2020, Badakhshan province was still included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part

672 Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, url, p. 27
673 Callahan, T. and Marty, F.J., Tilting at Windmills: Dubious US claims of targeting Chinese Uyghur militants in Badakhshan, AAN, 19 March 2018, url
674 UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, url, p. 18
675 UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, url, p. 9
676 UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, url, p. 19
677 UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, url, p. 21
678 Etilaatroz, [informal translation ‘Uyghur fighters in Afghanistan: activity under the umbrella of Taliban, threat to China’], 14 December 2019, url
679 Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, url, p. 26
680 National (The), ISIS recruitment is growing in Afghanistan as US and Taliban work for peace, 8 August 2019, url
681 Dr Drexludddin Khan Spiveyzai (@Risbolensky), [Twitter], posted on 3 September 2019, url; FJ (@NatsecJef), [Twitter], posted on 16 May 2020, url; Intelligensia (@OSINT_313), [Twitter], posted on 16 May 2020, url; Valle, R., [Twitter ], posted on 16 May 2020, url
682 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2019, url, p. 78
of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North is led by German forces and has its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province.\(^6\)\(^8\)

A November 2019 New York Times article points at the frequency of switching sides between the Taliban, other anti-government armed groups and the Afghan security forces in the remote province of Badakhshan, causing old local rivalries to intertwine with new loyalties.\(^6\)\(^8\)\(^5\)

### 2.2.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.2.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 106 civilian casualties (48 deaths and 58 injured) in Badakhshan. This represents an increase of 68% compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were air strikes, followed by ground engagements and targeted/deliberate killings.\(^6\)\(^8\)\(^6\) Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 75 civilian casualties in Badakhshan in the first half of 2020, reporting an increase in civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020, compared to the first.\(^6\)\(^8\)\(^7\)

ACLED collected data on 276 violent events in Badakhshan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, 186 of which were coded as battles, 81 as explosions/remote violence and 9 as violence against civilians.\(^6\)\(^8\) Warduj stood out as the district where most incidents were reported with 54 violent events, followed by Jorm district with 40 violent events. No violent events were registered by ACLED in Eshkshmesh, Kofab, Shignan, Shaki and Wakhan districts.\(^6\)\(^8\)\(^9\)

![Figure 4. Badakhshan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data.](url)

ACLED coded 68% of the violent incidents in Badakhshan province as ‘battles’, mostly ‘armed clashes’, representing the most prevalent incident type in all of Badakhshan’s districts, with the exception of

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\(^6\)\(^8\)\(^5\) NYT, Captives or Defectors? Taliban Fighters Tell Conflicting Tales. 7 November 2019, [url](url)

\(^6\)\(^8\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](url), p. 94. No UNAMA data on civilian casualties in Badakhshan province were available for the first half of 2020.

\(^6\)\(^8\)\(^7\) SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](url), p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](url), p. 72

\(^6\)\(^8\) EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Badakhshan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](url)

\(^6\)\(^8\) EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Badakhshan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision Code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](url)

\(^6\)\(^8\) EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Badakhshan, [url](url)
Warduj, Jorm and Kohestan districts. The majority of those armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including police, military or NDS personnel and members of pro-government militias or so-called Arbakis (the term ‘Arbaki’ is often used locally and by the Taliban in reference to members of the Afghan Local Police or other pro-government militias) or attacks on military or police facilities such as checkpoints, military bases and sometimes attacks on vehicles.

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGES, such as the ones in the context of ‘Operation Pamir 207’ aimed at recapturing Warduj and Yamgan districts in the Summer of 2019 or an operation in Jorm district in April 2020 were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED. Most of the security operations in Badakhshan were carried out in September 2019 and April 2020. Some of these operations were backed by air strikes, for example in Warduj and Nesay districts in April 2020.

During an attack in Afghanjkhwah district on 29 March 2019, the Taliban were able to capture the district, before government forces recaptured it on 2 April 2019. The Taliban attacked the centre of Jorm district on 14 April 2019, the centre of Shuhada district on 19 June 2019, Nesay district on 13 October and 2 November 2019 and the centre of Warduj district on 18 September 2019. To put pressure on Taliban supply networks and finances, the security forces increased their operations in September and October 2019 in the north-east, with their main focus on Kunduz and Badakhshan. They were able to recapture three of Badakhshan’s districts, two of which, Warduj and Yamgan, having been under Taliban control for about four years, while Koran wa Munjan had been captured by the Taliban on 22 July 2019. On 7 September 2019, the security forces were also able to clear parts of

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691 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Badakhshan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
694 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url]; Xinhua, 2 soldiers, 14 militants killed in clashes in N. Afghanistan, 22 May 2020, [url]
695 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 10-16, 16 May 2019, [url]
697 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, [url]
698 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Badakhshan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
699 Afghanistan Times, Tens of rebels killed in Badakhshan, 11 April 2020, [url]; Pajhwok Afghan News, 27 Taliban killed in Badakhshan airstrikes: MoD, 11 April 2020, [url]
700 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 29-April 4, 4 April 2019, [url]; RFE/RL, Taliban Takes Control of District In Northeast Afghanistan Following Deadly Clashes, 30 March 2019, [url]
701 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 12-18, 18 April 2019, [url]
703 NYT, A Desperate Battle, and a Victory for Now, at a Remote Afghan Outpost, 26 September 2019, [url]
704 Xinhua, Afghan fighting gets intensified amid reported progress in U.S.-Taliban talks, 7 September 2019, [url]; RFE/RL/Gandhara, Taliban Capture Key Afghan Districts Bordering Central Asia, 10 September 2019, [url]; Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces retake Warduj district after 3 years, 7 September 2019, [url]; Tolonews, Yumgan District Under Forces Control After Four Years, 9 September 2019, [url]
705 Khaama Press, Taliban militants capture Kuran wa Munjan district of Badakhshan province, 22 July 2019, [url]; Khaama Press, Afghan forces recapture Kiran Wa Manjan district in Badakhshan province, 11 September 2019, [url]; Tolonews,
an important road leading to Tajikistan. However Badakhshan was one of the Taliban’s targets during their attacks in the north in March 2020. After the week of reduction in violence, which a local doctor said they used to prepare for their attacks, the Taliban managed to take control again of Yamgan district and of some villages in Jorm district, inflicting casualties on Afghan security forces there.

The majority of the 81 reported incidents of ‘explosions/remote violence’ registered by ACLED in Badakhshan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020, were ‘air/drone strikes’\textsuperscript{710} representing 18% of all violent incidents in Badakhshan province. Air strikes were mainly carried out in Warduj and Jorm districts. The majority of air strikes were carried out by Afghan forces, some were attributed to NATO forces.\textsuperscript{711} While those air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs\textsuperscript{712}, some also caused civilian casualties, for example in Warduj district on 14 October 2019, when an air strike killed eight civilians, including children.\textsuperscript{713} Incidents where the Taliban or unidentified armed groups used roadside bombs and IEDs to target Afghan and international security forces or government officials\textsuperscript{714}, represented 9% of all violent incidents registered by ACLED in Badakhshan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.\textsuperscript{715} Some of these incidents caused civilian casualties, for example the ISKP-claimed killing of militia leader and former mayor Nazir in Fayzabad district on 1 September 2019\textsuperscript{716} or in Khoestan district on 30 May 2020, when two shepherds were killed as a result of a roadside bomb detonating in front of a checkpoint.\textsuperscript{717}

\textsuperscript{706} NYT, A Desperate Battle, and a Victory for Now, at a Remote Afghan Outpost, 26 September 2019, url
\textsuperscript{707} Clark, K., Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (2): Assessing the conflict a month after the US-Taliban agreement, AAN, 8 April 2020, url
\textsuperscript{708} UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/582-S/2019/935, 10 December 2019, url, p. 6
\textsuperscript{710} These do not include air strikes carried out during operations categorised by ACLED under ‘battles’. For more information on ACLED’s methodology, please consult the introduction.
\textsuperscript{711} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Badakhshan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
\textsuperscript{712} UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, url, p. 10; Khaama Press, Airstrikes kill at least 40 Taliban militants in Badakhshan, 4 September 2019, url; Tolonews, 12 Taliban including Commander Killed in Badakhshan, 12 December 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 17 militants killed in Badakhshan airstrike, clash, 23 May 2020, url
\textsuperscript{713} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, url; Tolonews, Civilians Killed In An Airstrike In Warduj, Badakhshan, 14 October 2019, url
\textsuperscript{715} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Badakhshan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
\textsuperscript{716} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, url
\textsuperscript{717} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, url
Nine incidents categorised by ACLED as ‘violence against civilians’ included the killing of MoI officials\(^{718}\), the father of a police commander\(^{719}\) and a civilian accused of being a government spy\(^{720}\) by the Taliban or unidentified armed men. The Taliban killed four or five members of the same family in retaliation of the killing of two of their commanders\(^{721}\) or on suspicion of being government spies.\(^{722}\) Civilians were also killed in an attack, carried out by unidentified armed men on a mosque in Argo district in December 2019.\(^{723}\) Four civilians were killed for unknown reasons in a Taliban-controlled area in Arghanjkhwah district in June 2020.\(^{724}\) The Taliban accused government forces of killing civilians during attacks in Warduj district in October 2019 and January 2020 and in Fayzabad district in February 2020.\(^{725}\) In addition to the incidents registered by ACLED, UNAMA documented the beating and abduction of thirteen civilians in Warduj district on 30 May 2020. Seven were released in the following days while the other six were only released by 26 June 2020.\(^{726}\)

There were reports from the north-eastern region, including from Badakhshan province, about electricity and mobile phone networks being interrupted before and during the presidential election in September 2019.\(^{727}\) Due to conflict in Nesay district in January 2020 the main roads in some of the district’s villages were closed to the public prompting the government to plan cash distribution for food in those villages.\(^{728}\) Within the framework of its attacks on health care initiative, the World Health Organisation (WHO) registered the closure and reopening of a health facility in Badakhshan province in 2019.\(^{729}\)

### 2.2.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 33,208 displaced by conflict from Badakhshan province, 97% of whom were displaced within the province itself. The largest displacement occurred in Jorm district, mainly in August and September 2019, when conflict and clashes were reported in the Khustak valley.\(^{730}\) A large group was displaced within Warduj district in January 2020. Other large groups were displaced within Baharak district in August and September 2019, when military operations were carried out.\(^{731}\) UNOCHA reported displacement from Koran wa Munjan district to other districts within Badakhshan province but also to other provinces such as Parwan or Panjshir in July and August 2019, when the Taliban took control of the district centre\(^{732}\) and military operations followed.\(^{733}\) In the last days of June 2020 UNOCHA noted the ‘most significant

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\(^{718}\) Khaama Press, Taliban kills two MOI officials in Jorm district of Badakhshan, 14 November 2019, [url]

\(^{719}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Badakhshan detective chief wounded, father killed, 3 October 2019, [url]

\(^{720}\) NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url]

\(^{721}\) NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, [url]

\(^{722}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban execute 5 civilians over cooperation with govt, 23 June 2019, [url]

\(^{723}\) NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url]; Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 worshippers killed in Badakhshan gun attack, 12 December 2019, [url]

\(^{724}\) Ariana News, Taliban gunned down four civilians in Badakhshan: official, 2 June 2020, [url]; Pasbanan, Four member of a family were killed in Badakhshan, 2 June 2020, [url]

\(^{725}\) EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Badakhshan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]


\(^{727}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, [url]; Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetsituasjon og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url]; p. 10; NYT, To Disrupt Elections, Taliban Turn to an Old Tactic: Destroying Cell Towers, 2 October 2019, [url]


\(^{731}\) Tolonews, Large-Scale Military Operations Launched In Badakhshan, 29 August 2019, [url]


\(^{733}\) Tolonews, Large-Scale Military Operations Launched In Badakhshan, 29 August 2019, [url]
displacement since March 2020’ in three north-eastern provinces, including Badakhshan. Unconflict-induced displacement was registered from over half of Badakhshan’s districts, including Fayzabad.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 32,277 persons displaced by conflict to Badakhshan province, all displaced within the province. While in Warduj and Jorm, displacement occurred within the respective districts, Fayzabad hosted 22 % and Baharak 19 % IDPs from various districts within Badakhshan province.

2.3 Badghis

2.3.1 General description of the province

The province of Badghis is located in northwestern Afghanistan, alongside the border with Turkmenistan. Badghis province is divided into the following administrative units: Ab Kamari, Murghab (Bala Murghab), Ghormach, Jawand, Muqr, Qadis, and Qala-i Naw. The provincial capital is

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736 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url](https://www.unocha.org/afghanistan-afghanistan-conflict-displacement)
737 UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Badghis Province- District Atlas, April 2014, [url](https://www.unocha.org/afghanistan-badghis-province-district-atlas)
739 RFERL, Officials: 25 elite commandos killed in clashes with Taliban, 17 July 2019, [url](https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-officials-25-elite-commandos-killed-clashes-taliban/29940320.html)
The district of Ghormach reportedly became part of Faryab in 2017. In August 2018, the Peshawar-based daily newspaper, the Frontier Post reported that Ghormach’s administrative affairs would be shifted back to Badghis due to security reasons. The administrative status of the district seems to be disputed. AAN cited sources claiming that the central government had already transferred Ghormach to Faryab ‘temporarily’ in 2007, while the governor of Faryab did not consider Ghormach to be part of Faryab in 2010. NSIA estimated the population of Badghis province for 2020-21 at 549,583. According to the Office of the President of Afghanistan, Badghis is inhabited mainly by Tajiks, Pashtuns, Uzbeks, and Turkmens.

The roads of Badghis have been reported to be in bad condition and mostly unsafe because of insurgent and criminal activity. In January 2020, Wolesi Jirga (Lower House of the Afghan Parliament), approved two presidential decrees on obtaining USD 100 million loan for the construction of two roads: Kabul ring road, which will cost USD 70 million and the Armak-Qala-i Naw road in Badghis that will cost USD 30 million. The population relies entirely on rainfall for agriculture and drinking water and the food insecurity reached a crisis level. Drought and natural disasters made people in Badghis province vulnerable to recruitment by insurgents and militants due to the famine.

According to the UNODC Opium Survey, in 2018, opium poppy cultivation in Badghis province decreased by more than two thirds compared to 2017, mainly driven by drought, but also because UNODC counted the district Ghormach, which is a major poppy cultivating district, as part of Faryab in 2018. According to AAN, in 2019, opium-poppy cultivation in the four western provinces including in Badghis has decreased by 23% compared to 2018. On 23 June 2019, Afghan security forces reportedly seized a Taliban-related truck loaded with drugs on the Herat-Torghondi Highway, which came from Bala Murghab district of Badghis province.

### 2.3.2 Conflict background and actors in Badghis

According to the provincial profile of Badghis by AAN, Badghis was the first province of northern Afghanistan to be seized by the Taliban in late 1996. After the fall of the Taliban, several influential warlords ruled Badghis, among them Abdul Malik, Rashid Dostum, Juma Khan, and Ismail Khan. An EU-funded Emergency Response Mechanism (ERM) household assessment report of November 2018 indicated that the security situation has worsened in Badghis in 2018 due to fighting between

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741 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, 1 June 2020, [url](#), p. 41
742 Ali, O., Ruttiq, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan’s major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, [url](#), p. 15
743 Frontier Post (The), Ghormach falls to Taliban as ANA troops move to Maimana, 28 August 2018, [url](#)
744 Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, [url](#)
745 Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Badghis, 1 February 2017, [url](#)
746 AREU, The Political Economy of Education and Health Service Delivery in Afghanistan, January 2016, [url](#), pp. 44-46;
747 Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, [url](#)
748 Pajhwok Afghan News, Decrees on $100m loan for 2 projects approved, 6 January 2020, [url](#)
749 In 2019, Badghis was a drought-hit province (see: EEAS, Contribution from the European Union enhances resilience in Badghis Province, 28 October 2019, [url](#), which made people vulnerable to AGEs recruitment (see: National Geographic, In Afghanistan, climate change complicates prospects for peace, 3 February 2020, [url](#))
750 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 16
751 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17
752 AAN, New world drug report: opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, 25 June 2020, [url](#)
753 Salaam Times, Afghan border forces, police block Taliban drug trafficking route in Herat, 5 July 2019, [url](#)
754 Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, [url](#)
755 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Badghis Provincial Overview, n.d., [url](#)
insurgents and government forces in Jawand and Qadis.\textsuperscript{756} Since 2014, Badghis province has been a hotbed of fighting between the Taliban, IMU and ANDSF.\textsuperscript{757} Since 2016, Badghis was amongst the western provinces witnessing clashes between Taliban factions each loyal to a different commander.\textsuperscript{758} In July 2019, Khaama Press reported that Badghis province was one of the ‘relatively volatile’ north-western provinces of Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{759}

In October 2019, UNAMA, indicated that the four western provinces of Afghanistan including Badghis, in the recent years have experienced a growing number of insurgent activities.\textsuperscript{760} According to Etilaatroz, since March 2019, Taliban fighters continued their attacks on Bala Murghab district and extended their presence into Jawand, Ab Kamari, Muqur and Qadis districts, where intense clashes continued between the group and Afghan forces. The source quoted Ziaulhaq Ferozkohi, political activist in Badghis province, stating that [informal translation] ‘the Taliban control major territory in Badghis province including and entirely Bala Murghab District and its capital. Residents left the district, and only military outposts remained. The government control only the capitals of Qadis, Ab Kamari and Muqur Districts.’ According to the source, a security in-charge for Badghis, who did not want to be named, stated that [informal translation] ‘Taliban have been collecting 500 AFG (around 5 Euros) per month per family, and the group monopolised the pistachio farms’. The source also quoted Sharifullah Chamtoo, Badghis chief police, stating [informal translation] ‘all districts of Badghis province are under the government control.’\textsuperscript{761} While according to information contained in a LWJ map, Ghormach, Muqur and Bala Murghab districts of Badghis province were under the Taliban control, and Ab Kamari, Qala-i Naw, Qadis and Jawand districts were contested.\textsuperscript{762}

In December 2019, Taliban issued a statement claiming that they have taken the control of Bala Murghab district\textsuperscript{763} and in March 2020, a local news quoted Najmulddin Burhani the spokesman for Badghis Governor stating that Rubat area of Qadis district was under the Taliban control.\textsuperscript{764} On 4 May 2020, Taliban reported that several of Mujahidin (Taliban fighters) were graduated from Saad Ben Abi Weqas military training camp in Badghis province. They claim that these fighters got trained on military warfare in using light and heavy weapons including laser weapons. The group posted several photos of the alleged fighters during the training.\textsuperscript{765}

The International Public Policy (IPP) Review stated in January 2019, that the Islamic State of Khorasan has cultivated its presence among other provinces of northern Afghanistan also in Badghis.\textsuperscript{766}

Regarding the presence of ANDSF in Badghis province, the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Regiment of Zafar 207\textsuperscript{th} Corps of ANA (which is responsible for the western provinces of Afghanistan), is based in Badghis.\textsuperscript{767} As part of the

\textsuperscript{756} ERM, Household Assessment Report, 1 November 2018, \url{[url]}, p. 1
\textsuperscript{757} RFE/RL, Afghanistan’s New Northern Flash Points, n.d., \url{[url]}
\textsuperscript{758} Strategy Page, Afghanistan: Perpetual Pressure On Pakistan, 13 March 2018, \url{[url]}
\textsuperscript{759} Khaama Press, Airstrike kills 8 Taliban militants in Bala Murghab district of Badghis Province, 4 July 2019, \url{[url]}
\textsuperscript{760} UNAMA, Badghis leaders strategize on stronger measures to protect children in armed conflict, 5 October 2019, \url{[url]}
\textsuperscript{761} Etilaatroz, بررسی اوضاع امنیتی غرب کشور؛ از آفرینش تحركات طالبان تا تلفات سنگین این گروه [informal translation: ‘security assessment of the west of the country; from the increase of Taliban’s mobility to heavy losses of the group’], 30 August 2019, \url{[url]}
\textsuperscript{762} LWJ, Several Districts Change Hands as Fighting Rages in Northern Afghanistan, 6 July 2020, \url{[url]}, however the source does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated
\textsuperscript{763} Voice of Jihad, د امیر نور محمد زابلی کرچک پک یک دختر جوان در ولایت بادغیس [informal translation: ‘a young girl committed suicide in Badghis Province’], 3 March 2020, \url{[url]}
\textsuperscript{764} Voice of Jihad, بادغیس: کمک یک دختر جوان در ولایت بادغیس [informal translation: ‘a quick look at last year’s victories’], 31 December 2019, \url{[url]}
\textsuperscript{765} SubheKabul, خودکشی یک دختر جوان در ولایت بادغیس [informal translation: ‘a young girl committed suicide in Badghis Province’], 3 March 2020, \url{[url]}
\textsuperscript{766} IPP Review, The Islamic State of Khorasan Expands in Afghanistan, 3 January 2019, \url{[url]}
\textsuperscript{767} Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., \url{[url]}; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, \url{[url]}, pp. 58 - 59
RS (Resolute Support) mission, Italian forces provide ‘functionality-based’ security assistance to ANA 207th Corps and ANP in the west of Afghanistan including Badghis.768

2.3.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.3.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 161 civilian casualties, including 77 killed and 84 injured in Badghis province, which represents 104% increase compared to 2018. The leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, air strikes and non-suicide IEDs.769 According to SIGAR, RS recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Badghis province during the first quarter of 2020770, and the mentioned source recorded between 0 and 25 civilian casualties during the second quarter of 2020.771

According to ACLED data, between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 there were 388 security incidents recorded in Badghis province, of which 241 were coded as battles, 133 remote violence and 14 incidents of violence against civilians.

According to Etilaatroz, since August 2019, Badghis province continued to be besieged where all supplying roads were shut down due to the continued armed clashes between the Taliban fighters and the Afghan security forces.773 UNOCHA indicated in December 2019 that since one year AGEs blocked main roads to Jawand district, which interrupted the transportation of essential needs to civilians living in the area.774 In November 2019, another source reported that all roads to Jawand district have been mined by the Taliban, which resulted in severe food and supply shortages in the area.775 In January 2020, a local news reported on the presence of the Taliban’s prison in Badghis province from which the Afghan government forces rescued 55 ANA soldiers, four commandos, one police and two border police personnel.776 In April 2020, NYT reported on the presence of a Taliban checkpoint established in the village of Laman in Qala-i Naw City, the provincial capital, where the group shot and killed one civilian driver who refused to stop his car at Taliban’s order.777 During the same period, Taliban militants blocked the highway of Qadis-Qala-i Naw to carry out an attack against the Afghan forces.778

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768 USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, url, p. 14
769 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 94
770 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, url, p. 69
771 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, url, p. 72
772 Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Badghis; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, url
773 Etilaatroz, فرص‌سازی وظایف امنیتی غرب کشور؛ از افزایش تحرک‌کات طالبان تا تلفات سنگین این گروه [informal translation: ‘security assessment of the west of the country; from the increase of Taliban’s mobility to heavy losses of the group’], 30 August 2019, url
774 UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian updated 25 November to 1 December 2019, 4 December 2019, url
775 Tolonews, Badghis: District with mined roads faces food shortage crisis, 14 November 2019, url
776 Salaam Times, Rescued Afghan soldiers speak of appalling torture, brutality in Taliban prison, 31 January 2020, url
777 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 30 April 2020, url
778 Afghanistan Times, At least 12 Taliban rebels killed in Badghis, 13 April 2020, url
On 20 May 2020, Salaam Times report that the Taliban blocked roads to the districts of Badghis and prevented local people, government and health workers to enter Bala Murghab, Jawand and Qadis districts. The source also indicated that Taliban in Badghis province restarted to impose restrictions on private telecommunication companies, telecom which is used by 70 % of Badghis population to maintain the system only between 6 a.m. and 5 p.m. in Badghis province and shut it down during the night.\textsuperscript{779}

Recent incidents that caused civilian casualties in Badghis province in 2019 and 2020 include: three civilians killed, (including one woman) and three others injured (including two women and a girl) during ground engagement between the Taliban and ANA in Ab Kamari district on 17 July 2019\textsuperscript{780}; three civilians killed on 19 July 2019 by an air strike hitting a house in the Du Juee area of Bala Murghab district\textsuperscript{781}; on 23 July 2019, a high school teacher was killed, and two other civilians wounded after a rocket fired from an Afghan helicopter struck their shop in the Joy-e Ganj area of Bala Murghab district\textsuperscript{782}; on 20 July 2019, an Afghan air forces’ air strike, which hit a family’s house, killed five civilians, all members of a single family, in the Akazi area of Bala Murghab district, which was reportedly controlled by the Taliban\textsuperscript{783}; on 27 July 2019 an air strike reportedly killed four civilians including a tribal leader, following their meeting with the Taliban officials in Regi village of Jawand district\textsuperscript{784}; on 30 October 2019, a civilian driver was killed by the Taliban attack on a convoy of local officials in the village of Qarchaghay in Qala-i Naw district\textsuperscript{785}; on 7 November 2019, six civilians were killed including three women and three children when the house of a Taliban commander was bombed by an air strike in the village of Maidah Qol in Aa Kamari district\textsuperscript{786}; on 3 January 2020, one child was killed in a roadside bomb explosion when he was looking for his sheep in the village of Na-Khod-Amodah in Qadis district\textsuperscript{787}; on 25 April 2020, a woman was killed, and a child was wounded after a Taliban mortar hit their house in the village of Kamengi Oliya in Qadis district\textsuperscript{788}; on 25 May 2020, three children were killed after a bomb planted by the Taliban exploded in Chashma-Dozdak village of Muqur district\textsuperscript{789}, on 1 May 2020, the Taliban destroyed, in an explosion, a school in Qadis district that was recently constructed.\textsuperscript{790}

\subsection{2.3.3.2 Displacement}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 29,359 persons displaced from Badghis province, with 84 % displaced within the province itself (mainly in Bala Murghab and Qala-i Naw districts), 14 % were displaced into Herat province and the remaining 2 % were displaced into Faryab and Ghor provinces.\textsuperscript{791}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 24,593 persons displaced to Badghis province, with almost 99 % coming from within the province itself.\textsuperscript{792}

Between 6 – 12 January 2020, the conflict reportedly continued between ANSF and AGEs in Badghis and an estimated number of 17,335 conflict affected IDPs were identified in ‘hard-to-reach’ areas in Badghis province.\textsuperscript{793} According to

\textsuperscript{779} Salaam Times, Taliban’s blockade of districts in Badghis endangers thousands of lives, 20 May 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{780} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 72

\textsuperscript{781} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 19-25, 25 July 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{782} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 19-25, 25 July 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{783} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 19-25, 25 July 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{784} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-1 Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{785} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{786} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 2 December 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{787} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, (sic) 2 January 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{788} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report, April 2020, 30 April 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{789} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report, May 2020, 28 May 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{790} Salaam Times, Enemies of education: Taliban blow up newly constructed school in Badghis, 13 May 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{791} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{792} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{793} UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Weekly humanitarian update, 6 - 12 January 2020, \url{url}
UNOCHA, during the period between 28 April and 4 May 2020, security situation in Badghis remained unstable and the ongoing conflict displaced 400 families (around 2,800 individuals) in Badghis and Ghor provinces. During the same period, in Badghis province, 294 people affected by flash flood received humanitarian assistance.  

### 2.4 Baghlan

#### 2.4.1 General description of the province

Baghlan province is located in the north-eastern part of Afghanistan and has borders with Bamyan, Samangan, Kunduz, Taljar, Panjshir, Parwan and Balkh. Baghlan province is divided into the following administrative units: Andarab, Baghlan-e-Jadid (also known as Baghlan-e Markazi), Burka, Dahana-e Ghuri, Deh Salah, Doshi, Fereng wa Gharu, Guzargah-e Nur, Khenjan, Khost wa Fereng, Khwajahejran (Jalga), Nahrin, Pul-e Hesar, Pul-e Khumri, and Tala wa Barfak. The provincial capital is Pul-e Khumri.

According to estimates for 2020-2021 by NSIA the province has a population of 1,014,634, 242,859 of whom live in the provincial capital, Pul-e Khumri. The main ethnic groups in the province are Tajiks, Pashtuns and Hazaras. Other ethnic groups present include Uzbeks and Tatars. Baghlan province is connected to eight other provinces by the Kabul-North Highway. This is the only trans-Hindukush highway in Afghanistan and the major transit route between Kabul and the north of Afghanistan.

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794 UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Weekly humanitarian update, 24 April – 4 May 2020, 7 May 2020, url
795 UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Baghlan Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
796 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: North Eastern Region – District Atlas, April 2014, url, pp. 32-45
797 AIMS, AIMS Political Divisions Map, n.d., url
799 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, 1 June 2020, url, p. 18
800 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Baghlan Provincial Overview, n.d., url
the country, via the Salang pass. The road forks at the northern edge of provincial capital Pul-e Khumri, north-west to Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh province, north-east towards Kunduz. At the border between Baghlan and Parwan, the highway leads through the notoriously overcrowded and desolate Salang Tunnel. Besides the Kabul-North Highway Baghlan should be connected to Bamyan by December 2022 via the so-called Baghlan to Bamyan (B2B) road, according to plans by the World Bank. Baghlan’s capital Pul-e Khumri is known to be an economic hub.

According to AAN, the Kabul-North Highway is pivotal for the military success of government forces, as AGEs are able to hinder the movement of ammunition and troops by blocking the highway, as they did, for example, after an attack on a checkpoint in Pul-e Khumri on 4 December 2019. AAN links the Taliban’s success in conquering and holding Kunduz City for two weeks in 2015 to the fact that they were able to stop Kunduz-bound military convoys in Baghlan for days with a combination of road blocks and ambushes. In a conversation with Landinfo in October 2019, an international source described the stretch on Highway One between Kabul and Pul-e Khumri as sufficiently safe, including for international travellers. On the road further north, however, several incidents and road closures and obstructions as a result of clashes and non-state armed groups’ presence and activity were reported. AGEs reportedly draw revenue from extorting money from fuel trucks passing through Baghlan.

The security along the highway is also pivotal for Kabul’s energy supply, as electricity transmission lines originating in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan run along the highway. Power lines and towers at times suffered damage by Taliban attacks or clashes between the Taliban and government forces in the reporting period.

There were reports of protesters blocking the Kabul-North Highway in March 2019 and in April 2019 after the announcement of the parliamentary elections results. One participant in the April protest was killed and six others wounded when security forces opened fire to clear the road.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Baghlan does not belong to the ten main opium-cultivating provinces of Afghanistan. Opium poppy cultivation in Baghlan remained approximately the same in 2018 compared to 2017.

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802 Pajhwok Afghan News, Current Salang tunnel insufficient, says President Ghani, 15 October 2018, [url]
803 World Bank (The), Trans-Hindukush Road Connectivity Project, n.d., [url]
804 Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan administrative units, n.d., [url]
805 NYT, Afghanistan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, [url]
808 Salam Watandar, Taliban collecting billions through illicit customs, religious taxes, 16 May 2019, [url]
809 Pajhwok Afghan News, Power transmission line damaged in Baghlan, 18 March 2019, [url]; Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul in dark as 3 pylons blown up in Baghlan, 15 September 2019, [url]
810 Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan protestors unblock Kabul-North highway, 13 March 2019, [url]
811 NYT, Afghanistan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, [url]; Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 person killed, 5 injured as Baghlan protest turned violent, 27 April 2019, [url]
812 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url], p. 17
813 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url], p. 15
2.4.2 Conflict background and actors in Baghlan

The transport routes leading through Baghlan are decisive for the security situation of the province. According to AAN, the Taliban started intimidating people travelling along the Baghlan-Balkh Highway in late 2015.814 In October 2019, Afghanistan Analyst Obaid Ali described how the Taliban established a presence at different locations around Highway One and the split of the road towards Kunduz.815 Having understood the strategic importance of the main transport routes in the province, the Taliban established mobile checkpoints on the Baghlan-Balkh Highway in order to search for ANSF members and attempted to establish a permanent presence in the area. This helped them to obstruct the use of Highway One when carrying out larger attacks816, such as the offensive on provincial capital Pul-e-Khumri in early September 2019, at a time when talks with the United States were leading up to the signing of an agreement.817 In response to the Taliban establishing checkpoints, ANSF have conducted several clearance operations, which, according to AAN, were ‘inconsequential’ and hence unsuccessful in creating a coherent government presence in the area.818

The security situation in Baghlan province reportedly worsened in 2016 after the Taliban launched concerted actions against key districts near the provincial centre of Pul-e-Khumri.819 In spring 2018, the Afghan Ministry of Defence (MoD) admitted that the provincial capital Pul-e-Khumri was threatened by the Taliban820, and by December 2018 the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MoI) counted Baghlan among the provinces with a high Taliban presence and where Afghan forces have been engaged in deadly battles in parts of the province.821

According to an Afghanistan analyst contacted by the Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket) in January 2020, Kunduz and Baghlan were considered to be the most Taliban-controlled or influenced provinces in the north-eastern region.822 A similar assessment was made by Afghanistan analyst Obaid Ali in October 2019.823 In September 2019, no presidential elections took place in Dahana-e-Ghouri district, due to the Taliban controlling this district824, but in late October 2019, after three years under Taliban control, government forces re-captured that district.825 As of 2 July 2020 an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Burka and Tala wa Barfak districts as ‘Taliban-controlled’, Andarab district as ‘government-controlled’ and the remaining districts in Baghlan province as ‘contested’.826

814 Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, url
815 Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, url
816 Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, url
818 Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, url
819 Khaama Press, Talibans deputy military chief surrenders in Baghlan province, 12 August 2017, url
820 Tononews, 7 Provincial Centers Face ‘Serious Security Threats’, 16 May 2018, url
821 Tononews, Afghan Forces To Focus On Insecure Regions In Winter, 26 December 2018, url
822 Sweden, Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, url, p. 48
823 Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, url
824 Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, url
826 LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., url. The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.
Besides Taliban fighters, local pro-government militias supported by the National Directorate of Security used to be active in the province, e.g. in the Surkh Kotal area eight kilometres north-west of Pul-e Khumri.\(^{827}\)

In response to the Taliban offensive on Pul-e Khumri in September 2019, the government forces received support by armed residents. According to sources consulted by AAN, these people were members of various uprising groups led mostly by commanders affiliated with Jamiat-e Islami.\(^{828}\)

According to an AAN report from July 2016, Afghan ethnic Uzbeks set up an insurgent group called Jundullah in 2009 by splitting away from IMU.\(^{829}\) While Jundullah has been affiliated with the Taliban in the past, it established itself as an independent, IS-allied group by taking advantage of the turmoil created by the Taliban conquest of Kunduz in September 2015. Unsympathetic towards IS-groups, the Taliban contained Jundullah’s activities in Baghlan by 2016. According to the same report, as of July 2016, ‘[…] the threat of Daesh in the north-east – through Jundullah affiliating itself to IS – is neither widespread, nor immediate.’\(^{830}\)

A December 2018 report by the US Counter-Terrorism Center (CTC) on IS-groups in Afghanistan, counted one ISKP attack in Baghlan between 2014 and 2018. The attack took place in 2017 causing the deaths of nine persons.\(^{831}\) While the Lead Inspector General for Operation’s Freedom Sentinel referred to the existence of smaller groups of supporters in Baghlan in 2019\(^{832}\) and an official statement about the arrest of a key ISKP member was published in May 2019\(^{833}\), no security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were registered by ACLED in Baghlan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.\(^{834}\)

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Baghlan province is under the responsibility of the 217\(^{th}\) ANA corps after ANA’s 20th Division, previously under the ANA 209th Corps, was reassigned in April 2019 to become a new corps, the 217th Corps.\(^{835}\) The 217\(^{th}\) Corps has its headquarters in Kunduz.\(^{836}\) As of 30 April 2020 Baghlan province was still included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North is led by German forces and has its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province.\(^{837}\)

### 2.4.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.4.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 349 civilian casualties (123 deaths and 226 injured) in Baghlan. This represents an increase of 34% compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground

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\(^{831}\) Jadoon, A., Allied and Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan’s Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, CTC Sentinel, 3 December 2018, pp. 11, 15


\(^{833}\) Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces arrest key ISIS group member in Baghlan province, 16 May 2019, [url](https://khaama.com/2019/05/16/afghan-special-forces-arrest-key-isis-group-member-in-baghlan-province/)

\(^{834}\) EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](https://www.acled.org/)

\(^{835}\) SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2019, pp. 78

\(^{836}\) USDOOD, Operation Freedom’s Sentinel. Lead Inspector General Report To The United States Congress. April 1, 2019–June 30, 2019, 16 August 2019, p. 5

engagements followed by targeted/deliberate killings and non-suicide IEDs.\textsuperscript{838} Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 75 civilian casualties in Baghlan in the first half of 2020, reporting a decrease in civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020, compared to the first.\textsuperscript{839}

ACLED collected data on 444 violent events in Baghlan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, 304 of which were coded as ‘battles’, 118 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ and 22 as ‘violence against civilians’.\textsuperscript{840} With 188 reported incidents, Pul-e Khumri stood out as the district where most violent events were reported, followed by Baghlan-e Jadid with 93 incidents. No violent events were registered by ACLED in Fereng Wa Gharu and Khost wa Fereng districts.\textsuperscript{841}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure6.png}
\caption{Baghlan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data.\textsuperscript{842}}
\end{figure}

ACLED coded around 68\% of the violent incidents in Baghlan province as ‘battles’, mainly ‘armed clashes’. This category represented the most prevalent incident type in nearly all of Baghlan’s districts.\textsuperscript{843} The majority of those armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including police, military or NDS personnel and members of pro-government militias or so-called Arbakis (the term ‘Arbaki’ is often used locally and by the Taliban in reference to members of the Afghan Local Police or other pro-government militias)\textsuperscript{844}, or attacks on military or police facilities such

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{838} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 94. No UNAMA data on civilian casualties in Baghlan province were available for the first half of 2020.
\item \textsuperscript{839} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 72
\item \textsuperscript{840} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{841} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Badakhshan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision Code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{842} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Baghlan, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{843} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{844} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-july 4, 4 July 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 10-16, 16 May 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Deputy intelligence chief for Baghlan gunned down, 12 May 2019, \url{url}
\end{itemize}
as checkpoints, bases and headquarters and on convoys. These incidents at times resulted in civilian casualties, as for example on 5 May 2019 when in addition to dozens of casualties among police forces, more than ten civilians were injured in a coordinated attack claimed by the Taliban on police headquarters in Pul-e Khumri City. Responding to a Taliban attack in Chashma-e Sher area of Pul-e Khumri City, an Afghan air force helicopter hit a house in April 2020. As a result, two children were killed and six civilians were wounded.

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED. With the approval of the Ministry of Defence’s Operation Khalid on 2 April 2019, Baghlan was one of the provinces in the north-east that security forces’ operations focused on. Most operations were carried out in May 2019 and from September to November. Some ANDSF operations lead to the recapturing of villages in certain districts of Baghlan, including Baghlan-e Jadid in June 2019, Burk in December 2019, the Kelagai area of Doshi district in October 2019 or the Dand-e Shahabuddin area of Pul-e Khumri district in October 2019. Some operations were backed by air strikes, as for example in Baghlan-e Jadid district in early June 2019 or in Dahana-e Ghuri district at the end of July 2019.

There were reports on the Taliban capturing smaller areas in the reporting period, such as the strategic Kayan valley in Doshi district in July 2019. Taliban and other sources also reported on the Taliban attacking the district headquarters in Burka district on 3 May 2019, the centre of Guzargah-e Nur district in July 2019, or attacking villages and areas in Nahrin and Baghlan-e Jadid districts in September 2019. The Taliban reportedly took control over Guzargah-e Nur district in Baghlan province in September 2019 for a few months until government forces recaptured the district in January 2020.

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850 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url

851 Tolonews, Large Scale Operation Launched In Baghlan, 17 October 2019, url

852 Khaama Press, 11 Taliban militants killed in Special Forces raid, airstrikes in Laghman and Baghlan, 4 June 2019, url

853 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url; Khaama Press, 52 militants killed, 33 wounded as Afghan forces repulse Taliban attack in Baghlan, 30 July 2019, url

854 Khaama Press, Taliban militants take control of the strategic Kayan Valley in Baghlan province, 2 July 2019, url; Xinhua, Taliban overruns area in N. Afghanistan’s Baghlan province, 2 July 2019, url


More than half of the 118 reported incidents of explosions/remote violence, registered by ACLED in Baghlan between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020, were incidents where the Taliban or unidentified armed groups used roadside bombs or IEDs, including pressure-plate IEDs\(^{863}\) or magnetic bombs\(^{862}\) to target security forces.\(^{863}\) These incidents represented 14% of all violent incidents in Baghlan province and at times resulted in civilian casualties, for example on 14 May 2019 when explosives attached to vehicles went off in Pul-e-Khumri\(^{864}\), on 4 June 2019 when people leaving a mosque after Eid prayers in Nahrin district were hit by a bomb explosion\(^{865}\) or on 4 November 2019, when a road mine blast hit a family in Dand-e Shahabuddin area of Pul-e Khumri City.\(^{866}\)

Over one third of the reported incidents of explosions/remote violence and representing 10% of all violent incidents registered by ACLED in Baghlan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 were air/drone strikes.\(^{867}\) Air strikes were mainly carried out in Pul-e Khumri, Baghlan-e Jadid and Dahana-e Ghuri districts and most were carried out by Afghan forces, while some were attributed to US forces.\(^{868}\) While those air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs, some also caused civilian casualties, as happened in Pul-e Khumri in July 2019 and April 2020.\(^{869}\)

ACLED coded a few incidents of shelling in Baghlan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.\(^{870}\) Some of those attributed to ANSF caused civilian casualties as happened in Nahrin district on 23 September 2019 when a group of children were killed when an unexploded rocket shell went off while they were playing\(^{871}\) or in Pul-e Khumri on 9 March 2020 when a mortar shell fired from a military base hit a civilian home, killing one person and wounding four others.\(^{872}\)

Twenty two incidents categorised by ACLED as violence against civilians represented 5% of all violent events in Baghlan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.\(^{873}\) These included the kidnapping and/or killing by armed groups, including the Taliban, of an off-duty soldier in Baghlan-e Jadid in June

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863 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](https://www.acleddata.com/country-data/africa/afghanistan)

864 NYT, 1 August 2019, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/01/washington/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)

865 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](https://www.acleddata.com/country-data/africa/afghanistan)

866 NYT, 1 August 2019, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/01/washington/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)

867 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](https://www.acleddata.com/country-data/africa/afghanistan)

868 NYT, 1 August 2019, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/01/washington/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)

869 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](https://www.acleddata.com/country-data/africa/afghanistan)

870 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](https://www.acleddata.com/country-data/africa/afghanistan)

871 NYT, 1 August 2019, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/01/washington/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)


873 NYT, 1 August 2019, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/01/washington/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)


875 NYT, 1 August 2019, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/01/washington/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)

876 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](https://www.acleddata.com/country-data/africa/afghanistan)

877 NYT, 1 August 2019, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/01/washington/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)


879 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](https://www.acleddata.com/country-data/africa/afghanistan)

880 NYT, 1 August 2019, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/01/washington/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)

881 NYT, 1 August 2019, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/01/washington/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)

882 NYT, 1 August 2019, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/01/washington/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)

883 NYT, 1 August 2019, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/01/washington/afghanistan-war-casualties.html)
2019\(^{874}\), of government representatives and employees near Pul-e Khumri in August 2019\(^{875}\), of civilians in Nahrin district in September 2019\(^{876}\), of education personnel in Nahrin district in May 2019 and in Baghlan-e Jadid and Doshi district in November 2019\(^{877}\) and the killing of a truck driver in Doshi district in February 2020.\(^{878}\) Unknown armed men killed five members of one family in Deh Salah district on 16 April 2020.\(^{879}\) An imam succumbed to his injuries after being beaten for performing the funeral of a local police officer in Dahana-i Ghuri district in June 2020.\(^{880}\) Talibans sources reported incidents of Afghan security forces killing civilians in targeted attacks or during operations.\(^{881}\) In addition to the incidents registered by ACLED, UNAMA documented the killing of the brother of a Talibans fighter by the ALP in Pul-e Khumri district on 25 November 2019 as an act of revenge for the killing of one of their commanders. Two other civilians were wounded in the incident.\(^{882}\)

There were reports from the north-eastern region, including from Baghlan province, of electricity and mobile phone networks being interrupted before and during the presidential election in September 2019.\(^{883}\) Baghlan was, after Kunduz, the province with the second-lowest turnout numbers for the presidential election of 28 September 2019 in Afghanistan. This was, as in Kunduz, attributed to bad security. The main roads connecting Baghlan to Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif and Kunduz were blocked by the Talibans. Direct attacks on polling centres and rocket shelling were reported from Pul-e Khumri and Doshi districts.\(^{884}\)

In April 2019 the Baghlan police chief announced the establishment of new checkpoints to improve security along the Baghlan-Balkh Highway.\(^{885}\) The Talibans however carried out attacks on checkpoints on the Baghlan-Samangan Highway in March and May 2019 and in January 2020\(^{886}\) and on the Kunduz-Baghlan Highway in July 2019, January and February 2020.\(^{887}\) Oil tanker drivers and directors of petroleum companies complained in March 2019 about increasing attacks on their trucks in Baghlan, particularly around Dand-e Ghori locality in Pul-e Khumri and Kelagi locality in Doshi district.\(^{888}\) Another attack on oil tankers was reported from Pul-e Khumri district in May 2019.\(^{889}\)

\(^{874}\) NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, url
\(^{876}\) NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, url
\(^{877}\) NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul university teacher shot dead in Baghlan, 6 November 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Headmaster among 4 gunned down in Baghlan, 30 November 2019, url
\(^{878}\) NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, url
\(^{879}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 of a family gunned down in Baghlan attack, 16 April 2020, url
\(^{880}\) Reportedly, Imam in Baghlan Dies After Being Beaten by Talibans, 21 June 2020, url
\(^{881}\) EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url; Voice of Jihad, Innocent civilian martyred in Baghlan, 28 May 2020, url
\(^{882}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 67
\(^{884}\) Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, url
\(^{885}\) Tolonews, Baghlan Police Chief Warns Talibans To Quit Violence, 7 April 2019, url
\(^{886}\) Xinhua, 14 including 8 militants killed in northern Afghan province, 29 May 2019, url; Xinhua, 1st LD Writethru: 9 police killed in Talibans attack in N. Afghanistan, 28 January 2020, url; Khaama Press, NDS Special Forces storm key Talibans compound in Baghlan province, 3 March 2019, url; Tolonews, Police Suffer Heavy Casualties in Baghlan, 28 January 2020, url
\(^{887}\) Tolonews, MEHWAR: Insecurity Increases In Baghlan, 13 July 2019, url; Khaama Press, Afghan forces suffer casualties in Talibans attacks, 23 January 2019, url; Tolonews, Five Security Force Members Killed on Kunduz-Baghlan Highway, 2 February 2020, url
\(^{888}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Militant attacks on oil tankers increasing in Baghlan, 30 March 2019, url
\(^{889}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Talibans attack leaves 2 oil tankers torched in Baghlan, 12 May 2019, url
Sources reported an explosion inside a doctor’s private clinic in Pul-e Khumri on 4 April 2019. The doctor was killed and several patients were injured. According to further investigation by UNAMA, the doctor had received dead threats from the Taliban. UNAMA also documented the forced closure of 11 clinics in different districts of Baghlan province on 12 May 2019. All were reopened within the next week.

In its report covering 2019 UNAMA noted that in certain parts of Afghanistan, including Baghlan, several private telecommunications companies, with the exception of Salaam Telecommunications, shut down their services in the evening following up on orders issued by the Taliban in order to prevent being tracked down or targeted during operations.

While armed clashes were the prevalent type of violent event, similar as in almost all of Baghlan’s districts, Pul-e Khumri showed a somewhat different conflict pattern with nearly one out of four incidents involving the use of IEDs. The police headquarters in Pul-e Khumri City were the target of a coordinated attack, involving a suicide bombing, on 5 May 2019. On 2 February 2020, a suicide bomber detonated his explosives before he had reached his target, an engagement ceremony, in Pul-e Khumri. Such attacks, which have been carried out in other larger cities in Afghanistan as well, were not reported from other districts in Baghlan province.

In late August, early September 2019, the Taliban attacked and penetrated three provincial centres in one week’s time, first Kunduz, immediately followed by Pul-e Khumri and then Farah. After having been driven out of Kunduz following their attack on the city, several Taliban fighters reportedly moved to Baghlan province where they launched an offensive on the provincial capital on 1 September 2019. They were able to enter deep into the city and hold out for several days. This was the first such attack for Pul-e Khumri. During the attack, the Taliban forcibly entered residential homes. According to the head of the provincial council in Baghlan, heavy fighting caused people to panic and to try to flee. The attackers were pushed back, but clashes continued on the outskirts of

890 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 29-April 4, 4 April 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Physician killed, 20 civilians injured in Baghlan blast, 4 April 2019, url
891 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 45
892 UNAMA, Afghanistan The Protection Of Civilians In Armed Midyear Update Conflict: 1 January To 30 June 2019, 30 July 2019, url, p. 5
894 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
895 Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan attack ends as all 8 attackers eliminated, 5 May 2019, url; Khaama Press, Attack on Baghlan Police HQ claims the lives of 13 people, wounding 55 others, 5 May 2019, url; Tolonews, Death Toll Rises To 20 In Baghlan Police HQ Attack, 6 May 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 75 people suffer casualties in Sunday attack: Baghlan governor, 6 May 2019, url
896 Pajhwok Afghan News, Bomber killed, 2 civilians injured in Baghlan, 2 February 2020, url
897 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 39; EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
898 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
899 Ali, O., Rutting T., Taliban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, url
900 NYT, Taliban Attack Second Afghan City in 2 Days as Peace Deal Nears, 1 September 2019, url; Al Jazeera, Amid heavy fighting in north, US envoy meets Afghan president, 2 September 2019, url
901 Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, url
903 NYT, Taliban Attack Second Afghan City in Two Days as an Agreement for Peace Nears, 1 September 2019, url
the city in the following days.904 According to a diplomatic source interviewed by the Norwegian Country of Origin Information centre, Landinfo, in October 2019, the fall of provincial capitals Kunduz, Pul-e Khumri and Taloqan (Takhar) was prevented due to air strikes.905 Civilian casualties and displacement were reported.906 While operations where carried out for reopening the Kabul-North and the Pul-e Khumri-Mazar Highways907, exit routes from the city remained contested and movement obstructed during more than a week following the attack.908 Checkpoints established by the Taliban in Baghlan-e Jadid district were obstructing traffic to the north, although civilians were reportedly allowed to pass.909 Telecommunications and road movements were intermittently disrupted.910 Local sources described to AAN how people’s lives were impacted by the events, with schools and shops closed, electricity and water cut off and a sharp increase in food prices.911

In October 2019, shopkeepers complained about insecurity due to Taliban presence and daily firing in the city impacting their businesses in Pul-e Khumri.912

Taliban presence lead to regular attacks, fighting and security operations during the reporting period in some areas of Pul-e Khumri, such as Dand-e Ghori (not to confuse with Dahana-e Ghuri district, also in Baghlan province) in April, July, October and December 2019913, Chashma-e Sher in July 2019914 or Dand-e Shahabuddin in October 2019.915 A large-scale operation reportedly resulted in the displacement of thousands of families from Dand-e Ghori and Dand-e Shahabuddin areas in October 2019.916

2.4.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA regularly reported how continued clashes between AGEs and the ANDSF in Baghlan caused displacement in the reporting period.917

904 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Update on the situation in Kunduz city and Pul-e-Khumri Flash Update No.3, 3 September 2019, url; Tolonews, Highways Remain Closed As Clashes Continue In Baghlan, 2 September 2019, url; Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e-Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, url
907 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s shadow governor among 43 rebels killed in Baghlan, 5 September 2019, url
908 Tolonews, Baghlan Clashes Enter Sixth Day, 6 September 2019, url; See also: UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Flash Update 2 – Lull in armed clashes in Kunduz city and new clashes in Pul-e-Khumri, 1 September 2019, url; Xinhu, Afghan fighting gets intensified amid reported progress in U.S.-Taliban talks, 9 September 2019, url; Al Jazeera, Trump cancels Taliban talks: What does it mean for Afghanistan?, 8 September 2019, url; Kabul Press, US Peace Talk with the Taliban Is Talibization of Afghanistan, 3 September 2019, url
909 Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, url
910 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (26 August – 1 September 2019), 4 September 2019, url; Tolonews, Special Forces Launch Clearance Operations In Baghlan, 4 September 2019, url
911 Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, url
912 Pajhwok Afghan News, Growing insecurity worries Baghlan shopkeepers, 13 October 2019, url
914 Khaama press, Special Forces rescue 2 oil tanker drivers, kill 5 Taliban militants in Baghlan, 18 July 2019, url
915 Pajhwok Afghan News, Massive operations launched against Taliban in Baghlan, 17 October 2019, url
916 Pajhwok Afghan News, Baghlan IDPs in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, 30 October 2019, url
UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 46,669 persons displaced by conflict from Baghlan province, 93% of whom were displaced within the province itself. The largest displacement occurred in Pul-e Khumri district, especially in September 2019, after the Taliban had launched an offensive on the provincial capital.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{https://www.unocha.org/afghanistan-conflict-displacement/}.} Thousands of people were displaced from Burka in April and July 2019, from Baghlan-e Jadid, mainly in October 2019, from Nahrin, mainly in September 2019 and from Guzargah-e Nur districts in October and December 2019. Nearly all IDPs from Burka and Nahrin districts were displaced within the respective districts, while the people displaced in October 2019 from Baghlan-e Jadid sought refuge in Pul-e Khumri and all IDPs from Guzargah-e Nur were displaced to Taloqan in Takhar province.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{https://www.unocha.org/afghanistan-conflict-displacement/}.} In the last days of June 2020, UNOCHA noted the ‘most significant displacement since March 2020’ in three north-eastern provinces, including Baghlan.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (22 June – 28 June 2020), 1 July 2020, \url{https://www.unocha.org/afghanistan-humanitarian-update/}.}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 43,428 persons displaced by conflict to Baghlan province, all displaced within the province. Pul-e Khumri hosted 80% of all IDPs, most from within the district and a large group from Baghlan-e Jadid in October 2019. Other districts hosting people displaced to Baghlan province in the reporting period, were Burka, Nahrin and Baghlan-e Jadid. All or nearly all of the people displaced to those districts came from within the respective districts.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (23 – 29 September 2019), 2 October 2019, \url{https://www.unocha.org/afghanistan-humanitarian-update/}.}
2.5 Balkh

2.5.1 General description of the province

Balkh province is located in the northern part of Afghanistan and has borders with Kunduz and Baghlan provinces to the east, Samangan province to the south-east, Sar-e Pul province to the south-west, Jawzjan province to the west and an international border with Uzbekistan to the north and Tajikistan to the north-east and Turkmenistan to the north-west. Balkh province is divided into the following administrative units: Balkh, Charbulak, Charkent, Chemtal, Dawlatabad, Dehdadi, Kaldar, Keshendeh, Khulm, Marmul, Mazar-e Sharif, Nahr-e Shahi, Sholgareh, Shortepa and Zari. The provincial capital is Mazar-e Sharif.

According to estimates for 2020-2021 by NSIA, the province has a population of 1,509,183, approximately 484,492 of whom live in the provincial capital, Mazar-e Sharif. Balkh is an ethnically diverse province. It is inhabited by Pashtun, Uzbek, Hazara, Tajik, Turkmen, Aimaq, Baloch, Arab and Sunni Hazara (Kawshi) communities.

Balkh – and more specifically Mazar-e Sharif – is an import/export hub as well as a regional trading centre. A map provided by the Ministry of Finance and used by the Diplomat shows a highway leading to the Uzbek border crossing point Hairatan-Termiz branching off the Ring Road east of Mazar-e Sharif. Furthermore, a highway connecting Balkh to Bamyan in the centre of Afghanistan is under

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922 UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Balkh Province- District Atlas, April 2014, [url]
923 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Northern region District Atlas, 13 April 2014, [url]; GADM, Afghanistan [Map], 2018, [url]
924 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url], p. 31
925 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, [url], p. 31
926 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Balkh, n.d., [url]
928 Samuel Hall, Economic Assessment and Labour Market Survey of Mazar-i Sharif, Pul-i Khumri, Kandahar City and Kunduz City, 16 January 2017, [url], p. 43
construction, according to that map. Mazar-e Sharif has an airport with scheduled passenger services to national and international destinations. In January 2019, an air corridor connecting Mazar-e Sharif and Europe via Turkey was opened for cargo flights.

According to the UNODC Opium Survey of 2018, Balkh ranks 7th among the ten main opium poppy-cultivating provinces of Afghanistan. Because of a drought, poppy cultivation decreased by 30% in the province in 2018 compared to 2017.

2.5.2 Conflict background and actors in Balkh

Up until early 2019 Balkh was usually described as one of the relatively calm and most stable provinces of Afghanistan, largely due to a monopoly on power by the former warlord Atta Mohammed Noor, who was governor of Balkh for more than a decade. Even after Noor’s resignation in 2018 his influence in the province continued to be strong. Atta Noor’s militiamen formed most of the provincial police force. However, a representative of an international organisation who met with the Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket) in Kabul in January 2020 saw Noor’s forced resignation as a contributing factor to the worsening security situation in Balkh. According to Afghan news portals Tolonews and Pajhwok Afghan News, the tensions between the President and Noor around Noor’s resignation were followed by an increased presence of armed men in Mazar-e Sharif, which allegedly had links to political parties and members of parliament. Subsequently, criminal activities such as armed robberies, murder, clashes, and kidnapping increased in Balkh’s capital in early 2018 and remained a source of concern for Balkh’s residents in 2019, prompting the police to take action against unregistered vehicles and motorcycles increasingly involved in crimes or to introduce a ban on the use of motorbikes.

Compared to other northern regions, the Taliban have a much smaller presence in Balkh, according to a 2019 Reuters article. Nevertheless their influence reportedly increased in 2019 and there were reports of Taliban activity in nearly all of Balkh’s districts. Attacks by the Taliban special forces, known as the Red Unit forces, were reported in Khulm district in May 2019 and in Charkent district in...

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929 Diplomat (The), Kabul’s Plan to Realize Afghanistan’s Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, url
930 Austria, BFA-Staatsdokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019; Ariana Airlines, Flights schedule, n.d., url
931 Pajhwok Afghan News, Mazar-i-Sharif-Turkey-Europe air corridor formally opens, 9 January 2019, url
932 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, pp. 6, 17
933 Reuters, Gunfight erupts in north Afghan city over police chief’s appointment, 14 March 2019, url; Tolonews, Taliban Planning To Disrupt Balkh Security: Police Chief, 22 August 2019, url
934 RFE/RL, Afghanistan’s New Northern Flash Points, n.d., url; RFE/RL, Powerful Afghan Governor Resigns, Ending Standoff With Ghani, 22 March 2018, url; Ruttig, T., “Atta for President” Again? The struggle for the Afghan presidency and Jamiat’s leadership, AAN, 10 April 2017, url
935 Reuters, Gunfight erupts in north Afghan city over police chief’s appointment, 14 March 2019, url
936 RFE/RL, Rival Police Clash In North Afghan City In Spat Between President, Ex-Governor, 14 March 2019, url
937 Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, p. 46
940 Pajhwok Afghan News, Increasing crime incidents worry Balkh dwellers, 26 October 2019, url
941 Pajhwok Afghan News, Undocumented vehicles, bikes being seized in Balkh, 27 October 2019, url; Kilid Group (The), Unknown Gunmen Kill 3 Employees of Private Company in Balkh Province, 28 June 2020, url
942 Reuters, Gunfight erupts in north Afghan city over police chief’s appointment, 14 March 2019, url
943 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s influence, insecurity grow in Balkh, 18 August 2019, url
944 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, url
February 2020. In May 2020, a Sar-e Pul provincial council member mentioned the Taliban running checkpoints in various villages of Zari district, on the road towards Mazar-e Sharif.

As of 2 July 2020 an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Dawlatabad district as ‘Taliban-controlled’, Charbulak, Chemtal and Zari districts as ‘contested’ and the remaining districts in Balkh province as ‘government-controlled’, including Keshendeh, a district that the New York Times reported to be under Taliban control in December 2019.

Local officials and first Vice President Gen. Dostum claimed in December 2019 that ISKP had increased its influence in all provinces of the northern region, including Balkh, in the previous months. However, no security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Balkh between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Balkh province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen Corps that has its headquarters in Dehdadi district of the province. Primarily present at bases in Kabul and Bagram, the US forces maintained regional hubs as of 30 April 2020, including in Balkh province in the north. Balkh province is included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North is led by German forces and has its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif.

Members of pro-government militias or so-called Arbakis (the term ‘Arbaki’ is often used locally and by the Taliban in reference to members of the Afghan Local Police or other pro-government militias) and local uprising commander forces are present in Balkh province and regular targets of Taliban attacks.

### 2.5.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.5.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 277 civilian casualties (108 deaths and 169 injured) in Balkh. This represents an increase of 22% compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by non-suicide IEDs and targeted killings. In the first half of 2020, UNAMA ranked Balkh province first in terms of civilians most affected by the conflict, documenting 344 civilian casualties in the province.

Resolute Support recorded between 102 and 150 civilian casualties in

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945 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url]
946 Rutting, T., The case of Mawlawi Mehdi and Balkhab District: Are the Taleban attracting Hazaras?, AAN, 23 May 2020, [url]
947 LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url]. The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated. For more information on the methodology used by, see the Introduction section of this report.
948 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, [url]
949 Tonewonews, Large-scale Military Operation To Launch in North: Dostum, 5 December 2019, [url]
950 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Balkh; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
951 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan, December 2019, 23 January 2020, [url], p. 50
952 Tonewonews, 209 Shaheen Corps: The Base The Taliban Attacked, 22 April 2018, [url]
953 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url], pp. 3; 14
955 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url], p. 94
Balkh in the first half of 2020, reporting similar numbers of civilian casualties between the first and second quarter of 2020.\textsuperscript{957}

ACLED collected data on 811 violent events in Balkh province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, 631 of which were coded as ‘battles’, 162 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ and 18 as ‘violence against civilians’.\textsuperscript{958} The security situation in Balkh province has been deteriorating in 2019\textsuperscript{959} and according to UN data, Balkh province was one of the four most active areas of conflict in the first months of 2020.\textsuperscript{960} With 195 incidents, Balkh stood out as the district where ACLED recorded most violent events between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020, followed by Chimal and Charbulak districts, with more than 140 incidents each. Other districts where ACLED recorded over 40 incidents, were Sholgara and Dawlatabad and Zari. No violent events were registered by ACLED in Marmul district.\textsuperscript{961}

ACLED coded 78% of the violent incidents in Balkh province as ‘battles’, nearly all ‘armed clashes’.\textsuperscript{963} The majority of those armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including police, ANA soldiers or NDS personnel and members of pro-government militias\textsuperscript{964} or attacks on

\textsuperscript{957} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, url, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, url, p. 72
\textsuperscript{958} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Balkh; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
\textsuperscript{959} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s influence, insecurity grow in Balkh, 18 August 2019, url
\textsuperscript{961} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
\textsuperscript{962} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Balkh, url
\textsuperscript{963} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Balkh; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
military or police facilities such as checkpoints and bases and on convoys and vehicles. These incidents at times resulted in civilian casualties, as for example in Sawrian village in Charbulak district on 3 August 2019, in the Alam Khel area of Balkh district on 17 March 2020, or in the Maidan Wali area of Dawlatabad district on 14 May 2020. Attacks by the Taliban on government officials and employees were also included under armed clashes by ACLED. On 30 March 2019, the Taliban attacked a convoy carrying First Vice-President Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum on the Mazar-Shiberghan Highway which connects Balkh and Jowzjan provinces. Gen. Dostum escaped unhurt, but there were casualties among his entourage. On 14 September 2019, the Taliban ambushed the Labour and Social Affairs Director for northern Balkh province on the highway between Balkh district and Mazar-e-Sharif.

Operations, such as Operation Walid 40 launched in March 2019, Operation Khalid in April 2019 and Operation Shaheen 611 in April 2020 and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under battles by ACLED. Most of those were carried out in August 2019 and January 2020. Some of these operations were backed by air strikes, for example in Chemtal district in March and August 2019 or in Charbulak in June and July 2019.

The Taliban attacked security outposts briefly capturing them before they were retaken by security forces in Zari district in March and May 2019 and in Charkent district on 3 July 2019. Afghan officials rejected claims by the Taliban of having captured Zari district in September 2019, stating that

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968 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-74, 4 July 2019, [url]
969 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url]
970 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, [url]
971 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, [url]
972 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Balkh; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
973 Tolonews, Dostum Unhurt As His Convoy Attacked By Taliban, 30 March 2019, [url]; RFE/RL, Afghan Vice President Dostum Survives Convoy Ambush, 30 March 2019, [url]; NYT, Afghan Vice President Survives Attack on Convoy, 31 March 2019, [url]; Pajhwok Afghan News, Dostum’s convoy attacked in Balkh, bodyguard killed, 30 March 2019, [url]
974 Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh official injured in Taliban attack, 14 September 2019, [url]
977 Tolonews, ‘17 Villages Cleared of Taliban’ in Balkh: Police, 29 April 2020, [url]
978 Pajhwok Afghan News, Notorious Taliban commander killed in Balkh operation, 16 may 2019, [url]: Khaama Press, Taliban’s most dangerous commander Mullah Khadem killed in Balkh province, 16 May 2019, [url]
979 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Balkh; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
980 Khaama Press, Dozens of Taliban militants killed in latest Special Forces operations, airstrikes, 14 March 2019, [url]: Khaama Press, 3 Taliban militants killed, 2 detained in Balkh and Kunduz provinces, 20 June 2019, [url]: Khaama Press, Taliban commander Qari Mehdi among several killed, wounded in Balkh airstrikes, 1 August 2019, [url]
981 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 29-April 4, 4 April 2019, [url]: NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url]
982 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url]
Clashes between pro-government forces and the Taliban in September 2019 resulted in casualties on both sides, including the death of the Taliban’s district governor in Zari district. As a result of an AGE attack on Zari district centre in February 2020, four people were killed and others were injured. In another Taliban attack in Zari district on 30 April and 1 May 2020, 38 members of local uprising groups were killed or injured. The Taliban claimed to have overtaken Alamkhai, Baba Yousif, and Boka villages of Balkh district at the end of December 2019. Heavy fighting was reported from Charbulak district in November 2019 after the Taliban attacked the district centre. As a result, the district police chief and a pro-government militia member were killed. The district police chief of Shortepa district was also killed in a Taliban attack on the police and district headquarters on 1 October 2019. Five other police officers were also killed and fifteen were taken prisoners. Government officials denied the claim by the Taliban that they had overran the compound. In response to a Taliban attack, Afghan security forces launched an operation called Shaheen 221 in February 2020, during which they managed to clear some vulnerable areas in Chemtal district, such as Pul-e Bangaala village, from the Taliban. Coordinated attacks by the Taliban on Dawlatabad, Balkh and Chemtal districts in March 2020 triggered operations by security forces. Clashes between (pro-)government forces and local jihadi commander forces were also reported in Balkh district in May 2019 and caused civilian casualties.

Air/drone strikes represented 11% of all reported violent incidents in Balkh between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020. Nearly three out of four air strikes in Balkh province were carried out in following four districts: Chemtal, Charbulak, Balkh and Sholgara. Most air strikes were carried out by Afghan forces, while some were attributed to US forces. While air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs and destroyed their facilities or equipment, some also caused civilian casualties such as the air strikes carried out on 25 January 2020 in Boki village of Balkh district during which at least six civilians were killed, when a bomb hit their home. In May 2020, civilians, reportedly forced by the Taliban to

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984 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, url
986 Pajhwok Afghan News, 38 local uprising members killed, injured in Zare clash, 1 may 2020, url
987 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, url
988 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh: District police chief killed in Taliban attack, 6 November 2019, url
989 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, url
990 AP, Afghan officials: Taliban attack kills at least 11 policemen, 1 October 2019, url
991 Tolonews, 'Vulnerable' Areas in Chamtal Cleared of Taliban: Army, 8 February 2020, url
993 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 dead, 5 injured as Balkh commandos clash, 8 may 2019, url
994 These do not include air strikes carried out during operations categorised by ACLED under ‘battles’. For more information on ACLED’s methodology, please consult the introduction.
995 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Balkh; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
996 NYT, Dozens KILLED as Taliban Bombs in 4 Humvees Rip Through Afghan District, 30 June 2019, url; Khaama press, 8 Taliban militants killed in an airstrike of the Afghan Air Force in Balkh province, 4 April 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan New, Taliban’s district chiefs, commandiers killed in Balkh, 30 June 2019, url; Khaama Press, Car bomb destroyed; 15 Taliban militants killed in Balkh operations, 17 August 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban chief for Chamtal district killed in airstrike, 7 February 2020, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 16 insurgents killed in Balkh air raid, says army, 5 May 2020, url
997 Khaama Press, 49 Taliban militants killed, wounded; strategic compound destroyed in Balkh, 9 September 2019, url; Khaama Press, Notorious Taliban commander, his fighters killed in Balkh before disrupting elections, 28 September 2019, url; Khaama press, Video: Airstrike destroys key Taliban compound in Balkh province, 6 April 2020, url
destroys a main road in Balkh district in order to obstruct government forces, were killed and wounded by air strikes.999 In the first half of 2020, UNAMA documented more than half of all civilian casualties as a result of Afghan Air Force air strikes in Kunduz and Balkh provinces.1000

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs – sometimes VB-IEDs1001 or pressure plate IEDs1002 - to target security forces1003 or government officials1004, represented 7 % of all reported security incidents in Balkh between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.1005 Some of these incidents resulted in casualties among civilians.1006 This happened for example on 15 July 2019, in Charbulak district when an IED went off while children were playing in the area killing two of them1007, or on 18 August 2019, when a civilian vehicle hit a roadside bomb in Dawlat Abad district. At least 10 civilians, nearly all members of the same family, were reported to have died.1008

Mortars fired by Afghan forces in Zari district in January and February 2020 and rockets fired by the Taliban in Chemtal district in March 2020 caused civilian casualties.1009

Eighteen incidents categorised by ACLED as violence against civilians included the killing of off-duty police personnel1010, the abduction and killing of civilians by the Taliban on 7 April 2020 in Sholgareh district1011 and the killing of civilians in operations by security forces, as reported by the Taliban.1012 These incidents represented 2 % of all violent events in Balkh province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.1013 In addition to the incidents registered by ACLED, UNAMA documented the abduction of five fuel truck drivers by the Taliban at one of their checkpoints in Charbulak district on 11 October 2019 until their company paid AFN 30 000 per tanker.1014

(27 January – 2 February 2020), 5 February 2020, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 of a family killed in Balkh airstrike, residents claim, 26 January 2020, url
1000 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict. midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, url, p. 16
1004 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, url
1005 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Balkh; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
1006 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, url
1007 Khaama Press, Roadside bomb explosion kills 2 children in Balkh province, 15 July 2019, url
1011 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban abduct, slay 8 civilians in Balkh, 8 April 2020, url
1013 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Balkh; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
1014 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 49
UNAMA notes a consistent pattern in the use of civilian locations by AGEs when carrying out their attacks in Afghanistan, which exposes civilians to risks of attack by pro-government forces. Illustrating this, UNAMA documented a ground engagement in Chemtal district in March 2019, when the Afghan National Army fired a mortar round towards Taliban fighters who were hiding in residential homes. The mortar landed on a civilian home, killing three civilians including a six-year old boy, and injuring three children.1015 Another example was an attack on a convoy of Afghan security forces on 23 June 2019, during which Taliban fighters were hiding in shops in a bazaar in Balkh district. As a result of the government forces’ response to the attack, two civilians, including a child, were killed.1016 While fleeing after having attacked the police headquarters and the district governor’s office in Zari district on 1 May 2020, the Taliban tried to hide in civilian houses and killed a civilian who refused to open the door.1017

There were reports from the northern region, which includes Balkh province, about electricity and mobile phone networks being interrupted before and during the presidential election in September 2019.1018 However, in contrast to other northern provinces, AAN did not observe a telecommunication ban in Balkh. In some districts not all networks were active.1019 The election campaign office of President Ghani was attacked by unidentified gunmen on 1 September 2019.1020 After a security meeting in advance of the elections the Independent Election Commission announced that 33 polling centres, located in Chemtal, Charbuluk, Dawlatabad, Shortepa en Sholgareh districts, would not open on election day.1021

Balkh was one of the four main provinces in Afghanistan where ANDSF invested in improving security along the major roads in the third quarter of 2019.1022 There were reports of increased insecurity along the Mazar-Shiberghan Highway in August 2019.1023 The Taliban reportedly often established checkpoints along the highway, making travelling for government employees difficult.1024 Security incidents along the Mazar-Shiberghan Highway were reported in March1025, April1026 and October 20191027 and continued to be reported in 20201028, including during the week of reduction in violence at the end of February 2020 agreed between the Taliban and the United States.1029 Protesters blocked the Mazar-Shiberghan Highway in June 2019 after to children were killed and two civilians were injured in a security operation on that highway.1030

Within the framework of its attacks on health care initiative, the World Health Organisation (WHO) did not register such attacks in Balkh province in 2019.1031 On 9 July 2019, the Taliban attacked a police checkpoint, that had been providing security for a hospital in Dawlat Abad district. One police officer

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1015 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 51
1016 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21–27, 27 June 2019, url
1017 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, url
1018 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, url
1019 AAN, Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (13): Observations from Kandahar, Takhar, Wardak and Balkh, 4 October 2019, url
1020 Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghani’s campaign office attacked in Balkh, 1 September 2019, url
1021 Pajhwok Afghan News, 33 polling sites to stay shut in Balkh on Election Day, 14 September 2019, url
1024 Tolonews, Taliban Planning To Disrupt Balkh Security: Police Chief, 22 August 2019, url
1025 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, url
1026 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 5-11, 11 April 2019, url; Xinhua, Gov't forces kill 7 militants in N. Afghanistan, 30 April 2019, url
1027 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, url
1028 Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 highway police personnel killed in Balkh assault, 1 January 2020, url
1030 Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh protesters close road after forces kill 2 children, 22 June 2019, url
1031 WHO, Afghanistan, Attacks on Health Care in 2019 as of December 31, 2019, 31 December 2019 url
was killed, another was wounded. UNAMA recorded the looting of medical supplies by ANA in Zari district on 26 April 2020. The medical supplies belonged to an NGO, accused by the ANA of supporting the Taliban with those supplies.

Education personnel from various districts in Balkh province, backed by the provincial council head, complained in August 2019 to Afghan news agency Pajhwok about ongoing conflict and clashes impacting the education process and school attendance. The Balkh Education Director, however, confirmed increasing insecurity in some districts but claimed no serious problems were reported.

In June 2020, through its Twitter account, the Kabul-based news service Reportedly cited residents of Balkh district saying that the Taliban blocked access to water and communication networks in the district.

The conflict pattern in Mazar-e Sharif district, which includes the provincial capital, was different from the general pattern in Balkh province and in its different districts. Also Mazar-e Sharif was one of the districts In Balkh province where a lower number of incidents were reported.

ACLED registered 19 violent incidents in Mazar-e Sharif district between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 representing around 2% of all violent events recorded by ACLED in Balkh province in that period. While ACLED categorised at least 65% of the violent incidents in the different districts of Balkh province as battles, in Mazar-e Sharif this event type represented 37% of all violent incidents.

Over half of the reported violent incidents in Mazar-e Sharif were landmine or IED explosions, whereas in the other districts that type of incidents represented under 25% and in most districts even under 10% of all violent incidents. No air strikes were reported in Mazar-e Sharif. At least 18 people, including civilians, were injured when an IED attached to a bicycle exploded at one of the busiest intersections in Mazar-e Sharif on 17 December 2019. A magnetic IED detonated near a public bathhouse in PD10 of Mazar-e Sharif on 4 January 2020, killing one civilian and wounding three others. On 14 January 2020, an explosion in PD9 of Mazar-e Sharif City, reportedly in front of the residence of the Balkh district governor, killed two children. This was followed by another explosion wounding at least seven civilians.

The two incidents of violence against civilians registered by ACLED in Mazar-e Sharif, included the beheading of a 9-year old girl on 30 September 2019 and the killing af a religious scholar on

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1032 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url]
1034 Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh students stop attending lessons as violence rages, 27 August 2019, [url]
1035 Reportedly, [Twitter], posted on 11 June 2020, [url]
1036 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violent against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
1037 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violent against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
1038 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violent against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
1039 Khaama Press, Explosion injures 18 civilians in Balkh province of Afghanistan 17 December 2019, [url]; Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians among 22 injured in Mazar-i-Sharif blast, 17 December 2019, [url]; RFE/RL, Roadside Bomb Kills 10 From Same Afghan Family, 17 December 2019, [url]
1040 Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 killed, 3 wounded as blast rocks Mazar-i-Sharif, 4 January 2020, [url]; Tolonews, One Civilian Killed in IED Explosion in Balkh, 4 January 2020, [url]; RFE/RL/Gandhara, 4 January 2020, [url]
1042 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violent against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
12 October 2019 by unidentified armed men. In addition Pajhwok reported on the killing of a primary court judge by unidentified armed men in PD 10 of the city on 8 August 2019.

Mazar-e Sharif was the scene of clashes in the context of political disputes and powerplay in the reporting period. On 14 March 2019, gunfire broke out between militia fighters loyal to former Governor Mohammad Atta Noor and Interior Ministry forces sent to escort and support the new provincial police chief, appointed by President Ashraf Ghani. As a result more than a dozen people, police officers as well as civilians, were wounded. A clash between local police and local jihadi commanders on 7 May 2019 resulted in two people, including one civilian, being killed and five people, including three civilians, being wounded. On 14 December 2019, heavy fighting erupted and lasted for nearly 24 hours between Afghan security forces and fighters loyal to local militia commander and former police chief for Faryab, Nizamuddin Qaisary. The battle caused residents to flee the neighbourhood, while the two sides were shelling each other. Nearby civilian houses were damaged.

Presidential election day, on 28 September 2019, was a quiet day in Mazar-e Sharif, with little visible security measures an no visible checkpoints. Despite the fact that sources described the situation in the city as secure, allowing the people in the city to go out to vote, turnout was low compared to previous elections.

Sources consulted by Landinfo during its fact-finding mission at the end of October 2019, were of the opinion that the security situation in Mazar-e Sharif had worsened in 2019, compared to 2018, but attributed this mainly to crime and to a small extent to conflict-related violence. Residents of Mazar-e Sharif complained to Pajhwok in 2019 and 2020 about a worsening security situation and increasing crime in the city, mentioning the presence of illegal armed men who were involved in robberies, murders and chaos.

### 2.5.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 22 253 persons displaced from Balkh province, more than 99% of whom were displaced within the province itself. Most were displaced from Zari, mostly in July and September 2019 and March 2020, due to conflict, heavy fighting between security forces and the Taliban and air-and-ground operations against the Taliban and from Sholgarah, in particular in May 2020 and also in July and August 2019, when security operations were reported. Large groups were displaced from Chtemal district, especially in

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1043 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, url
1044 Pajhwok Afghan News, Primary court judge gunned down in Balkh, 8 August 2019, url
1045 RFE/RL, Rival Police Clash In North Afghan City In Spat Between President, Ex-Governor, 14 March 2019, url; Reuters, Gunfight erupts in north Afghan city over police chief’s appointment, 14 March 2019, url; AP, Afghans probe US mistaken airstrike of Afghan army base, 14 March 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh: Gunfire erupts after talks on new police chief fail, 14 March 2019, url
1046 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3–9, 9 May 2019, url
1047 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, url; Khaama Press, BREAKING: Government storms a warlord’s home with Helicopter gunships in northern Balkh province as he refuses to surrender to security forces, 15 December 2019, url
1048 NYT, Afghan Warlord Escapes Arrest as Troops Turn City Into a War Zone, 16 December 2019, url
1049 Tolonews, Fight To Arrest Qaisari in Mazar-e-Sharif Ongoing, 15 December 2019, url
1050 AAN, Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (13): Observations from Kandahar, Takhar, Wardak and Balkh, 4 October 2019, url
1051 Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan. Sikkerhetssituasjonen i Balkhprovinsen i 2019, 6 April 2020, url, p. 13
1052 Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh police taking action against illegal armed men: Chief, 10 June 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Balkh police record over 800 crimes in six months, 7 February 2020, url
1053 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url
1055 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s influence, insecurity grow in Balkh, 18 August 2019, url
July 2019 and February 2020, when ACLED registered most violent incidents there\textsuperscript{1056}, from Charbulak district, in particular in April 2019 and from Dawlatabad, mostly in February 2020. People were also displaced from Nahr-e Shahi district in September 2019, due to attacks by AGEs around election day\textsuperscript{1057} and from Shortepa district in January 2020 due to military operations in that district.\textsuperscript{1058} The majority of the IDPs from different districts in Balkh province were displaced to Nahr-e Shahi district or to Mazar-e Sharif. Although insecurity and fighting reportedly caused people to flee in Balkh district\textsuperscript{1059}, only seven IDPs were registered by UNOCHA from that district in June 2020. UNOCHA also did not register conflict-induced displacement from Mazar-e Sharif district.\textsuperscript{1060}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 28,987 persons displaced to Balkh province. In addition to the 22,176 people displaced within the province, Balkh also hosted IDPs from Faryab province and to a lesser extent from Jawzjan and Sar-e Pul provinces. Mazar-e Sharif, Nahr-e Shahi, Sholgareh and Charkent were the only districts hosting IDPs in the reporting period. Almost two out of three IDPs displaced to Balkh province were displaced to Nahr-e Shahi district, including all IDPs from Zari district and all IDPs displaced from within the district itself in September 2019. Mazar-e Sharif hosted about one third of all IDPs displaced to Balkh province.\textsuperscript{1061}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{1056} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Balkh; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1057} ERM (Emergency Response Mechanism), Household Assessment report, 20 October 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1058} UNOCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 January – 2 February 2020), 5 February 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1059} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s influence, insecurity grow in Balkh, 18 August 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1060} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1061} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}
\end{footnotesize}
2.6 Bamyan

2.6.1 General description of the province

Bamyan province is located in the central highlands region and has borders with the provinces of Samangan to the north, Baghlan and Parwan to the east, Wardak to the south-east, Ghazni and Daykundi to the south, Ghor to the west and Sar-e Pul to the north-west. Bamyan is situated south of the Hindu Kush and north of the Koh-i Baba mountain ranges. The province is divided into the following administrative units: Bamyan, Kahmard, Panjab, Sayghan, Shibar, Waras and Yakawlang. The provincial capital is Bamyan. Yakawlang Two is mentioned as a separate ‘temporary’ district.

According to AAN analyst Thomas Ruttig, “temporary” districts [...] have been approved after entry into force of the 2004 constitution by the president due to security or other considerations, but have not yet been approved by parliament.

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Bamyan province has a population of 495,557. As Bamyan is part of the Hazarajat region, referred to as the ‘unofficial Hazara capital’ by Al Jazeera, the main ethnic group in the province is Hazara. Other groups present include a minority of Pashtun,

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1062 UNOCHA, Afghanistan – Bamyan Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
1063 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Bamyan Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
1065 Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections - Final Results by Polling Stations: Province Bamyan, 2020, url
1066 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, url, p. 19
1067 Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good News and Bad News About District Numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, url
1068 ACCORD, Anfragebeantwortung zu Afghanistan: Informationen zur Volksgruppe der Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyd, Sayid, Sayeed) [Query response on Afghanistan: Information on the ethnic group of the Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyd, Sayid, Sayeed)], 25 October 2017, url; Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, url
1069 Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Who Are the Hazaras?, 27 June 2016, url
Tajik, and Sayed/Sadat. According to various sources quoted in a query response of ACCORD, Bamyans Sayeds are mostly Hazaras, though they distinguish themselves from other Hazaras, and are traditionally part of the Hazara religious and political elite. Approximately 90% of Bamyans residents are Shias.

In March 2016, Kam Air initiated direct commercial flights between Kabul and Bamyans, with flights operating several times a week. By road, Bamyan can be reached from Kabul either by the Kabul-Bamyan Highway, via Wardak province, or by the Ghorband Valley, via Parwan province. Bamyan province is planned to be connected to neighbouring Baghlan province via the Baghlan to Bamyan (B2B) Road in 2022.

Bamyan is reportedly one of Afghans poorest provinces, ‘[...] often lacking basic facilities and electricity’. Tourism is a source of revenue in the province, which has however been impeded by insecurity in neighbouring provinces, as well as by the increasing Covid-19 crisis in Afghanistan. According to UNODCs Opium Survey from 2018, Bamyan province remained opium-free in 2018. UNODC data obtained by AAN in June 2020 indicated a 52% reduction in opium-poppy cultivation in the provinces of the central region and the central highlands (including Bamyan province).

2.6.2 Conflict background and actors in Bamyan

Certain regions in Afghanistan, like Panjsher province and the area of the central highlands (including Bamyan province), have been described as relatively safe and less affected by conflict-driven violence. According to an Afghan military expert cited by Tolonews, the relative stability of Bamyans as well as Daykundi and Panjsher provinces is related to the social cohesion among its inhabitants, as most of them belong to the same ethnic or tribal group. Bamyans relative peacefulness has also been attributed to the active involvement of religious leaders in local and governmental peace processes in the province.

An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 2 July 2020, indicated all districts of Bamyan province as...

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1070 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Bamyans Provincial Overview, n.d., url
1071 ACCORD, Anfragebeantwortung zu Afghanistan: Informationen zur Volksgruppe der Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyd, Sayid, Sayeed) [Query response on Afghanistan: Information on the ethnic group of the Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyd, Sayid, Sayeed)], 25 October 2017, url
1072 Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Bamyan Province Background Profile, n.d., url
1073 Khaama Press, Kam Air Starts Direct Commercial Flights to Bamyan for the First Time, 9 March 2016, url
1074 Kam Air, Route Map: Domestic Routes, 2020, url
1075 Pajhwok Afghan News, Hajigak Pass Reopens for Traffic, 26 April 2015, url
1076 World Bank (The), Trans-Hindukush Road Connectivity Project, 24 October 2018, url
1077 Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Who are the Hazaras?, 27 June 2016, url
1078 Pajhwok Afghan News, More Than 200,000 Tourists Visit Bamyan This Year, 3 September 2017, url; National (The), Coronavirus Shatters Tourism Hopes in Afrgyans Bamyans Province, 26 April 2020, url
1079 Pajhwok Afghan News, More Than 200,000 Tourists Visit Bamyan This Year, 3 September 2017, url
1080 National (The), Coronavirus Shatters Tourism Hopes in Afrgyans Bamyans Province, 26 April 2020, url
1081 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url
1083 Khaama Press, Traditional Dambora Musical Festival Organized in Bamyan Province, 30 June 2018, url; Al Jazeera, Low Turnout, Technical Glitches Mark Afghan Presidential Election, 28 September 2019, url; Reportedly, Challenges of the 2019 Elections: Bamyans, a Province with Heavy Preparedness and Soaring Uncertainty, 31 August 2019, url
1086 UNAMA, Bamyans Religious Scholars Gather to Discuss Peace-Building in Afghanistan, 20 November 2017, url
The provincial capital, Bamyan City, is reported to be under government control. According to an international source Landinfo spoke to in October 2019, the Taliban have no local presence in Bamyan province. However, infiltration of the Taliban from the neighbouring district of Tala Wa Barfak in Baghlan province has been reported, resulting in attacks at checkpoints and abductions. In September 2019, UNOCHA reported on a ‘tense’ situation in Bamyan’s districts Khamard and Shibar due to activities of non-state armed groups. In May 2020, the UN Security Council reported on a reorganisation of the Taliban shadow governance and military structure in several provinces, with key new appointments made in Bamyan province.

According to AAN analyst Ehsan Qaane, insecurity in the insurgency-affected Jalrez district of Wardak province has wider ramifications for the security situation in the Hazarajat region (including Bamyan province), ‘given the importance of passing through Jalrez and the risks that this transit entails’. The Kabul-Bamyan Highway, often referred to as the Death Road/Valley, has been reported as unsafe. According to two international sources Landinfo spoke to in October 2019, 10 to 15 kilometres on the Kabul-Bamyan Highway have been controlled by the Taliban for several years. In December 2019, Qaane reported on 20 kilometres of this highway, connecting the Hazarajat region to the Afghan capital, under Taliban control.

Roadblocks/checkpoints and IED emplacement by armed opposition groups have been reported, as well as people being killed, kidnapped, (passengers working for the Afghan government, NGOs or international troops) and/or extorted by Taliban militants. The victims were mainly Hazaras travelling on this route between Kabul and the Hazarajat region. 58 % of respondents of the Asia Foundation’s 2019 Survey of the Afghan People in Bamyan province reported to experience fear while travelling. In December 2019, AAN reported on an increasing number of Afghan people taking flights or longer routes to bypass roads situated in contested or Taliban-controlled areas. An NGO employee, cited by AAN, declared to use the Ghorband Valley route (through Parwan province) instead of the road between Maydan Shar and Bamyan. Truck drivers transporting agricultural produce and other material between Kabul and the Hazarajat

1087 LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., url (LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.)
1088 ERM, AC401-ERM 09 Conflict Household Assessment Report in Bamyan City, August 2019, url, p. 1
1092 Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, url
1093 Afghanistan Times, People Ask for Security of Kabul-Bamyan Highway, 13 September 2019, url; Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, url
1094 Tolonews, Bamiyan Tourism Takes a Knock due to Security Threats on Roads, 28 June 2017, url; National (The), Coronavirus Shatters Tourism Hopes in Afghanistan’s Bamiyan Province, 26 April 2020, url
1095 Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetsituasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, url, p. 26
1096 Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, url
1097 ERM, AC401-ERM 09 Conflict Household Assessment Report in Bamiyan City of Bamiyan Province, August 2019, url, p. 1; Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, url
1098 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 31-June 6, 6 June 2019, url; Afghanistan Times, People Ask for Security of Kabul-Bamyan Highway, 13 September 2019, url
1099 Afghanistan Times, People Ask for Security of Kabul-Bamyan Highway, 13 September 2019, url
1100 Tolonews, NDS Chief Says Claims against Alipoor Will Be Investigated, 27 November 2018, url; Afghanistan Times, People Ask for Security of Kabul-Bamyan Highway, 13 September 2019, url
1101 Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, url
1102 Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, url, p. 63
1103 Kazemi, S., R., Peace in the Districts (1): A Chasm between High Talks and Local Concerns in Afghanistan, AAN, 11 December 2019, url
region reportedly use the alternative route through Parwan as well, avoiding tax collection by the Taliban along the Kabul-Bamyan Highway.\textsuperscript{1104}

No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP have been recorded in Bamyan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 by ACLED.\textsuperscript{1105}

After the arrest of Hazara militia leader Abdul Ghani Alipur late November 2018, on charges of attacking security forces\textsuperscript{1106}, as well as of extortion of passengers by his gunmen on the highway from Maidan Shar to Jalrez and Bamyan\textsuperscript{1107}, protests were reported in Kabul, Mazar-e Sharif and Bamyan.\textsuperscript{1108} His supporters claimed that Alipur had not been fighting government forces, but rather the Taliban in parts of Wardak, Ghor and Daykundi provinces.\textsuperscript{1109} Shortly after the protests, Alipur was released from NDS custody.\textsuperscript{1110} Alipur’s militia is based in the province of Wardak but also operates in other parts of Afghanistan, claiming to help Hazara communities facing security threats.\textsuperscript{1111}

In July 2019, AAN reported on the recruitment of Shia Hazara and Sayed men and boys from Bamyan province by the Iranian-backed Fatemiyun group\textsuperscript{1112}, to fight in the Syrian war. Afghan officials have expressed concerns that ‘Iran may be laying the groundwork for an organised presence of its Fatemiyun proxy in Bamyan, Kabul and the country at large.’\textsuperscript{1113}

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Bamyan is under the responsibility of the 203\textsuperscript{th} ANA Corps. Bamyan province is included in the Task Force Southeast (TF-Southeast), which is part of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TF-Southeast is led by US forces and has its headquarters in Paktya province.\textsuperscript{1114} In November 2018 President Ashraf Ghani ordered the formation of a new 443-strong security unit in Bamyan province, to ensure the protection of (road) construction projects and to conduct special operations.\textsuperscript{1115}

### 2.6.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.6.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented five civilian casualties (three deaths and two injured) in Bamyan province. This represents a decrease of 29\% compared to 2018. Leading cause of casualties was explosive remnants of war.\textsuperscript{1116} For example in May 2019, three boys were killed in the Dahana-e Ahangaran area, when accidently setting off an old Soviet bomb while playing.\textsuperscript{1117} In March 2020, the UN Secretary General reported Bamyan as the only province to be declared free of landmine

\textsuperscript{1104} Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, [url]

\textsuperscript{1105} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Bamyan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]

\textsuperscript{1106} Tolonews, Alipoor Says He Is ‘Ready to Hand Over All Weapons’, 27 November 2018, [url]

\textsuperscript{1107} Tolonews, NDS Chief Says Claims Against Alipoor Will Be Investigated, 27 November 2018, [url]

\textsuperscript{1108} Tolonews, Alipoor Says He is ‘Ready to Hand Over All Weapons’, 27 November 2018, [url]; RFE/RL, Afghan Authorities Release Militia Leader after Violent Demonstrations, 26 November 2018, [url]

\textsuperscript{1109} Tolonews, Alipoor Supporters Protest for the Second Day in Kabul, 26 November 2018, [url]

\textsuperscript{1110} RFE/RL, Afghan Authorities Release Militia Leader after Violent Demonstrations, 26 November 2018, [url]; AP, Afghans Recruited to Fight in Syrian War Struggle Back Home, 1 April 2019, [url]

\textsuperscript{1111} RFE/RL, Afghan Authorities Release Militia Leader after Violent Demonstrations, 26 November 2018, [url]

\textsuperscript{1112} ‘One of the proxy forces deployed to Syria by the Iranian regime has been the Fatemiyun, a group of thousands of Afghan men who have fought on the side of the Syrian government since 2012-2013. The group has played a small, but not insignificant, role in the conflict in Syria.’ (Hamidi, M., The Two Faces of the Fatemiyun (!): Revisiting the Male Fighters, AAN, 8 July 2019, [url])

\textsuperscript{1113} Hamidi, M., The Two Faces of the Fatemiyun (!): Revisiting the Male Fighters, AAN, 8 July 2019, [url]

\textsuperscript{1114} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url], p. 14

\textsuperscript{1115} Tolonews, Ghani Orders Formation of New 443-Strong Security Unit in Bamyan Province, 10 November 2018, [url]

\textsuperscript{1116} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url], p. 94

\textsuperscript{1117} NYT, Afghanistan’s Curse: A Bomb from 2 Wars Ago Crushes a Family Today, 21 November 2019, [url]
contamination, following the work of the only mixed-gender demining team in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{1118} Resolute Support\textsuperscript{1119} recorded between 0 and 50 civilian casualties in Bamyan province in the first half of 2020, with no variation between the first and second quarter of the year.\textsuperscript{1120}

ACLED collected data on 15 violent events in Bamyan province from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, of which 14 were coded as ‘battles’ and 1 as ‘violence against civilians’. Kahmard in the north-western region of the province stood out as the district where most incidents were reported, with eight incidents recorded. Three incidents were reported in Sayghan district, two in Shibar district and two in Bamyan district, where the provincial capital is located. In the rest of the province, no violent incidents were recorded.\textsuperscript{1121}

![Figure 8. Bamyan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data\textsuperscript{1122}](image)

All ‘battles’ recorded by ACLED in Bamyan province were categorised as ‘armed clashes’, reported in Kahmard, Sayghan, Shibar and Bamyan districts in the third and fourth quarters of 2019. The majority of these armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military and police personnel as well as members of pro-government militias or so-called 	extit{arbakis} (the term 	extit{arbaki} is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan local police or other pro-government militias).\textsuperscript{1123}

The single incident ACLED registered as ‘violence against civilians’ in Bamyan was coded as an incident of sexual violence in Bamyan City.\textsuperscript{1124} In August 2019, two senior security officials were accused of raping a young woman in the guesthouse of the Bamyan police headquarters.\textsuperscript{1125}

Bamyan’s voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 represented the second highest of all provinces (after Daykundi province),


\textsuperscript{1119} Civilian casualty data for 2020 have not yet been published by UNAMA.

\textsuperscript{1120} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, \url, p. 72

\textsuperscript{1122} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Bamyan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url

\textsuperscript{1123} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Bamyan, \url

\textsuperscript{1124} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Bamyan, \url

\textsuperscript{1125} Khaama Press, Senior Security Officials on the Run after Raping a Young Woman in Bamyan Province, 14 August 2019, \url; USDOs, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2019 - Afghanistan, 11 March 2020, \url, p. 34
reaching almost 50\%^{1126} and with a high female turnout reported.\textsuperscript{1127} However, across the whole province the 2019 voter turnout remained low compared to previous elections.\textsuperscript{1128} In the Asia Foundation’s 2019 Survey of the Afghan People, 0-25 \% of respondents in Bamyan province reported to have experienced fear while voting.\textsuperscript{1129} Some voters in Bamyan and Daykundi provinces, who often travel back and forth to Kabul, were reported not to have participated in the elections out of fear of being stopped by the Taliban when passing through Jalrez district in Wardak province.\textsuperscript{1130} According to AAN, election day in Bamyan province went relatively smoothly. In some of the province’s districts such as Khahmad, Sayghan and Shibar, insecurity was reported to have hampered the voter turnout. The polling centre of Sar-e Qundi Baghak in the Imandab area of Shibar district remained closed due to a high security threat and a lack of access routes.\textsuperscript{1131} A Taliban checkpoint was established in the border area with Baghlans’s Tala Wa Barfak district on election day.\textsuperscript{1132} Without providing further details, Agence France Presse (AFP) reported on security incidents on polling day in Bamyan province.\textsuperscript{1133} Referring to Taliban source Voice of Jihad, ACLED recorded one incident on election day in Bamyan province, in which Taliban militants attacked several polling centres in Kahmard district, resulting in clashes with Afghan security forces.\textsuperscript{1134}

2.6.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 175 persons displaced from Bamyan province. The majority of IDPs (126 individuals) were displaced from Shiber district in January 2020. A smaller group of 49 IDPs was displaced from Sayghan district in February 2020. All IDPs found refuge in Kabul province (Kabul district).\textsuperscript{1135}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 730 persons displaced to Bamyan province, all coming from Jalrez district in Wardak province and finding refuge in Bamyan district in August 2019.\textsuperscript{1136} Surging insecurity and intensifying conflict between armed opposition groups and public uprising forces over control of the strategic area connecting Bamyan and Kabul province were reported to have displaced hundreds of people from their villages in the Maydan Valley (Jalrez district) of Wardak province. The IDPs found refuge in Bamyan province. When the situation in some villages in Jalrez improved, several displaced families were reported to have returned home or moved further on towards Kabul.\textsuperscript{1137} According to IOM displacement data published in August and October 2019, most IDPs and returnees in Bamyan province resided in Bamyan district, followed by

\textsuperscript{1127} RFE/RL, Five Takeaways from Afghanistan’s Presidential Election, 28 September 2019, \url{https://www.rferl.org/a/five-takeaways-from-africas-presidential-election/29664369.html}
\textsuperscript{1134} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Bamyan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{https://www.acled.org/}
Kahmard district. According to UNHCR, Bamyan is one of the four provinces with the highest percentage of returnees who originate there but choose to live somewhere else once they return.

2.7 Daykundi

2.7.1 General description of the province

Daykundi province is located in the central highlands region and has borders with the provinces of Ghor to the north and west, Bamyan to the north-east, Ghazni to the south-east, Uruzgan to the south and Helmand to the south-west. Daykundi province is divided into the following administrative: Ashtarlay, Nili, Kajran, Khadir, Kiti, Miramor, Sang-e Takht, Shahrestan, Gizab/Patoo and Nawmesh. The provincial capital is Nili.

According to Pajhwok Afghan News, Daykundi was once a district of Uruzgan province and was given the status of a separate province in 2003. According to the Dutch embassy in Kabul, Daykundi originated from the province of Uruzgan in March 2004.

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1138 IOM, Afghanistan - Bamyan Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results Round 7 (October - December 2018), 1 August 2019, url, pp. 1, 2, 6; IOM, DTM Afghanistan Baseline Mobility Assessment I District Level I Total Inflow (Returnees+IDPs) | June 2019 | Province: Bamyan, 9 October 2019, url
1140 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Daykundi Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
1141 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Daykundi Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
1143 Pajhwok Afghan News, Mineral Resources of Daikundi Province, 1 February 2014, url
1144 Netherlands, Embassy in Kabul (The), Context Analysis - URUZGAN Province, August 2006, url, p. 3
The administrative location of Gizab/Patoo district has been a source of contestation. The district changed hands between Daykundi province and the southern province of Uruzgan in the past and was disputed whether to be split in two or not. According to AAN analyst Martine van Bijlert, in 2011, Gizab was formally still part of Daykundi province, despite the fact that in 2006 it was temporarily placed under the authority of the province of Uruzgan. Several sources reported on the establishment of Patoo district in June 2018, formerly part of Gizab district in Uruzgan but now constituting a separate district belonging to Daykundi. UNODC’s Opium Survey from 2018 mentioned Gizab as ‘formerly part of Daykundi province, but under the administration of the governor of Uruzgan province’. In this survey, Gizab is listed as part of Daykundi until 2013, from on the year 2014 the district is listed as part of Uruzgan. In the 2018 official list of districts by the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, Gizab district is mentioned as belonging to Uruzgan province according to the local authorities, and belonging to Daykundi province according to the Central Statistics Organisation (CSO).

In March 2016, the Hazara-dominated district of Nawmesh was ‘split from the Pashtun-majority Baghran district in northern Helmand province’ by presidential order. In June 2017, its administration was transferred to Daykundi province. Nawmesh was considered a ‘temporary district’. According to AAN analyst Thomas Ruttig, ‘“temporary” districts [...] have been approved after entry into force of the 2004 constitution by the president due to security or other considerations, but have not yet been approved by parliament.’ UNAMA as well as AAN and several media sources mentioned Nawmesh district as part of Daykundi province in 2019.

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Daykundi province has a population of 516,504. As Daykundi is part of the Hazarajat region, the main ethnic group in the province is Hazara. Other groups present include a minority of Pashtun, Baloch, and Sayed/Sadat. Gizab/Patoo is a mixed Pashtun-Hazara district.

Daykundi is described as having a ‘difficult geography’. Most of the province’s territory is mountainous, with heavy snowfall in winter often blocking roads for months. For example in March 2019, Daykundi residents interviewed by Pajhwok Afghan News stated the roads connecting Pato/Patoo district to the provincial capital Nili had been closed since long. ‘Bad’ road conditions...

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1145 Qaane, E., The 2018 Election Observed (7) in Daikundi: The Outstanding Role of Women, AAN, 27 January 2019, url
1146 Van Bijlert, M., Trouble in Gizab; the Fight Everyone Chose to Ignore, AAN, 31 October 2011, url
1148 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, pp. 6, 62, 64, 68
1149 Afghanistan, IEC, Independent Directorate of Local Governance, Distribution of Seats to Districts, 2018, url, p. 1
1150 Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good News and Bad News About District Numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, url
1152 Van Bijlert, M., Trouble in Gizab; the Fight Everyone Chose to Ignore, AAN, 31 October 2011, url
1153 ACCORD, Anfragebeantwortung zu Afghanistan: Informationen zur Volksgruppe der Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyid, Sayid, Sayeed) [Query response on Afghanistan: Information on the ethnic group of the Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyid, Sayid, Sayeed)], 25 October 2017, url; Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, url
1154 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Dai Kundi Provincial Overview, n.d., url
1155 Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (18): How the People of Bamyan, Daikundi and Lal Wa Sarjangal Voted, AAN, 16 October 2019, url
1157 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Not Allowing Us to Buy Food: Daikundi Residents, 30 March 2019, url
and a lack of infrastructure were reported in Daykundi province.\footnote{1159} According to Daykundi residents cited by Tolonews in April 2018, ‘there is only one asphalted road in the province.’ According to Daykundi’s former governor cited in the same article, Daykundi has an airport, which is ‘not standard’ as only small planes can land.\footnote{1160}

In February 2019, the UN Secretary General reported that a combination of drought, ongoing conflict and low financial remittances had resulted in an atypically high demand for food and livelihood assistance in Daykundi province.\footnote{1161} According to UNODC’s Opium Survey from 2018, Daykundi was not among Afghanistan’s 10 main opium-poppy cultivating provinces in 2018; in fact cultivation amounted to less than 1,000 hectares. Compared to 2017, opium-poppy cultivation decreased by 50% in 2018, positioning Daykundi among the provinces with a ‘strong decrease’.\footnote{1162} UNODC data obtained by AAN in June 2020 indicated a 52% reduction in opium-poppy cultivation in the provinces of the central region and the central highlands (including Daykundi province).\footnote{1163} According to UNODC, 100% of opium-poppy taxes in Daykundi province is collected by anti-government groups.\footnote{1164}

### 2.7.2 Conflict background and actors in Daykundi

Certain regions in Afghanistan, like Panjsher province and the area of the central highlands (including Daykundi province), have been described as relatively safe and less affected by conflict-driven violence.\footnote{1165} According to an Afghan military expert cited by Tolonews, the relative stability of Daykundi as well as Bamyan and Panjsher provinces, is related to the social cohesion among its inhabitants, as most of them belong to the same ethnic or tribal group.\footnote{1166}

Mid-July 2019, an increase in Taliban attacks causing a deterioration of the security situation in some of Daykundi’s districts was reported.\footnote{1167} The situation in the districts of Gizab/Patoo, Ashtarlay and Khadir has been indicated as volatile.\footnote{1168} Kajran and Nawmesh districts are equally reported among the province’s most insecure areas.\footnote{1169} In September 2019, UNOCHA reported on a ‘tense’ situation in the districts of Kajran and Patoo due to activities of non-state armed groups.\footnote{1170} According to an international organisation Landinfo spoke with in October 2019, the Taliban were present in the southern areas of Daykundi.\footnote{1171}

Several sources related the security situation in the aforementioned districts to their sharing borders with insecure areas in neighbouring provinces such as Helmand, Uruzgan, Ghor and Ghazni.\footnote{1172} For

\begin{itemize}
  \item[1159] Afghanistan FSC, Daykundi Province Fact Findings (Qualitative Assessment) Report, 18 April 2018, [url](#); p. 3
  \item[1160] Tolonews, Daikundi Secure but Lacks Development: Residents, 6 April 2018, [url](#)
  \item[1162] UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#); pp. 10, 11, 17, 19
  \item[1163] Bjelica, J., New World Drug Report: Opium Production in Afghanistan Remained the Same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](#)
  \item[1164] UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018: Challenges to Sustainable Development, Peace and Security, 30 July 2019, [url](#); p. 64
  \item[1166] Pajhwok Afghan News, 2017 Causalities: Nearly 25,000 People Killed, Wounded in Afghanistan, 14 January 2018, [url](#)
  \item[1167] Reportery, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi; Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019, [url](#)
  \item[1168] ERM, AC301-ERM 09 Conflict Household Assessment Report in Nili District of Daykundi Province, 23 June 2019, [url](#); p. 1; AP, 3 Policemen Die in Attacks on Afghan Police Chief, Governor, 21 April 2020, [url](#)
  \item[1169] Reportery, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi; Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019, [url](#)
  \item[1170] UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (9 - 15 September 2019), 15 September, [url](#); p. 2
  \item[1171] Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhets situasjon og konfliktmonster i 2019, 22 January 2020, [url](#); p. 26
  \item[1172] Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi Residents Concerned About Daesh in Neighborhood, 3 June 2018, [url](#); Reportery, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi; Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019, [url](#)
example, Kajran district is described as a ‘corridor’ for the Taliban and part of a ‘strategic route’ through Helmand and Spin Boldak in Kandahar province.\textsuperscript{1173} According to provincial government officials, the increasing insecurity in some of Daykundi’s districts is partly attributed to an insufficient coordination among security forces and local departments\textsuperscript{1174} and to a lack of military equipment, often exploited by militant groups.\textsuperscript{1175} As stated by AAN analyst Ehsan Qaane, the creation of Patoo district affected the security situation in the region, as it sowed local discord.\textsuperscript{1176} According to a provincial police spokesperson, the establishment of Patoo as a new district resulted in local Taliban commanders being forced to leave the area. Retreating to neighbouring Uruzgan province, these commanders affiliated with Taliban groups there to attack the southern region of Daykundi province.\textsuperscript{1177} Daykundi residents cited by Pajhwok Afghan News related the instability in the province to a competition among political parties, often connected to local armed groups. Their rivalries fuelling tension, distrust and division in the area.\textsuperscript{1178}

An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 2 July 2020, indicated Gizab/Patoo district as ‘contested’. However, a USDOD assessment of July 2019, reported by LWJ in the same map, designated this district as ‘government-controlled’. Kajran district is listed as ‘unconfirmable’ in this map, with LWJ specifying that it has not been able to confirm the Taliban’s claim of controlling all areas except the district centre, nor USDOD’s assessment that the district is ‘government-controlled’. Daykundi’s remaining districts were categorised as ‘government-controlled’ or ‘undetermined’ in this assessment.\textsuperscript{1179}

Media sources in 2019 and 2020 reported on a Taliban presence in Kajran\textsuperscript{1180} and Patoo\textsuperscript{1181} districts. In March 2019, residents of Patoo district declared to Pajhwok Afghan News that their village bazaar was under Taliban control and that militants prevented them from buying food.\textsuperscript{1182} In August 2019, civilian protests were reported against increasing violence and Taliban attacks in Kajran and Patoo districts.\textsuperscript{1183} Several prominent Taliban figures were reported to have been killed in Kajran district.\textsuperscript{1184} In July 2019, a well-known Taliban commander called Mullah Noor was killed, together with more than 30 other militants.\textsuperscript{1185} In December 2019, the Taliban’s shadow chief for Nawzad district in Helmand province called Mullah Abdul Wasi was killed, together with several of his militants.\textsuperscript{1186}

According to AAN analyst Ehsan Qaane, the roads connecting Daykundi province to Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar and Herat are not secure.\textsuperscript{1187} For example, insecurity in the insurgency-affected Jalrez district of Wardak province has wider ramifications for the security situation in the Hazarajat region (including Daykundi province), ‘given the importance of passing through Jalrez and the risks that this transit entails’. Qaane referred to people being killed and/or kidnapped while travelling this route.\textsuperscript{1188} In December 2019, a pressure-plate IED detonated on the road connecting Daykundi to Ghazni

\textsuperscript{1173} Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on: 21 July 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1174} Reporterly, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi; Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1175} Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi Residents Concerned About Daesh in Neighborhood, 3 June 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1176} Qaane, E., The 2018 Election Observed (7) in Daikundi: The Outstanding Role of Women, AAN, 27 January 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1177} Reporterly, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi; Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1178} Pajhwok Afghan News, Political Parties Seen As a Source of Insecurity in Daikundi, 14 April 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1179} LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., \url{url} (LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.)
\textsuperscript{1180} Reporterly, 9 Security Forces Killed & Injured in Taliban Attack in Daikundi, 2 July 2019, \url{url}; Reporterly, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi; Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019, \url{url}; Xinhua, Taliban Shadow District Chiefs Killed in Afghan Provinces, 25 December 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1181} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Not Allowing Us to Buy Food: Daikundi Residents, 30 March 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1182} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Not Allowing Us to Buy Food: Daikundi Residents, 30 March 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1183} Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi Residents Rally against Mounting Instability, 3 August 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1184} See sources mentioned below.
\textsuperscript{1185} Reporterly, 9 Security Forces Killed & Injured in Taliban Attack in Daikundi, 2 July 2019, \url{url}; Reporterly, Security Incidents Mount in Daikundi; Why Has the Secured Province Faces Insecurity?, 11 July 2019, \url{url}; Xinhua, Taliban Shadow District Chiefs Killed in Afghan Provinces, 25 December 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1186} Qaane, E., The 2018 Election Observed (7) in Daikundi: The Outstanding Role of Women, AAN, 27 January 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1187} Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, \url{url}
province, impacting a civilian minibus and resulting in 10 civilians being killed and 9 injured. According to UNAMA, some sources claimed this road had been ‘closed’ by the Taliban.\textsuperscript{1189}

No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP have been recorded in Daykundi province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 by ACLED. One incident was recorded in June 2019, in which 10 Taliban and/or ISKP militants were killed and 5 were wounded during ground and air operations by Afghan and NATO forces in Kajran district.\textsuperscript{1190}

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Daykundi is under the responsibility of the 205\textsuperscript{th} ANA Corps. Daykundi province is included in the Train, Advise and Assist Command - South (TAAC-S), which is part of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-S is led by US forces and has its headquarters in Kandahar province.\textsuperscript{1191}

### 2.7.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.7.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 70 civilian casualties (44 deaths and 26 injured) in Daykundi province. This represented an increase of 71\% compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were non-suicide IEDs, followed by ground engagements and aerial operations.\textsuperscript{1192} Resolute Support\textsuperscript{1193} recorded between 0 and 50 civilian casualties in Daykundi province in the first half of 2020, with no variation between the first and second quarter of the year.\textsuperscript{1194}

ACLED collected data on 40 violent events in Daykundi province from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, of which 29 were coded as ‘battles’, 8 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ and 3 as ‘violence against civilians’. Kajran in the south-western region of the province stood out as the district where most incidents were reported, with 33 incidents recorded. Six incidents were reported in Nili district, where the provincial capital is located, and one incident was reported in Khadir district. In the rest of the province, no violent incidents were recorded.\textsuperscript{1195}

![](image)

**Figure 9.** Daykundi - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data\textsuperscript{1196}

\textsuperscript{1189} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url], p. 42

\textsuperscript{1190} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Daykundi; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]

\textsuperscript{1191} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url], p. 13

\textsuperscript{1192} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url], p. 94

\textsuperscript{1193} Civilian casualty data for 2020 have not yet been published by UNAMA.

\textsuperscript{1194} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url], p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url], p. 72

\textsuperscript{1195} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Daykundi; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]

\textsuperscript{1196} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Daykundi, [url]
ACLED coded around 73% of the violent incidents in Daykundi province as ‘battles’, of which the majority were ‘armed clashes’. This category represented the most prevalent incident type in Kajran, Nili and Khadir districts. The majority of these armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military and police personal as well as members of pro-government militias or so-called arbakis (the term arbaki is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan local police or other pro-government militias).\footnote{1197} Examples of such incidents include attacks on military or police checkpoints/outposts and bases in Kajran district in June 2019\footnote{1198}, in July 2019\footnote{1199}, in November 2019\footnote{1200}, in December 2019\footnote{1201} and in March 2020\footnote{1202}; in Nili district in July 2019\footnote{1203}; in Nawmesh district in July 2019\footnote{1204} and in October 2019\footnote{1205}; in Patoo district in August 2019\footnote{1206}; and in Khadir (Kando) district in March 2020.\footnote{1207} No civilian casualties were reported in these incidents.

Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED.\footnote{1208} For example in August 2019\footnote{1209} and December 2019\footnote{1210}, several Taliban militants were killed and wounded in ANDSF operations in Kajran district. In October 2019\footnote{1211} and November 2019\footnote{1212}, several Taliban militants were killed during Special Forces’ raids in Gizab district.

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeting the Afghan security forces, represented 10% of all reported security incidents in Daykundi.\footnote{1213} For example in April 2020, the car of a provincial police chief hit a roadside bomb, causing several ANP casualties.\footnote{1214} Some of the IED incidents resulted in casualties among civilians. This happened in May 2019, when a civilian vehicle hit a roadside bomb in Nawmesh district, killing seven civilians and wounding several others.\footnote{1215}

Air/drone strikes represented 10% of all reported violent incidents in Daykundi. Three of these air/drone strikes were carried out by Afghan military forces in Kajran district in December 2019, killing around 18 Taliban militants and wounding several others. One air/drone strike was reportedly carried out by NATO forces in April 2020, also in Kajran district, causing one civilian casualty.\footnote{1216}

\textsuperscript{1197} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Daykundi; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1198} Pajhwok Afghan News, 25 Security Forces Killed, Injured in Daikundi Attack, 28 June 2019, \url{url}; Xinhua, 8 Police Killed in Afghanistan’s Central Province, 28 June 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-July 4, 4 July 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1199} Reportedly, 9 Security Forces Killed & Injured in Taliban Attack in Daikundi, 2 July 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1200} Al Jazeera, Blast Targets UN Vehicle in Afghanistan Killing One Foreigner, 24 November 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Suffer Casualties in Taliban Attack in Daikundi Province, 24 November 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 Security Personnel Killed, 5 Wounded in Daikundi Assault, 24 November 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1201} Xinhua, Taliban Shadow District Chiefs Killed in Afghan Provinces, 25 December 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1202} 1TV, Four Killed in Attack Police Checkpoints in Daikundi, 29 March 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1203} Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Security Forces, 6 Rebels Killed in Fresh Offensives, 4 July 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1204} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1205} Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Killed, 7 Wounded in Fresh Wave of Violence, 7 October 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1206} RFE/RL, At Least 10 Afghan Police Killed in Taliban Attack on Security Checkpoint, 2 August 2019, \url{url}; VoA, Afghan Official: Taliban Strike Police Checkpoint, Kill 10, 2 August 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1207} Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Police Killed, 8 Injured in Daikundi Clash, 29 March 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1208} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Daykundi; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1209} Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Inflict Heavy Casualties on Taliban in Daikundi and Kandahar, 3 August 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1210} Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Taliban Killed in Daikundi Operation, 27 December 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1211} Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill, Detain 38 Taliban Militants in Daikundi and Wardak, 31 October 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1212} Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill, Detain 27 Taliban and ISIS Militants in 6 Provinces, 19 November 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1213} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Daykundi; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1214} AP, 3 Policemen Die in Attacks on Afghan Police Chief, Governor, 21 April 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1215} Pajhwok Afghan News, Daikundi Blast: 7 People Killed, 4 Injured, 10 May 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1216} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Daykundi; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}
ACLED categorised 8% of all reported violent incidents in Daykundi province as ‘violence against civilians’.

In October 2019, two polio-vaccinators were abducted by the Taliban in Nawmesh district. After the mediation of community elders, they were released three days later. In January 2020, two trucks loaded with food were looted by Taliban militants in Kajran district. The drivers were abducted by the AGEs, but later released. In June 2020, 53 civilians were reportedly taken hostage by the Taliban, while on their way from Kajran district to Kiti district. Local elders were involved to negotiate the release.

Daykundi’s voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 represented the highest of all provinces, reaching over 55%, with a high female turnout reported. However, across the whole province the 2019 voter turnout remained low compared to previous elections. In the Asia Foundations 2019 Survey of the Afghan People, 26-50% of respondents in Daykundi province reported to have experienced fear while voting. Some voters in Daykundi and Bamyan provinces, who often travel back and forth to Kabul, were reported not to have participated in the elections out of fear of being stopped by the Taliban when passing through Jalrez district in Wardak province. According to AAN, election day in Daykundi province went relatively smoothly. A local journalist and an observer from the Afghanistan Civil Society Forum Organisation (ACSFO) indicated insecurity had influenced voting in Kajran, Patoo and Nawamesh districts. Without providing further details, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on election related attacks on polling day in Daykundi province. The polling centre in Buk-e Suf in Kajran district reportedly came under fire and was temporarily closed, no casualties were reported.

### 2.7.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 2 390 persons displaced from Daykundi, from whom the majority (1 075) found refuge within the province itself (in Kajran and Nili districts). The remaining 1 315 IDPs from Daykundi sought shelter in the southern provinces of Kandahar (Spin Boldak district) and Helmand (Nahr-e Saraj district), in Kabul province (Kabul district) and in the western provinces of Herat (Injil district) and Ghor (Chag Charan district). The majority of IDPs in Daykundi province were displaced from Kajran district, with a peak of 874 individuals in July 2019 and a smaller number of 103 individuals in January 2020 and from Gizab/Patoo district with a peak of 983 individuals in December 2019 and a smaller number of 51 individuals in June 2019. Minor

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1217 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Daykundi; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url

1218 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 49

1219 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Rebels Accused of Looting Food-Laden Trucks, 24 January 2020, url

1220 However, the Taliban denied their involvement in the hostage-taking. Tolonews, [Twitter], posted on: 20 June 2020, url

1221 1TV, Taliban Abduct 53 Civilians in Daikundi, 20 June 2020, url


1223 REE/RL, Five Takeaways from Afghanistan’s Presidential Election, 28 September 2019, url

1224 Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (18): How the People of Bamyan, Daikundi and Lal Wa Sarjangal Voted, AAN, 16 October 2019, url

1225 Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, url, p. 62

1226 Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (18): How the People of Bamyan, Daikundi and Lal Wa Sarjangal Voted, AAN, 16 October 2019, url; Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, url

1227 Adili, A., Y., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (18): How the People of Bamyan, Daikundi and Lal Wa Sarjangal Voted, AAN, 16 October 2019, url

1228 Pajhwok Afghan News, 32 Killed, 123 Wounded in Election Day Attacks, 28 September 2019, url

groups of IDPs were displaced from Ashtarlay district in October 2019 and from Nili, Sang-e Takht and Kiti districts in January and February 2020.\(^{1230}\)

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Daykundi province from other provinces was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020.\(^{1231}\)

Fighting between Taliban militants and Afghan government troops in Gizab/Patoo district, as well as personal disputes between local commanders in Ashtarlay and Khadir districts were reported to have caused displacements to the area of Nili City in June 2019.\(^{1232}\) In July and August 2019, UNOCHA reported on continuing clashes over the strategic control of the Bazar Musharak area in Kajran district, causing the displacement of large numbers of people to various locations.\(^{1233}\) Several villages in the area were reported to be inaccessible due to conflict and mine contamination.\(^{1234}\)

According to IOM displacement data published in August and October 2019, most IDPs and returnees in Daykundi province resided in Khadir district, followed by Nili and Miramor districts.\(^{1235}\)

\(^{1230}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url]; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url].

\(^{1231}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url]; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url].

\(^{1232}\) ERM, AC301-ERM 09 Conflict Household Assessment Report in Nili District of Daykundi Province, 23 June 2019, [url], p. 1

\(^{1233}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (29 July - 4 August 2019), 4 August 2019, [url], p. 2

\(^{1234}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (12 - 19 August 2019), 19 August 2019, [url], p. 2

\(^{1235}\) IOM, Afghanistan - Daykundi Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results Round 7 (October - December 2018), 1 August 2019, [url], pp. 1, 2, 6; IOM, DTM Afghanistan Baseline Mobility Assessment I District Level I Total Inflow (Returnees+IDPs) I June 2019 l Province: Daykundi, 9 October 2019, [url].
2.8 Farah

2.8.1 General description of the province

The province of Farah is located in the western part of Afghanistan and borders Herat to the north, Ghor to the north-east, Helmand to the south-east and Nimroz to the south, as well as Iran to the west. Farah province is divided into the following administrative units: Anar Dara, Bakwa, Bala Buluk, Farah, Gulistan, Khak-e Safed, Lash-e Juwayn, Pur Chaman, Pushtrud, Qala-i Kah (formerly Pusht-Koh) and Shib Koh. The provincial capital of Farah is Farah.

Afghanistan NSIA estimated the population of Farah at 563,026 in 2020-21, with 128,047 of its residents living in the provincial capital. The majority of Farah’s inhabitants are Pashtuns, with Tajik and smaller Hazara communities residing mainly in the countryside. Aylat, Mugal, Sadat, Bomodi, Aymaq, Barahawi and Baloch tribes live in Farah, according to Pajhwok Afghan News.

Part of the Ring Road leads through Farah, connecting the province with the regional centre of Herat in the north and the provinces of Nimroz and Helmand in the south and south-east, respectively. Cross-border transport and trade with Iran is reportedly possible at Abu Nasr Farahi port. In September 2018, Tolonews reported security problems near the border crossing, as the route towards Iran is reportedly under the control of the Taliban.

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1236 UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Farah Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
1237 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Farah Province District Atlas, April 2014, url
1238 Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Farah, 2020, url
1239 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, d.n., url, pp. 5 and 43
1240 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, d.n., url, pp. 5 and 43
1241 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Farah Provincial Overview, n.d., url
1242 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Farah, n.d., url
1243 Diplomat (The), Kabul’s Plan to Realize Afghanistan’s Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, url
1244 Tolonews, Import Ban Affects Business In Farah Port, 21 September 2018, url; IRNA, Afghanistan opens Farah border to Iranian goods, 4 November 2018, url
the border leads through militant-controlled areas. In April 2020, UNODC cited [drug] traffickers in Farah province confirming Taliban presence on the trafficking route between Farah and Nimroz, between Farah and Helmand and between Farah and Iran.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Farah is one of the main opium poppy-cultivating provinces in western Afghanistan. Regarding the size of poppy cultivation in hectares, Farah ranked 5th among all Afghan provinces in 2018, with a decrease of poppy acreage by 15 % compared to 2017, after opium-poppy cultivation had increased by 41 % in 2017 compared to 2016. In 2020, UNODC indicated that ‘some traffickers believed that there might be nearer 20 or 30 [illicit opium manufacturing] laboratories in Farah’. According to AAN, in 2019, opium poppy cultivation in the western provinces including in Farah has decreased by 23 % compared to 2018.

### 2.8.2 Conflict background and actors in Farah

According to AAN, the Taliban were never fully defeated after 2001 and kept a strong presence in the province – especially in Bala Buluk. In February 2018, the Washington Post stated that approximately 60 % of Farah was controlled by insurgents, while the government controlled only the provincial capital and 10 district centres, some of which are allegedly too dangerous for district officials to visit. In August 2019, Etilaatroz cited a former local commander indicating that the Taliban have a widespread presence in the remote areas of Farah province. The source also cited Shah Mahmood Naimi, member of provincial council of Farah province, stating [informal translation] ‘Taliban maintain entire control over Khak-e Safed, Shib Koh, Bakwa, Gulistan, Bala Buluk districts including all highways, and in the remaining districts, the government control is limited within 3 kilometres (from the capital of the districts).’ Naimi further stated ‘currently, the Taliban commute even during the day in the remote areas of the city.’ According to the source, Farah police confirms Taliban’s presence in three districts and government’s control over Highway One, and Taliban’s control over certain roads due to the lack of security forces. Another source indicated that Taliban operate in a number of districts of Farah province.

In September 2019, Ariana News cited a local official in Farah province stating that ‘Taliban militants captured the center of Anar Darah district.’ In October 2019, the same source cites the Afghan government indicated the presence of a Taliban prison in Pur Chaman and in September 2019 in Bakwa districts. On 7 January 2020, Afghanistan Times reported that the government claimed having cleared several villages from Taliban presence in ‘outskirt of Farah City and in Bala Blok and Qal-e-Kah districts’. While on 20 January 2020, Kabul Now news cited Abdul Sattar Hussaini, a Member of the Afghan Parliament, stating the Taliban established a Friday black market in Farah province where

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the group sold weapons seized from the ANDSF. According to information by LWJ collected and presented in a map, Gulistan, Bala Buluk, Saheb Koh, Anar Dara and Khak-e Safed districts of Farah province were under Taliban control, Qala-i Kah, Posht-e Rod, Bakwa, Pur Chaman districts as well as Farah City were contested, while Lash-e Juwain district was under government control. In March 2020, Taliban reportedly closed the Farah-Herat Highway. On 10 May 2020, local media reported that former chief police of Farah province joined the Taliban. According to the UN Security Council report, as of 27 May 2020, the Taliban shadow governor for Farah was Mullah Mashar. The source also indicated that the former shadow governor for Farah province, Mullah Abdul Bari, was killed in an air strike in early August 2019. A local news also reported on the incident.

In terms of government presence, the 207th Zafar Corps is in charge of the ANA operations in the province of Farah. As part of the RS Mission, Italian forces provide ‘functionality-based’ security assistance to ANA 207th Corps and ANP in Farah province.

### 2.8.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.8.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 147 civilian casualties, including 87 killed and 60 injured in Farah province, which represents 47% decrease compared to 2018. The leading causes of casualties were Non-Suicide IEDs, ground engagements and air strikes. According to SIGAR, RS (Resolute Support) recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Farah province during the first quarter of 2020, and the mentioned source recorded the same number of civilian casualties (between 26 and 50) during the second quarter of 2020.

According to ACLED data, between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 there were 441 security incidents recorded in Farah province, of whom 277 were coded as battles, 148 remote violence and 16 incidents of violence against civilians.

![Figure 10. Farah - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data](url)

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1259 Kabul Now, Taliban retail weapons of Afghan forces in Farah, 20 January 2020, [url]
1260 LWJ, Several Districts Change Hands as Fighting Rages in Northern Afghanistan, 6 July 2020, [url], however the source does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated
1261 Pajhwok Afghan News, Militants close Herat-Farah highway for traffic, 19 March 2020, [url]
1262 Pajhwok Afghan News, Former police chief joins Taliban in Farah, 10 May 2020, [url]; Khaama Press, Interior minister reacts to as former chief of Farah joins Taliban, 10 May 2020, [url]
1264 Ariana News, 103 militants including Taliban shadow governor killed in Farah, 4 August 2019, [url]
1265 Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., [url]
1266 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, [url], p. 14
1267 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url], p. 94
1268 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url], p. 69
1269 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url], p. 72
1270 Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Farah; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url]
In September 2019, Ariana News indicated that Farah province was one of the insecure provinces in the west of Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{1271} According to UNAMA, at the end of August and beginning of September 2019, the Taliban carried out extensive attacks against three provincial capitals including the capital of Farah province.\textsuperscript{1272} Several news sources reported that throughout 2019 and the first half of 2020, several armed confrontations between the Taliban and the ANDSF took place in Farah province\textsuperscript{1273}, including intense fighting in parts of Farah province in June 2020\textsuperscript{1274}.

In December 2019, Tolonews cited a member of the People’s Peace Movement (PPM) who stated that 27 members of PPM have been abducted by the Taliban. The source quoted Dadullah Qani, member of the Farah provincial council, confirming the incident and stating that the group was kidnapped on Farah road while travelling from Herat to Nimroz province.\textsuperscript{1275}

Recent security incidents with impact on civilians in Farah province include: on 5 May 2019, between 30 and 45 civilian workers were killed, including children, in clashes and air strikes by foreign troops on drug production factories in Gulistan and Bakwa districts\textsuperscript{1276}; on 31 July 2019, between 24\textsuperscript{1277} and 34 people were killed, and around 17 were wounded when a bomb struck a bus on the highway in the Ab Khorma area, which links the provincial capitals of Herat and Kandahar\textsuperscript{1278}; on 1 September 2019, six people were killed, including women and children when a roadside bomb exploded in Anardara district as family members of the local police chief were heading from the district centre to their home\textsuperscript{1279}; on 23 November 2019, ten civilians were killed, and five wounded in an air strike in the Gajki village of Pushtroud district\textsuperscript{1280}; on 21 January 2020, Shia News Association indicated [informal translation] ‘the Afghan Minister of Public Health stated that during the past year, over 50 health centres have been destroyed during the conflicts in Afghanistan and 112 others were closed down due to the conflict, in particular in Farah and Nangarhar provinces’\textsuperscript{1281}; on 5 February 2020, two civilians were killed, and 10 others were wounded including women and children when a mortar hit Qala-i Kah and Shamalgha areas\textsuperscript{1282}; on 9 February 2020, five civilians, who were reportedly businessmen travelling from Farah City to Abu Nasar Farahi port were killed in an air strike\textsuperscript{1283}; on 12 May 2020, four children were killed by a mortar attack hitting a house in Bala Buluk district.\textsuperscript{1284}

### 2.8.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 17,830 persons displaced from Farah province, with 86% displaced within the province itself (mainly in the provincial

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{1271} Ariana News, Afghan forces retreat from Anar Darah district of Farah province, 7 September 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1272} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 35
\textsuperscript{1274} Ariana News, Taliban attacks intensified in most parts of Afghanistan recently, 15 June 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1275} Tolonews, 27 peace activists taken captive in Farah, 25 December 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1276} Pajhwok Afghan News, dozens of civilians, forces killed in Farah, 6 May 2019, \url{url}; UNAMA, protection of civilians in armed conflicts, special report: airstrike on alleged drug-process facilities, 5 May 2019, 9 October 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1277} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict, Quarterly report, 17 October 2019, \url{url}, p. 5
\textsuperscript{1278} Reuters, Afghanistan highway blast kills at least 34 on bus, injures 17, 31 July 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1279} NYT, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict, Quarterly report, September 2019, 26 September 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1280} NYT, Afghanistan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 2 December 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1281} Shia News Association, [unofficial translation] ‘Health Ministry: in the past one year, 50 health centres have been destroyed, 21 January 2020’, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1282} 1TV News, mortar shelling kills two children, wounds 10 in Farah, 5 February 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1283} Tolonews, Farah officials claim civilians were killed in airstrike, 9 February 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1284} Afghanistan Times, four children killed in Farah mortar attacks, 12 May 2020, \url{url}
\end{footnotesize}
capital district Farah and Qala-i Kah districts), 8% were displaced into Kandahar, 3% were displaced into Herat and the remaining 3% into Nimroz province.\textsuperscript{1285} UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 15,430 persons displaced to Farah province, with almost 100% coming from within the province itself.\textsuperscript{1286} During the months of May, June and July 2019, 1,362 individuals were displaced due to conflict from Bala Buluk, Khak-e-Safed, Gulistan, Pushtrud, Shib Koh, Anardara and Qala-i Kah districts to the surrounding villages of Farah City.\textsuperscript{1287} In August and September 2019, 1,287 people were displaced due to conflict from Bala Buluk, Khak-e Safed, Pur Chaman, Pushtrud, Bakwa, Lash-e Juwayn, Shib Koh, Anardara districts and villages of Farah City.\textsuperscript{1288}

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\textsuperscript{1285} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url} \\
\textsuperscript{1286} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url} \\
\textsuperscript{1287} UNOCHA, Farah Operational Coordination Team (OCT) meeting minutes, 25 July 2019, \url{url}, p. 1 \\
\textsuperscript{1288} UNOCHA, Farah Operational Coordination Team (OCT) meeting minutes, 3 October 2019, \url{url}, p. 1
\end{flushleft}
2.9 Faryab

2.9.1 General description of the province

Map 9: Afghanistan – Faryab province, source: UNOCHA

1289 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Faryab Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
Faryab province is located in the north-western part of Afghanistan and has borders with Jawzjan and Sar-e Pul provinces to the east, Ghor province to the south and Badghis province to the south-west and an international border with Turkmenistan to the west and north. Faryab province is divided into the following administrative units: Almar, Andkhoy, Bilcheragh, Dawlatabad, Garziwan, Khan-e Char Bagh, Khwajasabzposh, Kohestan, Maymana, Pashtunkot, Qaramqol, Qaysar, Qorgham, Shirintagab. The provincial capital is Maymana. According to UNODC, the district of Ghormach became part of Faryab in 2017. In August 2018, the Peshawar-based daily newspaper, Frontier Post noted that Ghormach’s administrative affairs would be shifted back to Badghis due to security reasons. The administrative belonging of Ghormach seems to be disputed. Afghanistan Analysts Network reported in 2017 that the central government had already transferred Ghormach to Faryab in 2007, while the governor of Faryab did not consider Ghormach to be part of Faryab in 2010. In 2018, AAN stated that Ghormach had been ‘temporarily transferred’ to Faryab according to a list of Afghanistan’s district numbers which was jointly published by the Central Statistics Organization and the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG). The 2020/21 population estimation of the Afghan NSIA, as well as the publication of the 2019 presidential election results by the Independent Election Commission again listed Ghormach as part of Badghis.

According to estimates for 2020-2021 by NSIA, the province has a population of 1,109,223, 95,971 of whom live in the provincial capital, Maymana. The main ethnic groups in the province are Uzbeks. Other groups present include Tajiks/Aimaqs, Pashtuns, Hazara, Moghol and other smaller ethnicities.

A part of the Ring Road leads through Faryab, connecting the province with neighbouring Jawzjan and the regional centre Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh province. According to AAN, parts of the paved highway between Badghis and Faryab have been under Taliban control in the past and in March 2018, the Taliban were threatening parts of the Ring Road, as well as important provincial roads. According to UNOCHA, the road between Andkhoy district and provincial capital Maymana remained contested in January and February 2020. AGEs had control and were taxing commercial and logistic vehicles. This impacted civilian movement as well.

As of July 2020, scheduled air passenger services between Maymana and Kabul were provided.
According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Faryab was among the ten main opium poppy-cultivating provinces of Afghanistan in 2018 – though it ranked within the lowest third of those ten provinces. Compared to 2017, the size of poppy-cultivating acreage in Faryab decreased by 64% in 2018, even though UNODC counted Ghormach – a district with sizeable opium-poppy cultivation – as part of Faryab for the first time in 2018. UNODC linked the decrease mainly to that year’s weather conditions, as Faryab was affected by a drought.\(^{1304}\)

### 2.9.2 Conflict background and actors in Faryab

According to AAN, ‘[…] Faryab is strategically important as it connects the western parts of the country with the north – it was through Faryab that the Taliban moved to capture Mazar-e Sharif in 1997 and 1998 and from where anti-Taliban forces came to re-capture the city in 2001.’\(^{1305}\) In 2018, Faryab was described as ‘one of the most contested provinces in the north-west’\(^{1306}\) with ‘an astonishingly widespread Taliban presence’.\(^{1307}\)

AAN links the Taliban’s success in Faryab from 2007 onwards to ‘local Jamiati-Jombesh rivalries, poppy-cultivation interests and radical propaganda by religious preachers, coupled with the absolute inconsistence of government outreach’\(^{1308}\) as well as the exploitation of local land and water conflicts and the rearmament of local commanders.\(^{1309}\) According to AAN, fighting broke out between local pro-government militias in early 2018, which further weakened the resistance against AGEs.\(^{1310}\)

In March 2018, AAN described how the Taliban became increasingly successful in the province after drawing on local fighters – which is a change in strategy compared to the Taliban’s approach before 2001. Since 2008, Faryab’s Taliban shadow governors mostly have been Uzbeks and also a majority of the Taliban district officers are Uzbeks in districts with an Uzbek majority, along with a few Tajiks. Pashtuns serve on mid-level posts in the districts of Qaysar, Dawlatabad, and Shirintagab where Pashtuns form a considerable share of the population.\(^{1311}\) However, AAN reported that the strategy of endorsement towards non-Pashtun ethnic groups among Faryab’s Taliban limited the group’s organisational capacity as some Pashtun Taliban commanders ignored instructions of Uzbek shadow governors. In order to avoid tensions, the then shadow governor allegedly deployed a strategy of individual smaller operations by each group in their own areas instead of joint operations with larger numbers of fighters.\(^{1312}\)

General Abdul Rashid Dostum, Jombesh party leader and self-proclaimed sole representative of the Uzbek minority in Afghanistan, allegedly perceived the Taliban outreach to Uzbek communities as a threat. Subsequently, Dostum put considerable effort in combatting the Taliban influence on Uzbek communities in Faryab and led several counteroffensives of pro-government (Jombesh) militias together with the ANSF throughout 2015 and 2016. According to AAN, there were ‘some initial successes, but no significant long-term results’: Dostum was reportedly able to clear most parts of Qaysar, Dawlatabad, and Shirintagab (as well as Ghormach) of Taliban militants. Local government


\(^{1305}\) Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, url

\(^{1306}\) Adili A. A., Afghanistan Elections Conundrum (17): Voters disenfranchised in Faryab, AAN, 12 October 2018, url

\(^{1307}\) Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan’s major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, url

\(^{1308}\) Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Classics of Conflict (1): Reviewing some of Afghanistan’s most notorious hotspots, AAN, 3 July 2015, url

\(^{1309}\) Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan’s major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, url

\(^{1310}\) Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan’s major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, url

\(^{1311}\) Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Classics of Conflict (1): Reviewing some of Afghanistan’s most notorious hotspots, AAN, 3 July 2015, url; Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, url

\(^{1312}\) Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan’s major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, url
forces and pro-government militias have however not been able to hold most of the areas after Dostum moved out of Faryab. According to analyst Deedee Derksen, Dostum’s remobilising of local militias might have strengthened the Taliban in the long run, as large numbers of militiamen formerly affiliated to Dostum might have defected to the Taliban after their funding by Dostum dried up.

In November 2018, the Faryab governor claimed that at least 80% of Faryab province was under Taliban control. Two districts were fully under Taliban control, while eight other districts were on the verge of collapse according to the civil society foundations network head. According to the police, the Taliban controlled the main district bazaar in Qaramqol district and security personnel inside the district building were besieged in June 2019. The Taliban retook control of Qaramqol district in November 2019. In June 2019, Bilcheragh district was recaptured by the ANDSF after having been under Taliban control for over a year. In July 2019, after a year, Afghan security forces managed to retake two strategic locations in the south-eastern outskirts of Maymana City. With the exception of the district centre, all areas of Dawlatabad were said to be under Taliban control in August 2019. Much of the area in Almar district was reported to be under Taliban control in October 2019. An Afghanistan analyst contacted by the Swedish Migrations Agency (Migrationsverket) in January 2020, considered Sar-e Pul and Faryab to be the most Taliban-controlled or influenced provinces in the northern region. As of 2 July 2020, an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Bilcheragh, Kohestan, Pashtunkot, Qaramqol and Shirintagab districts as ‘Taliban-controlled’, Andkhoy and Khan-e Char Bagh districts as ‘government-controlled’ and the remaining districts in Faryab province as ‘contested’.

According to information at the disposal of the UN Security Council in 2019 and 2020, in Afghanistan Central Asian groups are under the direct operational and financial control of the Taliban. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan is said to have no more than 100 members and operates mainly in Faryab and Jowzjan provinces where it maintains links to splinter groups such as Islamic Jihad Group and Khatiba Imam al-Bukhari. Besides local Taliban fighters, a small Taliban-affiliated group of the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) was reportedly fighting in Faryab in 2018.

According to information submitted to the UN Secretary General for the February 2020 report, ISKP had a covert presence in Faryab province, consisting of a group of up to 25 members, led by Qari Salahuddin, who was formerly with the Taliban. In May 2020, provincial officials expressed concern about ISKP affiliates, recruiting and looking for strengthening its position in Faryab province after the

1311 Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, url
1312 War on the Rocks, In Afghanistan, Today’s Pro-Government Militias Could Be Tomorrow’s Insurgents, 11 December 2017, url
1313 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban control 80pc of Faryab area, says governor, 28 November 2018, url
1314 Pajhwok Afghan News, Security personnel, Taliban suffer casualties in Faryab clashes, 30 June 2019, url
1315 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban overrun Qarma Qul district of Faryab, 23 November 2019, url
1317 Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghan forces recapture 2 strategic areas in Maimana, 2 July 2019, url
1318 Pajhwok Afghan news, Civilians among 16 suffered casualties in Faryab clash, 15 August 2019, url
1319 NYT, Afghans Demanded a Fair Election. They Could Be Waiting a While for Results, 13 October 2019, url
1320 Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, url, p. 47
1321 LWI, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., url. The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.
1323 Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan’s major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, url
1324 UNSG, Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 4 February 2020, url, pp. 6-7
US-Taliban deal. However, no security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Faryab province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Faryab province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen corps. Faryab province is included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North is led by German forces and has its headquarters in Mazar-e-Sharif, Balkh province.

2.9.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.9.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 665 civilian casualties (199 deaths and 466 injured) in Faryab. This represents an increase of 3% compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by air strikes and explosive remnants of war. Throughout 2019 UNAMA ranked Faryab among the five provinces in Afghanistan where civilians were most affected by the armed conflict. In the first half of 2020, UNAMA ranked Faryab province fourth in terms of civilians most affected by the conflict, documenting 233 civilian casualties in the province. Resolute Support recorded between 102 and 150 civilian casualties in Faryab in the first half of 2020, reporting similar numbers of civilian casualties between the first and second quarter of 2020.

ACLED collected data on 579 violent events in Faryab province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, 422 of which were coded as battles, 135 as explosions/remote violence and 22 as violence against civilians. An international source interviewed by the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, Landinfo, during a fact-finding mission at the end of October 2019, counted Faryab among the six most violent provinces in Afghanistan in terms of number of security incidents. According to a representative of an international NGO met by the Swedish Migration Agency, Migrationsverket, in Kabul in January 2020, Faryab remained a very insecure province where the security situation had further deteriorated compared to before. While ACLED registered violent events in all of Faryab’s districts, Qaysar and Pashtunkot stood out as districts where most incidents were reported, with more than 90 incidents

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1327 Afghanistan Times, Daesh may be regaining strength in Faryab, 9 May 2020, url
1328 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Faryab; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
1329 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, 1 July 2020, p. 14
1330 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 94
1331 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict: 1 January To 30 June 2019, Midyear Update, 30 July 2019, url, p. 3; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict: 1 January To 30 September 2019, Quarterly Report 17 October 2019, url, p. 2; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 94
1333 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, url, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, url, p. 72
1334 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Faryab; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
1336 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, url, pp. 5-6
1337 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, url, p. 72
reported in each district, as registered by ACLED, followed by Almar, Garziwan and Shirintagab districts, each with 50 or more violent events.\textsuperscript{1338}

ACLED coded 73% of the violent incidents in Faryab province as ‘battles’, mainly ‘armed clashes'.\textsuperscript{1340} The majority of those incidents were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military\textsuperscript{1341}, police\textsuperscript{1342} or NDS personnel\textsuperscript{1343} and members of pro-government militias\textsuperscript{1344} or so-called Arbakis (the term ‘Arbaki’ is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan Local Police or other pro-government militias) or attacks on military or police facilities such as checkpoints\textsuperscript{1345}, police headquarters\textsuperscript{1346} and bases\textsuperscript{1347} and to a lesser extent on convoys and vehicles. Some of those incidents resulted in civilian casualties, as for example during Taliban ambushes on security forces in Qaysar district on 18 October 2019 and in Khwajasabzposh district on 1 September 2019.\textsuperscript{1348} Three civilians were wounded and 17 shops were destroyed during a battle following a Taliban attack in Shirintagab district on 7 September 2019.\textsuperscript{1349} On 7 January 2020, a shopkeeper and two civilians were injured when a Taliban fighter dressed in burqa fired at NDS agents sitting in shop in Daulatabad district.\textsuperscript{1350} A woman was killed in a clash following a Taliban attack on a security outpost in Daulatabad district on 24 March 2020.\textsuperscript{1351} Civilians were killed and wounded in Taliban attacks on the centre of Shirintagab district in April 2020. In that same month, two children were killed in a clash following a Taliban attack on a security outpost in Kohestan district.\textsuperscript{1352} On 27 June 2020, mortar shells fired by security forces in

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure11.png}
\caption{Faryab - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data.\textsuperscript{1339}}
\end{figure}

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{1338} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1339} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Faryab, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1340} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Faryab; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1341} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1342} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1343} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1344} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1345} Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 security forces killed and wounded in Faryab assault, 1 March 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1347} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 19-25, 25 July 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1348} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 15-21, 22 March 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Taliban Capture About 150 Afghan Soldiers After Chase Into Turkmenistan, 17 March 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1349} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1350} Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 killed, 24 wounded in Faryab firefight, 7 September 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1351} Pajhwok Afghan News, Burqa-clad insurgent kills 3 NDS personnel in Faryab, 7 January 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1352} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, \url{url}
response to a Taliban attack on a military base in Qorghan district hit a house, killing a child and wounding four other civilians.\textsuperscript{1353}

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes.\textsuperscript{1354} Some of these operations were backed by air strikes.\textsuperscript{1355} Most of the security operations were carried out in March, July and August 2019, while fewer were registered by ACLED in the first half of 2020.\textsuperscript{1356}

There were reports of groups of Taliban fighters attacking the centre of Dawlatabad district on 25 May 2019\textsuperscript{1357}, of Kohestan district on 30 May 2019\textsuperscript{1358}, of Shirintagab district on 14 March and 17 August 2019\textsuperscript{1359}, of Bilcheragh district on 4 August 2019\textsuperscript{1360} and of Almar and Qaramqol districts in April 2020\textsuperscript{1361}, sometimes resulting into hour-long clashes. UNOCHA reported that continued clashes between AGEs and the ANDSF in various districts of Faryab in January and February 2020 caused civilian casualties.\textsuperscript{1362}

During the reporting period there were reports of the Taliban capturing villages and government forces recapturing areas in Pashtunkot district.\textsuperscript{1363} The Taliban temporarily captured Qorghan district at the end of August 2019.\textsuperscript{1364} Clashes in the weeks that followed caused a few hundred people to flee to Andkhoy district.\textsuperscript{1365} Fighting in Almar district in August 2019 resulted in the loss of civilian property and livelihoods.\textsuperscript{1366} The Taliban reportedly captured villages in Khwajasabzposh in September 2019.\textsuperscript{1367} In March 2020, the Taliban tried to overrun Almar district.\textsuperscript{1368}

Air/drone strikes represented 13\% of all reported violent incidents in Faryab between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020\textsuperscript{1369}, while incidents of shelling/artillery/missile attack represented 7\%.\textsuperscript{1370} Nearly half of those types of incidents in Faryab between 1 March 2019 and 20 June 2020 occurred in

\textsuperscript{1353} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020 (updated 2 July 2020), \texturl{url}
\textsuperscript{1354} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Faryab; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \texturl{url}
\textsuperscript{1355} Khaama Press, 28 Taliban militants killed in past 48 hours in Faryab: 209th Shaheen Corps, 18 March 2019, \texturl{url}; Khaama press, Key Taliban commanders among 31 killed in Faryab operations: 209th Shaheen Corps, 2 July 2019, \texturl{url}; Khaama Press, Nearly 500 Taliban militants killed in Faryab in past one month: 209th Shaheen Corps, 20 July 2019, \texturl{url}
\textsuperscript{1356} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Faryab; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \texturl{url}
\textsuperscript{1357} NYT Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, \texturl{url}
\textsuperscript{1358} Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 security personnel killed in Faryab attack, 30 May 2019, \texturl{url}
\textsuperscript{1359} NYT Afghan War Casualty Report: March 8-14, 15 March 2019, \texturl{url}; NYT Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 16-22, 22 August 2019, \texturl{url}
\textsuperscript{1360} NYT Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, \texturl{url}
\textsuperscript{1361} NYT Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, \texturl{url}
\textsuperscript{1363} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, \texturl{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces recapture strategic area of Faryab, 11 June 2019, \texturl{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban driven from 4 strategic Faryab villages, 8 July 2019, \texturl{url}
\textsuperscript{1364} Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab’s Qorghan district falls to Taliban: Officials, 28 August 2019, \texturl{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Forces re-take control of Faryab’s Qorghan district, 30 August 2019, \texturl{url}
\textsuperscript{1365} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 September 2019), 25 September 2019, \texturl{url}
\textsuperscript{1366} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (5 - 11 August 2019), 14 August 2019, \texturl{url}
\textsuperscript{1367} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, \texturl{url}
\textsuperscript{1368} NYT, Taliban Attack Afghanistan Amid Growing Coronavirus Threat, 28 March 2020, \texturl{url}
\textsuperscript{1369} These do not include air strikes are shellings carried out during operations categorised by ACLED under ‘battles’. For more information on ACLED’s methodology, please consult the introduction.
\textsuperscript{1370} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Faryab; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \texturl{url}
Pashtunkot, Bilchiragh and Qaysar districts. Most air strikes were carried out by Afghan forces, while some were attributed to NATO forces. While air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs\textsuperscript{1371}, some also caused civilian casualties. Air strikes in response to a Taliban attack in Garziwan district on 1 September killed at least 12 civilians.\textsuperscript{1372} A drone strike in Shorcha village of Pashtunkot district on 4 August 2019 killed two brothers and wounded another one.\textsuperscript{1373} Incidents of shelling/artillery/missile attack were attributed to both the Taliban and Afghan military forces and at times caused civilian casualties as for example in Almar district in May 2019.\textsuperscript{1374} Two mortar shells fired by the Taliban landed in a local bazaar in Khwajasabzposh on 5 July 2019, killing at least four civilians and wounding at least 33 others.\textsuperscript{1375} A child was killed and four other civilians were wounded as a result of a mortar shell exploding while children were playing in a house in Pashtunkot on 6 August 2019\textsuperscript{1376} and a mortar hit a civilian house in Bilcheragh district on 29 September 2019 and the house of an imam in Qaysar district in February 2020, killing and wounding civilians.\textsuperscript{1377} At least 11 civilians were killed or wounded as a result of Taliban rocket and mortar attacks on a village in Qaysar district in April 2020.\textsuperscript{1378}

AGEs also used roadside bombs\textsuperscript{1379} or IEDs, including pressure-plate IEDs\textsuperscript{1380}, or magnetic bombs to target security forces, at times also causing casualties among civilians.\textsuperscript{1381} This happened on 10 May 2019 in Dawlataabad district when children herding their cattle were killed and wounded when they struck an IED\textsuperscript{1382} or on 27 October 2019 in Pashtunkot district, when a boy was killed together with four other boys, after stepping on a pressure-plate IED.\textsuperscript{1383} Targeting army personnel, the Taliban had planted the device on a public road near an ANA checkpoint.\textsuperscript{1384} Another child was killed when a roadside bomb exploded in Almar district in April 2020\textsuperscript{1385} and seven children were injured when their donkey stepped on a pressure-plate IED in Garziwan district on 8 June 2020.\textsuperscript{1386}

Twenty-two incidents of violence against civilians were registered by ACLED, representing 3% of all violent events in Faryab province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 and attributed to both the Taliban and Afghan security forces.\textsuperscript{1387} These included the killing of the head of an appeal court\textsuperscript{1388}, the

\textsuperscript{1371} Khaama Press, Airstrike by Afghan Air Force kills 30 Taliban militants in Faryab province, 17 June 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s district chief among 8 killed in Faryab, 12 September 2019, url.
\textsuperscript{1372} NYT, To Start Afghan Withdrawal, U.S. Would Pull 5,400 Troops in 135 Days, 2 September 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians among over 50 killed in Faryab airstrikes, 1 September 2019, url.
\textsuperscript{1373} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, url;
\textsuperscript{1374} Tolonews, Airstrikes Kill 10 Militants In Faryab, 21 May 2019, url.
\textsuperscript{1375} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 9 killed, score injured in Faryab mortar attack, 5 July 2019, url.
\textsuperscript{1376} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, url.
\textsuperscript{1377} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 civilians killed in Faryab mortar shelling, 30 September 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Children among 5 killed in Faryab incidents, 7 February 2020, url.
\textsuperscript{1378} Khaama Press, Children, elder man among 14 killed, wounded in latest Taliban attacks in Faryab, 26 April 2020, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Separate Taliban attacks cause 28 civilian casualties, 26 April 2020, url.
\textsuperscript{1380} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{1381} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Faryab; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 January – 19 January 2020), 22 January 2020, url.
\textsuperscript{1382} Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 children killed, 5 injured in Faryab blast, 10 May 2019, url.
\textsuperscript{1383} Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 children killed, 1 wounded in Faryab landmine blast, 27 October 2019, url.
\textsuperscript{1384} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{1385} Khaama Press, Children, elder man among 14 killed, wounded in latest Taliban attacks in Faryab, 26 April 2020, url.
\textsuperscript{1387} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Faryab; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url.
\textsuperscript{1388} Afghan Islamic Press (@aip_news), [Twitter], posted on 16 January 2020, url.
kidnapping of four NGO health workers by an armed group during a vaccine survey in May 2019, the rape of two girls by unidentified gunmen in an area under Taliban control in Qaramqol district in May 2019, the killing of a tribal elder, the killing of an off-duty soldier, the abduction and killing of three civilians, including a former garrison commander, the killing of a family in Andkhoy district and the public hanging of two men having shaved their beards by the Taliban, the killing of two scholars by unknown gunmen in Maymana City and the killing of civilians by the Afghan security forces, as reported by the Taliban. The Taliban kidnapped a local journalist on 11 October 2019 in Faryab, releasing him the day after. In an attack on Kohi village in Qaysar district on 28 April 2019, the Taliban killed six civilians and wounded nine others. Local officials claimed that the villagers’ support for the government was the reason for the attack.

Illustrating a consistent pattern of the use of civilian locations by AGEs when carrying out their attacks in Afghanistan, which exposes civilians to risks of attack by pro-government forces, as noted by UNAMA, was an incident on 18 November 2019 in the Khwaja Naamosi area of Pashtunkot district. An American air strike targeted a house used as a shelter by the Taliban. Three civilians were killed as a result.

There were reports from the northern region, which includes Faryab province, about electricity and mobile phone networks being interrupted before and during the presidential election in September 2019. Ahead of the presidential election in September 2019, AGEs closed the road between Maymana City and the districts in Faryab. Clashes between Afghan security forces and the Taliban were reported on election day, 28 September 2019, in six of Faryab’s districts, including Bilcheragh and Qaysar.

In the reporting period security incidents occurred along the highway or roads, such as a Taliban attack on Maymana - Jawzjan Highway in Qaramqol district in June 2019. In July 2019 a clearance operation was carried out along the highway in Bilcheragh and Garziwan districts. Passing a zone...
of fighting on the Maymana - Almar road on 9 October 2019 a civilian car was hit by bullets. The driver and a girl were killed, three women were injured.\textsuperscript{1410}

Within the framework of its attacks on health care initiative, the World Health Organisation (WHO) did not register such attacks in Faryab province in 2019.\textsuperscript{1411} Faryab was one out of six provinces where UNAMA documented the abduction of healthcare workers between 11 March and 23 May 2020.\textsuperscript{1412}

As a result of clashes between the Taliban and security forces, residents of provincial capital Maymana had no electricity for at least a week at the end of September 2019. This also impacted access to water and food.\textsuperscript{1413} In October 2019, when clashes were reported in several of Faryab’s districts, a resident of Pashtunkot district spoke to Tolonews about the fighting causing problems in the clinics and schools being closed, adding that there was no electricity or proper drinking water in the district.\textsuperscript{1414}

2.9.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA reported regularly how continued clashes between AGEs and the ANDSF in Faryab caused displacement in the reporting period.\textsuperscript{1415}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 38 222 persons who were displaced due to conflict from Faryab province, 71 % of whom were displaced within the province itself. Most IDPs were registered from Pashtunkot, Khwajasabzposh and Garziwan districts. Nearly half of all IDPs from Pashtunkot were displaced in June 2019. All IDPs from Pashtunkot left the district, the large majority seeking refuge in provincial capital Maymana, while others fled to Herat, Shiberghan or Sar-e Pul. More than half of the IDPs from Khwajasabzposh were displaced to provincial capital Maymana. Others leaving the district in July and September 2019 looked for shelter in Balkh province and the IDPs registered in June 2019 stayed within the district. The majority of IDPs from Garziwan district were displaced within the district. This happened mainly in April 2019.\textsuperscript{1416} Another large group left Garziwan to seek shelter in Sar-e Pul district of the eponymous province in January 2020, at a time when ongoing fighting was reported from several districts in Faryab, including Garziwan.\textsuperscript{1417} No conflict-induced displacement was registered by UNOCHA from Maymana during the reporting period.\textsuperscript{1418}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 28 121 persons displaced to Faryab province. In addition to the 27 302 people displaced within the province, Faryab also hosted a few IDPs from Badghis, Balkh, Ghor, Jawzjan, Kunduz and Sar-e Pul provinces. Maymana hosted more than half of the people displaced to Faryab province in the reporting period and Andkhoy about one out of four.\textsuperscript{1419}

\textsuperscript{1410} Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 people suffer casualties in Faryab incidents, 9 October 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1411} WHO, Afghanistan, Attacks on Health Care in 2019 as of December 31, 2019, 31 December 2019 \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1412} UNAMA, Special Report: Attacks On Healthcare During The Covid-19 Pandemic, 20 June 2020, \url{url}, pp. 9, 20
\textsuperscript{1413} Pajhwok Afghan News, Clashes leave Faryab capital, some districts in darkness, 2 October 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1414} Tolonews, Ongoing Fighting In Six Districts of Faryab: Residents, 10 October 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1416} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 14 June 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1417} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 January – 19 January 2020), 22 January 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1418} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 14 June 2020, \url{url}
2.10 Ghazni

2.10.1 General description of the province

Map 10: Afghanistan – Ghazni province, source: UNOCHA

1420 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Ghazni Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
The province of Ghazni is located in the south-east of Afghanistan, bordering the provinces of Bamyan and Wardak to the north, Logar, Paktya and Paktika to the east, Zabul to the south and Uruzgan and Daykundi to the west. Ghazni does not share an international border. The province is divided into the following administrative units: Ghazni, with the provincial capital of Ghazni City, Abband, Ajrestan, Andar, Dehyak, Gelan, Giro, Jaghatu, Jaghuri, Khwajaumari, Malestan, Muqur, Nawa, Nawur, Qarabagh, Rashidan, Waghaz, Walmihammadi-e Shahid (Khugyani), and Zanakhan. The district of Andar is also known as Shilgar.

NSIA estimated the population of Ghazni for 2020/21 at 1 362 504, with 68 993 of its residents living in the provincial capital of Ghazni City. Urban population constitutes about 5 % of all inhabitants of the province. Ghazni is inhabited by Pashtuns (49 %), Hazara (46 %), Tajiks (5 %), and other smaller minorities. Three districts – Jaghori, Malistan and Nawur – are inhabited exclusively by Hazara population. Kuchi nomads also inhabit Ghazni, and their presence in the province may differ throughout the year due to migration.

The climate is harsh in the province but some isolated, remote districts (Nawur, Jagnhim, Malistan inhabited by Hazara and Ajrestan predominantly Pashtun) suffer more than the others as access roads are closed by winter snow and by spring mud. A US military expert referred to Ghazni City as a ‘key intersection’, since it is situated on the Ring Road (or Highway One), connecting the capital Kabul with the major population centre of Kandahar in the south. Additionally, the road to Paktika’s capital Sharan branches off the Ring Road in Ghazni City, while the road to Paktia’s capital Gardez forks a bit north of Ghazni City. Hence, control over Ghazni is of strategic importance.

According to the UNODC data obtained by AAN, poppy cultivation in Ghazni province decreased by 67 % in 2019, compared to 2018.

2.10.2 Conflict background and actors in Ghazni

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Ghazni province is under the responsibility of the 203rd ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces. The main military base in the province is called Camp Sultan. According to Afghan military officials in Ghazni, ANA does not have enough troops to hold the territory of the province. The army established a number of small outposts around the province to make larger checkpoints easier to defend. They quickly became a frequent target of Taliban nightly attacks. For example, in Andar district after a Taliban offensive in October 2018, the only sign of ANA presence was six military checkpoints and the only task for soldiers deployed there was not to surrender. Some of these bases were supplied by air without any land access. Other bases had road access but the Taliban still targeted the supply operations. In order to supplement the presence of the ANP, ALP, and the NDS paramilitary forces, a newly established ANA Territorial Force (ANA TF) is being piloted in the Hazara district of Jaghori where two ANA TF companies were created in the absence of any long-term regular ANA presence.

1423 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, url, p. 20
1424 Muzhary, F. and Clark, K., Uprising, ALP and Taliban in Andar: The arc of government failure, AAN, 22 May 2018, url
1425 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, url, p. 29
1428 Clearance Jobs, Taliban Seizure of Ghazni City Returns Terror Organization to its Roots, 13 August 2018, url
1429 Bjelica J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, url
1430 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, url, p. 14
1431 Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 09 February 2020, url
1432 Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 09 February 2020, url
1433 Muzhary F., One Land, Two Rules (7): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Andar district in Ghazni province, AAN, 13 June 2019, url
The Taliban had ‘long-established significant influence’ in the province and dominated militarily\(^{1433}\) with the provincial capital remaining an exception.\(^{1434}\) In a case study on Andar district, in southern Ghazni, AAN noted that two parallel forms of government have operated for years, with a shadow Taliban administration in place since 2007. Since 2013, the Taliban have expanded their governance structure by collecting taxes, and by establishing several administrative commissions, including a finance commission, a commission for civil casualties, a commission for prisoners, a commission for inviting government forces to surrender, a commission for cultural affairs and a commission for dealing with international NGOs; and from October 2018, Andar district has been ‘under virtually complete Taliban control’. While, the government plays an important role in providing health and education services and it is also responsible for ID cards distribution, in other aspects of daily life its role is highly limited. Local administration sometimes made informal agreements with Taliban regulating daily needs and services. AAN further noted that Andar district is the key location for Taliban in Ghazni as it was a command centre for attacks on different parts of the province. Most Taliban fighters currently active in Andar are locals, with very few outsiders. However, shadow governors of the Ghazni province used to be from Kandahar, while one of the Ghazni commanders from Andar is a shadow governor of Khost province.\(^{1435}\)

In the spring of 2019, ANA reportedly managed to recapture administrative centres in Deh Yak and Khwajah Omari districts.\(^{1436}\) In September 2019, government sources reported that ANA managed to recapture also Jaghato, Malistan, Jaghori, Ajristan and Nawur districts.\(^{1437}\) As of October 2019, the Taliban reportedly controlled almost all Pashtun populated districts of Ghazni, while government forces controlled Ghazni City and Hazara populated districts of the province.\(^{1438}\) A joint report by the Johannite International Assistance (JUH) and Agency for Assistance and Development of Afghanistan (AADA), reported a deterioration of the general security situation in Ghazni province of as of December 2019. The source noted that there was a significant number of checkpoints across the province held by both the Taliban and government forces, stating that ‘the district centres are mostly controlled by the government and outside of the district centres are entirely under the control of Taliban. In some district centres like Qarabagh, Nawa, Andar which are entirely under control of Afghanistan security forces, but Taliban fighters are present in and around of a kilometre distance away.’\(^{1439}\) In May 2020, local media reported that ANA managed to clear several villages in the outskirts of Ghazni City and in Andar district, during a 16-day operation where more than 100 Taliban fighters were killed.\(^{1440}\)

According to Afghan military sources quoted by the Stars and Stripes’ article, during the night, the Taliban pass through the villages in the province, even if they are not under their control. They sometimes plant roadside bombs or plan attacks on the government checkpoints. However, the Taliban only use small arms fire and the army can call in for artillery or air support when needed. On average, the main military base launches 80 shells per week.\(^{1441}\)

\(^{1433}\) Qaane, E., The Insecure Spring of Ghazni: Results of third-grade treatment by the centre?, AAN, 25 July 2018, [url]


\(^{1435}\) Muzhary F., One Land, Two Rules (7): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Andar district in Ghazni province, AAN, 13 June 2019, [url]

\(^{1436}\) UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 03 September 2019, [url], p. 6

\(^{1437}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt retakes control of Ghazni’s Jaghato district, 22 September 2019, [url]

\(^{1438}\) Kabul Now, Taliban force people to pay extortion money, Ghazni councilman confirms, 9 October 2019, [url]


\(^{1440}\) Khamaa Press, Over 100 Taliban militants during a 16-day operation in Ghazni province, 11 May 2020, [url]

\(^{1441}\) Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 09 February 2020, [url]
According to UNOCHA, Highway One was partially destroyed and contaminated with IEDs in August 2018. In 2018 and 2019, the Ghazni-Paktika Highway was reported to be under Taliban control and closed for civilian and government vehicles, with the insurgents continuing to put pressure on the Kabul-Kandahar Highway. Since the beginning of 2019 Taliban established lots of checkpoints to extort money in some areas under their control. According to a member of Ghazni Provincial Council, they could collect AFN 15 million a day from each of the checkpoints they set across the Kabul-Ghazni Highway. According to local people, Taliban stopped every car, checked the passengers (their ID cards or mobile phones) and force them to pay money. According to army sources, during 2019, ANA tried to secure the highway and remove Taliban checkpoints.

Citing Afghan officials, Stars and Stripes reported that, during 2019, government forces managed to retake ten Taliban-held districts and four Taliban-contested districts, including critical highways that connect Ghazni to the rest of the country. However the Afghan official ‘acknowledged that the highways still had to be cleared of the Taliban’s roadside bombs each morning’. In May 2020, 203rd Corps of Afghan Army managed to clear parts of the route linking Ghazni with Paktiya and Paktika provinces and established five military bases along the highway to ensure the security of the route.

UNAMA documented also ISKP activity in Ghazni province which caused civilian casualties.

In September 2019, the LWJ referred to Ghazni province as a ‘known haven for al Qaeda’, reporting that NDS forces supported by air forces killed 26 Al Qaeda fighters in Muqr district. According to Jamestown Foundation, some Al Qaeda cells were present in Ghazni province, where they found the shelter after Pakistani army offensive in tribal, remote region of Waziristan. However, Al Qaeda have lost many top leaders since 2017 in Ghazni. In March 2019, in Giro district, the Afghan army killed over 30 Al Qaeda fighters, including suicide bombers.

2.10.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.10.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 673 civilian casualties (213 deaths and 460 injured) in Ghazni. This represents an increase of 3% compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were suicide IEDs and non-suicide IEDs and ground engagements. Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 25 civilian casualties in Ghazni in the first quarter of 2020, reporting an increase in the number of civilian casualties in the second quarter of the year, with over 126 casualties recorded (from 1 April to 30 June 2020).

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED reported a total of 1,291 incidents related to security in Ghazni province: 830 battles, 423 remote violence, 38 cases of violence against civilians, mostly in the second part of 2019. In 2020 the number of security incidents and fatalities decreased.

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1442 UN News, ‘No safe way’ into battle-scarred Afghan city of Ghazni to deliver aid as traumatized children search for parents, 17 August 2018, [url]
1443 Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taliban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, [url]; Pajhwok Afghan News, 18 months on, Ghazni-Paktika road remains shut 3 November 2019, [url]
1444 Kabul News, Taliban force people to pay extortion money, Ghazni councilman confirms, 9 October 2019, [url]
1445 Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 09 February 2020, [url]
1446 Khamaa Press, Over 100 Taliban militants during a 16-day operation in Ghazni province, 11 May 2020, [url]
1447 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url], p. 36
1448 LWJ, Taliban supplies al Qaeda with explosives for attacks in major Afghan cities, 16 September 2019, [url]
1449 Jamestown Foundation, Al-Qaeda’s South Asian Branch Gravitating Toward Kashmir, 17 April 2020, [url]
1450 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url], p. 94
1451 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url], p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url], p. 72
1452 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Ghazni; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url]
Throughout 2019 and the first months of 2020, Ghazni continued to be a major battlefield between Taliban insurgents and the Afghan government – backed by US forces. The intensification of military campaigns by the Afghan forces aiming at retaking key territorial areas of the province has made ‘life worse for civilians’ living this areas.\footnote{According to some local respondents interviewed by AAN, full control of Taliban in some districts meant better security in terms of lower level of crime and freedom of movement.\footnote{During clashes in 2019, the roads became impossible to use.\footnote{Also, as a result of clashes and road blockades, people in need of emergency health care, reportedly, were not able to reach appropriate health care in time.\footnote{Additionally, several health facilities in Ghazni province were damaged either due to conflict or natural disaster.}}}} According to some local respondents interviewed by AAN, full control of Taliban in some districts meant better security in terms of lower level of crime and freedom of movement.\footnote{During clashes in 2019, the roads became impossible to use.\footnote{Also, as a result of clashes and road blockades, people in need of emergency health care, reportedly, were not able to reach appropriate health care in time.\footnote{Additionally, several health facilities in Ghazni province were damaged either due to conflict or natural disaster.}}}

The Taliban checkpoints along main roads in Ghazni province made travelling insecure, especially for government employees and university students.\footnote{In June 2019, the Taliban reportedly stopped a car in the Qiyaq area of Jaghatu district, kidnapped and killed a university student who was travelling to Kabul.\footnote{In September 2019, a civilian deputy police chief of Ghazni and another senior security official of Ghazni police were killed by the Taliban on the Kabul-Ghazni Highway in two separate attacks.\footnote{In December 2019, in Jaghatu district, an explosion of a pressure-plate IED planted by Taliban, killed 10 civilians travelling on the road from Daikundi to Ghazni.}}}

There were several cases of targeted killings in Ghazni City in 2019. In May 2019, the Taliban kidnapped and killed a military prosecutor and a government official from Zabul province. A local reporter was shot in his leg while travelling on a motorbike with his wife on 27 September 2019. In October 2019, the Taliban killed an attorney. On 10 December 2019, the head of the Disabled and Martyrs Department was killed by unidentified armed group.\footnote{According to AAN, ‘following the capture of Andar by the Taliban in October 2018, the district has experienced a considerable increase in night raids, drone activity, airstrikes, search operations and...'}
ground fighting between militants and US special forces-backed Afghan forces. These have resulted in the killing of both civilians and Taliban fighters, as well as the destruction of the district governor’s compound. Civilians have also been detained and beaten.\textsuperscript{1464} According to Afghan military sources, in case of clashes in populated areas, the risk of civilian causalities grew as the use of artillery and air strikes were the only effective weapon of ANA against Taliban forces.\textsuperscript{1465} On 30 March 2019, a mortar round fired during the clash between ANA and Taliban hit the school in Andar district. Four students and a teacher were killed and 18 others were injured.\textsuperscript{1466}

There were also reports of search operations conducted by Afghan security forces during which people were harassed. According to locals, Taliban usually do not undertake house to house searches.\textsuperscript{1467} According to ACLED, in June 2019, Afghan forces started shooting at people who refused to show their ID cards, killing one person.\textsuperscript{1468} On 10 September 2019, Afghan and US forces raided and destroyed a village in Giro district, five civilians were killed, two wounded. The Afghan army also destroyed two mosques, a school and two houses.\textsuperscript{1469} In April 2020, there were violent protests in Jaghori after two local policemen allegedly raped two women from the district. Protestors clashed with the police and one person was killed and nine other wounded as police opened fire to the gathering.\textsuperscript{1470}

Attacks by ISKP against civilians in Ghazni province were also reported. On 5 July 2019, IKSP detonated a remote-controlled IED in the Shia Muhammadiyah Mosque in Ghazni City; two people were killed and 22 were injured, including children. On 8 October 2019, another IED was detonated in a classroom of Ghazni University, killing or injuring 27 students, most of them women.\textsuperscript{1471}

2.10.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 3 742 persons displaced from and within Ghazni province. Most of them were displaced from Dehyak district and were resettled to Ghazni City.\textsuperscript{1472} The major reason for displacement was active conflict, followed by drought. In Dehyak district, ground engagement and air strikes increased in 2019, but the population often received prior warning from insurgents.\textsuperscript{1473}

291 persons from various districts of Ghazni province were displaced to Kabul City, 75 persons from Malestan district left for Injil district, Herat province and two families (14 persons) were displaced to Qala-e Kah in Farah province. No conflict-induced internal displacement to Ghazni province from other provinces was reported by UNOCHA in the reporting period.\textsuperscript{1474}

\textsuperscript{1464} Muzhary F., One Land, Two Rules (7): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Andar district in Ghazni province, AAN, 13 June 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1465} Stars and Stripes, Dangers for civilians rise in Afghan-Taliban conflict, 09 February 2020, \url{url}; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, February 2020, \url{url}, p. 71

\textsuperscript{1466} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 71

\textsuperscript{1467} JUH/AADA, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Ghazni Province, Humanitarian Response, 01 December 2019, \url{url}, pp. 19-20

\textsuperscript{1468} ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Ghazni; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1469} ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Ghazni; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1470} Tolonews, 1 Protestor Killed as Ghazni Protest Turns Violent 28 April 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1471} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 48

\textsuperscript{1472} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1473} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1474} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, \url{url}
2.11 Ghor

2.11.1 General description of the province

Map 11: Afghanistan – Ghor province, source: UNOCHA

The province of Ghor is located in central towards north-western Afghanistan and does not share an international border. It is surrounded by the provinces of Herat and Badghis to the west, Faryab and Sar-e Pul to the north, Bamyansk and Daykundi to the east, and Helmand and Farah to the south. Ghor province is divided into the following administrative units: Chaghcharan (Firozkoh), Charsadra, Dawlatyar, Du Layna, Lal Wa Sarjangal, Pasaband, Saghar, Shahrak, Taywara, and Tulak. The provincial capital is Chaghcharan.

The provincial capital of Ghor is called Ferozkoh or Chaghcharan, Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA), the national broadcasting corporation of Afghanistan, stated that Chaghcharan was renamed to Firozkoh in 2014.

Afghanistan, NSIA estimated the population of Ghor at 764,472 in 2019/20. According to the provincial profile published by the US Naval Postgraduate School, the largest ethnic group in Ghor are Tajiks, followed by Hazaras, Aimaqs and a small number of Pashtuns and Uzbeks; RFE/RL stated that Aimaqs constitute the majority of Ghor.

Afghanistan, NSIA referred to Chaghcharan as the provincial capital of Ghor in June 2020.


Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, d.n., P. 33

RTA article published at Baztab news portal, Ghor province, 11 July 2018.

Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, d.n., P. 33

Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, d.n., P. 33

US, Naval Postgraduate School, Ghor Provincial Overview, n.d., url

RFE/RL, Female Afghan Governor Won't Back Down Amid Threats, Controversy, 19 October 2015.

US, Naval Postgraduate School, Ghor Provincial Overview, n.d., url

UNOCHA, Afghanistan Ghor Province - District Atlas, April 2014.

Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, d.n., P. 33


Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, d.n., url

RFE/RL, Female Afghan Governor Won't Back Down Amid Threats, Controversy, 19 October 2015.

US, Naval Postgraduate School, Ghor Provincial Overview, n.d., url
According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Ghor was not among the ten main opium poppy-cultivating provinces of Afghanistan in 2018. Compared to 2017, opium-poppy cultivation reportedly decreased by 15% in 2018. The main opium-poppy cultivating districts have been Chaghcharan, Pasaband, and Taywara. According to AAN, in 2019, opium-poppy cultivation in the western provinces including in Ghor has decreased by 23% compared to 2018.

### 2.11.2 Conflict background and actors in Ghor

According to AAN, ‘Ghor is known for its particularly confusing pattern of conflicts, involving insurgent groups and ‘freelancing’ militias, the dividing line between which is all but hermetic [...]’ Besides Taliban insurgents, armed groups partially affiliated to political parties in the central government are present in the province. According to AAN, the ‘insurgent’ activities of some groups can be hardly distinguished from crime and allegiances have been shifting several times in the past. During the period of 2017 and 2018, the absence of rule of law and government was allegedly a particular pressing problem in Ghor.

AAN reported in November 2016 of a network of militants active in the district of Chaghcharan, which maintained close links to the political party and former militia, Jamiat-e Islami, but also with established links to the Taliban after 2010. It was said to sympathise with ISKP after 2015 – even though AAN stated that claims of an IS-affiliation of the group proved wrong. While the network’s criminal activities led to protests and resistance of local residents, the government forces’ weak presence in Ghor, as well as the network’s affiliation with Jamiat reportedly prevented its disarmament. On the contrary, after fighting between the group and the Taliban erupted, provincial officials treated the group as a ‘popular uprising’ force and the ANSF provided logistical support for the fight against the Taliban. However, when ANSF launched a clearing operation against the network in the wake of protests caused by the killing of more than 30 civilians by the network in 2016, the Taliban allegedly fought against ANSF, as they perceived the presence of government forces as a threat against their strongholds in neighbouring Charsada district.

Furthermore, according to an AAN report of 2017, an MP from Ghor province stated that affiliates of Hezb-i-Islami, a rival party to Jamiat-e Islami, distributed a large quantity of weapons to their supporters in Ghor. According to Pajhwok Afghan News, two sons of a former Hezb-i-Islami commander died in a clash with Taliban insurgents in January 2018. The fighting reportedly erupted over the collection of ushr taxes, respectively a leadership dispute between the former Hezb-i-Islami commander and Taliban insurgents.

In August 2019, Etilaatroz cited Mohammad Mehdi, deputy provincial council for Ghor province, stating that the Taliban strength in Ghor province has weakened after Mawlawi Zarif deputy [commander] of Red Unit of the Taliban militants has been killed by the security forces. According to the source Mehdi indicated [informal translation] ‘government and public uprising forces control Tolak, Shahrak, Saghar, Tyora, Pasaband, Dawlatyar district centres.’ According to the source, Mehdi added that due to the lack of security forces, the Taliban are present in remote areas of Ghor province [...] public uprising forces keep the security of governmental buildings in the province. The source also cited Abdul Rahim Rezazadeh, member of provincial council of Ghor confirming the presence of Taliban in remote areas.

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1483 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 17
1484 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 33
1485 AAN, New world drug report: opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, 25 June 2020, url
1486 Ruttig, T., The ‘Humvee Bomb’ Series: The October wave of Talibean attacks in 2017 context, AAN, 7 November 2017, url
1487 Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, AAN, 23 November 2016, url
1489 Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, AAN, 23 November 2016, url
1491 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill HIA commander’s sons in Ghor clash, 13 January 2018, url
of Ghor province. Taliban claimed that in 2019 they took the control of Charsada district centre of Ghor province.

In December 2019 and January 2020, around 88 Taliban fighters surrendered to the government forces in Ghor province amongst whom 18 surrendered to join the peace process and other 70 due to continued military pressure by the ANDSF. According to Kabul Now (local media), in February 2020, the Taliban maintained full control in many Ghor districts. During the same period, AAN reported that there were several fighting actors present in many of the nine remote districts of Ghor province, including illegal and criminal armed groups, the Taliban and ANDSF. According to information by LWJ collected and presented in a map, Charsada, Dawlat Yar, Taywara, Pasaband and Tulak districts of Ghor province were contested.

In March 2020, Ariana News quoted MoD claiming the killing of Qari Rauf, a Taliban shadow governor for Lal Wa Sarjangal district, and several other Taliban fighters including Qari Niyatullah [...] from Zarzughal village and IEDs fabricator for Taliban.

In May 2020, the UN Security Council indicated that the Taliban shadow governor for Ghor was Mawlawi Abdul Qayum Rohani Noorzai. In June 2020, Afghanistan Times cited Fakhruddin, police chief of Pasaband district, stating that the deputy governor of Taliban for Ghor province was Mullah Ahmadshahi, who entered Pasaband district with the Taliban shadow governor and over 200 militants on motorbikes. In June 2020, another source mentioned two names ‘Mustafa and Mikhail’ as Taliban high ranking commanders for Ghor province.

The ANSF conducted military operations in Ghor in 2018. According to a report of January 2019, the newly established ANA TF will be stationed ‘soon’ in several districts of Ghor.

The 207th Zafar Corps is in charge of ANA operations in the province of Ghor. As part of the RS (Resolute Support), Italian forces provide ‘functionality-based’ security assistance to ANA 207th Corps and ANP in the west of Afghanistan including Ghor.

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1492 Etilaatroz, بررسی وضعیت غرب کشور از افزایش تحرکات طالبان تا تلفات سنگین این گروه، [informal translation: ‘security assessment of the west of the country; from the increase of Taliban’s mobility to heavy losses of the group’], 30 August 2019, url
1493 Voice of Jihad, از بروز اوضاع مهمی در غرب؛ افزایش تحرکات طالبان تا تلفات سنگین این گروه، [informal translation: ‘a quick look at last year’s victories’], 31 December 2019, url
1494 Salaam Times, Taliban fighters surrendering in Ghor pledge support against former comrades, 2 December 2019, url;
Salaam Times, Increased military pressure forces 70 Taliban fighters to surrender in Ghor, 14 January 2020, url
1495 Kabul Now, Women exchanged for weapons in parts of Ghor, 1 February 2020, url
1496 AAN, Placating Ghor, for now: ten-days protest pushed the government to respond, 5 February 2020, url
1497 LWJ, Several Districts Change Hands as Fighting Rages in Northern Afghanistan, J July 2020, url, however the source does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated
1498 Ariana News, Taliban shadow district governor among 10 dead – Ghor, 26 March 2020, url
1500 Afghanistan Times, Seven security forces killed in Ghor Taliban attack, 13 June 2020, url
1501 Afghanistan times, Ghor’s Pasaband district at risk of collapse to Taliban, 16 June 2020, url
1502 Pasbanan, Nine police were killed in Ghor province, 13 June 2020, url
1503 Tolonews, Casualties Rise Amid Heavy Clashes In 10 Provinces, 13 May 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Scores of rebels, security personnel killed in clashes, 14 December 2018, url
1504 Tolonews, Territorial Army To Begin Mission In West, 14 January 2019, url
1505 Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., url; USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, url, p. 59
1506 USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, url, p. 14
2.11.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.11.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 77 civilian casualties, including 62 killed and 15 injured in Ghor province, which represents 20% increase compared to 2018. The leading causes of casualties were Target/deliberate killings, ground engagements and Non-Suicide IEDs. According to SIGAR, RS (Resolute Support) recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Ghor province during the first quarter of 2020, and the mentioned source recorded between 51 and 75 civilian casualties during the second quarter of 2020.

According to ACLED data, between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 there were 222 security incidents recorded in Ghor province, of which 145 were coded as battles, 56 remote violence and 21 incidents of violence against civilians.

![Figure 13. Ghor - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data](url)

In 2019, violent conflict and lack of security in several remote districts of Ghor province was reported. Tolonews quoted Rahila Rahmannzada, women rights activist, stating that there were 113 cases of violence against women including stoning during kangaroo courts in Ghor province as of 21 December 2019. According to the head of Mine Action Coordination, cited by Tolonews in 2019 in Ghor province, 22 people were killed and 16 wounded due to the explosion of unexploded ordnance. In May 2020, Afghanistan Times reported on an increasing number of informal courts in Ghor province, where local religious and tribal leaders or influential figures punish people accused of crimes.

Recent incidents that caused civilian casualties in Ghor province in 2019 and 2020 include: on 8 June 2019, Taliban attacked security outposts in Poshta Noor village in Dawlatyar district of Ghor, killing at least fifteen members of the public uprising forces and civilians, and as well as wounding a

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1507 UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](url), p. 94
1508 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url](url), p. 69
1509 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url](url), p. 72
1510 Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Ghor; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](url)
1511 AAN, Placating Ghor, for now: ten-day protests pushed the government to respond, 5 February 2020, [url](url)
1512 Tolonews, "Lack of security means more violence against women in Ghor", 21 December 2019, [url](url)
1513 A Kangaroo court (محکمة صحرايي [Makham-e Sahrayee in Dari]) is an improvised court organized by the Taliban to punish victims publicly including shooting, hanging, stoning etc., and aimed at spreading violence and intimidating people, Salaam Times, Taliban brutality takes center stage with couple’s execution in Ghor, 28 April 2020, [url](url); AIHRC, نتایج ارزیابی کمیسیون در رابطه با تصاویر ویدیویی از سنگساری یک خانم در ولایت غور[informal translation ‘the result of commission’s enquiry concerning the videos of stoning of a woman in Ghor province’], 10 February 2020, [url](url)
1514 Tolonews, "Lack of security means more violence against women in Ghor", 21 December 2019, [url](url)
1515 Tolonews, 100 civilian casualties caused by unexploded ordnance in 2019, 20 February 2020, [url](url)
1516 Afghanistan Times, Drumhead courts-martials in rise in Ghor, 19 May 2020, [url](url)
tribal leader and two others\textsuperscript{1517}; on 4 July 2019, one civilian was killed and another wounded when the Taliban attacked the office of the local pro-government militia in Dawlatyar district\textsuperscript{1518}; on 8 July 2019, six children were killed in an explosion\textsuperscript{1519}; on 23 July 2019, one civilian was killed when a roadside bomb, placed close to the district council compound in Dawlatyar district, exploded\textsuperscript{1520}; on 20 August 2019, two civilians, a father and his son, were killed and the man’s wife was wounded by a roadside bomb while they were travelling by motorcycle in the Midan Barra Khanah area of Firozkoh (provincial capital)\textsuperscript{1521}; on 24 August 2019, two civilians were reportedly killed in a roadside bomb in the same area\textsuperscript{1522}; on 1 September 2019, four civilians were killed, and seven were wounded when multiple bombs detonated in Firozkoh City\textsuperscript{1523}; on 25 September 2019, a roadside bomb explosion killed one civilian and wounded another one in Firozkoh district\textsuperscript{1524}; on 9 October 2019, two civilians were killed, and four wounded in a roadside bomb planted by the Taliban hitting their vehicle while travelling from Kabul to the Sheniya village of Dawlat Yar district. Additionally, an ambulance, which arrived to the area to evacuate the victims, was also blown up by a roadside bomb, wounding the driver\textsuperscript{1525}; on 13 October 2019, a roadside bomb, which exploded near a vehicle in the village of Band-e Bayan in Lal Wa Sarjangal district, killed two women who were moving to Herat province.\textsuperscript{1526} on 21 October 2019, a 22-year-old woman was killed at home when the Taliban fired several mortars on the village of Mang in Chahar Sadah district\textsuperscript{1527}; on 10 November 2019, one civilian was killed during a clash between the Taliban and Afghan security forces when the latter’s convoy was ambushed in the village of Dahan-e Alander in Firozkoh\textsuperscript{1528}; on 29 May 2020, one child was killed and another was injured in a bomb blast in Pozalich village of Firozkoh, the provincial capital\textsuperscript{1529}; on 10 June 2020, a bomb, reportedly planted by the Taliban, exploded in Tarbulaq village of Du Layan district killed one child and wounded three others\textsuperscript{1530}; on 17 June 2020, a roadside bomb, planted by the Taliban, went off in the village of Pa-i Kamar in Firozkoh district killing three children\textsuperscript{1531}; on 19 June 2020, a roadside bomb planted by the Taliban went off in Somak village of Dawlat Yar district killing one civilian on his motorcycle.\textsuperscript{1532}

2.11.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 10 512 persons displaced from Ghor province, with 93 % displaced within the province itself (mainly in the provincial capital Chaghcharan), 6 % were displaced into Herat province and the remaining 1 % were displaced into Faryab province.\textsuperscript{1533}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 10 036 persons displaced to Ghor province, with almost 99 % coming from within the province itself.\textsuperscript{1534}

\textsuperscript{1517} Tolonews, several killed in Taliban attack in Ghor: Officials; 8 June 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1518} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-4 July, 4 July 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1519} Save the Children, At least 25 children hospitalised after Ghazni car bomb attack, 8 July 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1520} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 19-25, 25 July 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1521} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 16-22, 22 August 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1522} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1523} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1524} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1525} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1526} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1527} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1528} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 2 December 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1529} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, url
\textsuperscript{1530} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, url
\textsuperscript{1531} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, url
\textsuperscript{1532} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, url
\textsuperscript{1533} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url
\textsuperscript{1534} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url
During the period of 28 April – 4 May 2020, the ongoing conflict displaced 400 families (around 2,800 individuals) in Badghis and Ghor provinces. Salaam Times reported that, in April 2020, due to the Taliban attacks hundreds of families had to leave their homes in Shahrek district [...] and were displaced to Firozkoh district.

1535 UNOCHA, Afghanistan, Weekly humanitarian update, 24 April – 4 May 2020, 7 May 2020, url

1536 Salaam Times, An insult to Islam: Taliban attack in Ghor forces hundreds to flee during Ramadan, 7 May 2020, url
2.12 Helmand

2.12.1 General description of the province

Map 12: Afghanistan – Helmand province, source: UNOCHA\textsuperscript{1537}

\textsuperscript{1537} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Helmand Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url]
The province of Helmand is situated in southern Afghanistan, bordering the provinces of Nimroz, and Farah to the west, Ghor, and Daykundi to the north, and Urugzan, as well as Kandahar to the east. In the south, Helmand shares a 162-kilometre border with Pakistan along the Durand line. Helmand is the largest province of Afghanistan. It is divided into the into the following administrative units: Nad Ali, Nawa-e-Barizayi (Nawa), Nahr-e-Saraj (Gereshk/Grishk), Washer, Garm Ser, Nawzad, Sangin, Musa Qala, Kajaki, Reg-e-Khan Nishin (Reg), Baghran, DISHU, Lashkargah, Marja (formerly part of Nad-e-Ali), and Nawamish. The provincial capital of Helmand is Lashkargah. Hazara-dominated Nawamish was reportedly split from the Pashtun-majority district of Baghran by a presidential order in March 2016. In June 2017, its administrative affairs were transferred to neighbouring Daykundi province.

According to NSIA, the population of Helmand is estimated at 1 446 230 for 2020/21. Urban population, living mainly in the provincial capital Lashkargah, constitutes slightly more than 7% of all inhabitants. The majority of Helmand’s residents are reportedly Pashtuns, with a Baloch minority in the south at the border to the Pakistani province Balochistan and with some Hazara minority in the north. While Helmand’s northern districts – Baghran, Kajaki and Musa Qala – are mainly populated by members of the Alizai tribe, the districts of Marja and Nad-e-Ali are more heterogeneous, inhabited by Nurzai, Ishaqzai, Alizai, Alekozai, and several smaller tribes. The Ishaqzai are allegedly ‘[...] one of the most religiously conservative tribes across Afghanistan’, with the late Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansur belonging to this tribe.

According to AAN, the more heterogeneous composition of the districts in the south of Helmand was the result of a large-scale irrigation and agriculture project mainly funded by USAID until 1970, which created new arable land to be cultivated by so-called naqileen – i.e. Pashtuns from other parts of Afghanistan. Author Carter Malkesian noted that this allegedly led to a rift in Helmand’s society and the naqileen predominantly allied with the Taliban against the older landed tribes, particularly in the district of Garm Ser in southern Helmand.

The province has a ‘significant geo-strategic importance’. A section of the Ring Road runs through the districts of Nahr-e-Saraj, Sangin and washer, connecting major population centre Herat in the west with Kandahar in the east and eventually the capital Kabul. However, according to Tolonews, as of January 2020, the five districts in Helmand province had no road access due to Taliban presence. A domestic airport with scheduled passenger service reportedly exists in Helmand’s capital Lashkargah.

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1538 Pajhwok Afghan News, Recognition of southern Helmand province, n.d., url
1539 Diplomat (The), 5 Reasons Why Helmand Matters to the Taliban, 31 May 2016, url
1540 Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, url
1541 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020/21, url, pp. 7, 40
1542 Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, url
1543 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, url, pp. 7, 40
1544 Naval Postgraduate School, Helmand Provincial Overview, n.d., url
1545 Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, url
1546 Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, url
1547 Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, url; Guardian (The), Why capturing Helmand is top of the Taliban’s strategic goals, 26 December 2015, url
1548 Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, url
1549 Malkesian, C., War Comes to Garmser: Thirty Years of Conflict on the Afghan Frontier, 2013, p. 266
1550 Pajhwok Afghan News, Recognition of southern Helmand province, n.d., url
1551 Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, url
1552 Diplomat (The), 5 Reasons Why Helmand Matters to the Taliban, 31 May 2016, url; Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, url
1553 Tolonews, Efforts Underway to Clear 5 Helmand Districts of Insurgents, 10 January 2020, url
1554 Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019
Helmand is one of Afghanistan’s most fertile regions, with a climate favouring the cultivation of a variety of crops – including opium –, and Helmand river providing the necessary irrigation through a ‘relatively organized’ canal system.\footnote{1555 Diplomat (The), 5 Reasons Why Helmand Matters to the Taliban, 31 May 2016, \url{url}}

According to the UNODC data obtained by AAN, Helmand province is situated in the region which the largest producer of opium in the world. However, in 2019 poppy cultivation in Helmand province decreased by 38 % in 2019, compared to 2018.\footnote{1556 Bjelica J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, \url{url}} The province’s pivotal role for opium poppy cultivation allegedly contributes considerably to its strategic importance for the Taliban: whoever controls Helmand is rewarded with large-scale revenues, according to several accounts.\footnote{1557 BJ Review, Afghanistan’s Future: The Role of Helmand, 23 December 2015, \url{url}}

2.12.2 Conflict background and actors in Helmand

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Helmand province is under the responsibility of the 215th ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southwest (TF Southwest), led by US forces.\footnote{1558 N-TV, Taliban auf dem Vormarsch: In Helmand geht es um Afghans Zukunft [Taliban on the rise: Afghanistan’s future at the stake in Helmand], 23 December 2015, \url{url}; Guardian (The), Why capturing Helmand is top of the Taliban’s strategic goals, 26 December 2015, \url{url}; Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, \url{url}}

Local authorities stated in January 2020 that ANA has too little troops to maintain or retake the checkpoints from Taliban but army officials denied it.\footnote{1559 Tolonews, Efforts Underway to Clear 5 Helmand Districts of Insurgents, 10 January 2020, \url{url}} On the government side, along with Afghan security forces such as the ANP, ALP, ANA, some various pro-government ‘uprising forces’ took active part in fighting. One of the local initiatives of this type is also the Sangorian Group.\footnote{1560 Jamestown Foundation (The), The Sangorian: Weakening the Taliban from Within, 11 January 2019, \url{url}; Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, \url{url}} The Sangorian was allegedly established in January 2016 by the operational commander of the Afghan forces in Helmand as a covert anti-Taliban militia with the aim of infiltrating and weakening the Taliban from within. Its fighters are locals, Taliban dissidents and former Taliban insurgents, however according to the media reports, Afghan government denied its existence.\footnote{1561 Jamestown Foundation (The), The Sangorian: Weakening the Taliban from Within, 11 January 2019, \url{url}}

In 2012, expert Antonio Giustozzi explained that the conflict in Helmand was driven by several factors including weak governance and corruption of the government, but also inter and intra tribal rivalries, competition between criminal networks over narcotic routes and resources, and outdated, dysfunctional social structures based on feudal landlords. Moreover, Taliban managed to receive large amounts of money from drug trade which made them self-sufficient.\footnote{1562 Jamestown Foundation (The), The Sangorian: Weakening the Taliban from Within, 11 January 2019, \url{url}} After the international troops largely withdrew in 2014, the Taliban overran several ‘chiefdoms’ in Helmand, which had been under control of ANP, ALP and pro-government militia commanders.\footnote{1563 Jamestown Foundation (The), The Sangorian: Weakening the Taliban from Within, 11 January 2019, \url{url}; Tolonews, Efforts Underway to Clear 5 Helmand Districts of Insurgents, 10 January 2020, \url{url}} In 2017, US Marines returned to Helmand after three years, reportedly in order to advise Afghan government forces and to increase air strikes without conducting ground operations on their own.\footnote{1564 Jamestown Foundation (The), The Sangorian: Weakening the Taliban from Within, 11 January 2019, \url{url}; USODD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, \url{url}} The aim of the Marine’s deployment in Helmand was to secure the provincial capital Lashkargah from falling to the Taliban; the Afghan security forces reportedly remained dependent on US support in order to stay on the offensive.\footnote{1565 Jamestown Foundation (The), The Sangorian: Weakening the Taliban from Within, 11 January 2019, \url{url}} In 2017, BBC reported that the Taliban captured nearly 85 % of Helmand province, making the cities of Sangin and Musa Qala the centre of its command and commerce. However, the schools, at least for boys, and hospitals in both towns were funded and inspected by the government in Kabul. According to locals interviewed by BBC, areas entirely under Taliban control experienced less fighting and there was a...
meaningful rise in trade but some personal freedoms were limited. Soon the provincial capital Lashkargah also became surrounded and on the brink of collapse.\footnote{BBC, Taliban territory: Life in Afghanistan under the militants, 8 June 2017, url.}

Since 2018, ANSF supported by US marines conducted several offensive operations called ‘Maiwand’ and managed to push Taliban away from certain districts and to clear some parts of local roads. In the consequence, Taliban reportedly lost a lot of commanders and fighters.\footnote{Quilty A., Static War: Helmand after the US Marines’ return, AAN, 23 April 2020, url.}

The LWJ reported that the Taliban fully control 7 of 14 districts: Baghran, Musa Qala, Naw Zad, Sangin, Ghorak, Deh-e Shu, Reg-e Khan, the rest of the districts are marked as contested. The provincial capital and its surroundings are regularly stormed by AGEs but until now the government defended the city.\footnote{LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., url; LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.}

In December 2019, Tolonews reported that the government forces managed to recapture Marja district after four years.\footnote{Tolonews, Helmand’s Marjah Cleared of ‘Insurgents’ After Four Years, 1 December 2019, url; Military Times, US troops and A-10s return to Marjah fight, 3 December 2019, url.}

According to the AAN, as of April 2020, ‘although the US air campaign has kept significant pressure on the Taliban throughout the province since early to mid-2018, aside from Nawa, the only area the government appears to have retaken and held is Malgir; adding that ‘for now, the goal of the fighting there, as recently witnessed along the canal, on both sides, seems to be about maintaining the status quo.’\footnote{Quilty A., Static War: Helmand after the US Marines’ return, AAN, 23 April 2020, url.}

As a consequence of US-Taliban agreement signed in February 2020, US troops started leaving the military base in Lashkargah in March 2020.\footnote{Quilty A., Static War: Helmand after the US Marines’ return, AAN, 23 April 2020, url.} On 4 March 2020, US forces in Helmand attacked the Taliban, 11 days after the agreement, responding to the Taliban attack on ANDSF checkpoints. The commander of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, General Miller, said that the United States would continue the air strikes in support of government army and police if they were attacked by the Taliban.\footnote{Military Times, US resumes airstrikes against Taliban to halt attack on Afghan forces, 04 March 2020, url.}

Besides the Taliban, Al Qaeda is allegedly present in Helmand and closely collaborates with the Taliban – even though the Pentagon reportedly stated that the two groups do not maintain strategic relationships.\footnote{LWJ, Afghan forces target al Qaeda commanders in Helmand and Nangarhar, 7 August 2018, url; Institute for the Study of War, Al Qaeda Expands its Presence in Afghanistan, 23 October 2019, url.}

According to the news magazine The Diplomat, as of September 2018, there has been no known presence of Islamic State (IS) fighters in Helmand.\footnote{Diplomat (The), The Last 2 Sikhs in the Taliban’s Heartland, 26 September 2018, url.}

### 2.12.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.12.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 675 civilian casualties (284 deaths and 391 injured) in Helmand province. This represents a decrease of 23 \% compared to 2019. Although the number of victims remains high, UNAMA reported that it has decreased since 2017, particularly in case of ground engagement victims.\footnote{UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 69, 94} Resolute Support recorded between 76 and 100 civilian casualties in Helmand in the first
six months of 2020, with no variation in number between the first and second quarter of 2020.\textsuperscript{1577} According to UNAMA, leading causes of civilian casualties in 2019 were IEDs, air strikes, followed by ground engagements.\textsuperscript{1578}

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED reported total 1,650 incidents related to security in Helmand province: 1,154 battles, 474 remote violence, 22 cases of violence against civilians.\textsuperscript{1579}

During the reporting period, the use of IEDs caused the most civilian casualties in the province.\textsuperscript{1580} For instance, on 25 March 2020 at least eight civilians were killed after the explosion of a roadside bomb in Musa Qala district.\textsuperscript{1581} On 31 March 2020, eight other civilians were killed in an explosion in Nahr-e Saraj district.\textsuperscript{1582} Although the Taliban claimed they usually issued a warning to local population about safety on the roads or closed the roads for traffic to reduce the number of civilians killed by IEDs, bombs on the roads still caused civilian casualties and limited the freedom of movement of local people.\textsuperscript{1583}

On 22 September 2019, Afghan special forces conducted a raid supported by US air strikes against prominent Al Qaeda fighters.\textsuperscript{1584} According to various sources, from 15\textsuperscript{1585} to 40\textsuperscript{1587} civilians were killed and at least 11 wounded when wedding procession was accidentally targeted. Most victims were women and children who participated in a wedding which was to take place in Musa Qala district.\textsuperscript{1588} According to Ministry of Defense, during the same operation, the security forces managed to kill 22 foreign fighters, including persons from Al Qaeda leadership and arrest 14 others.\textsuperscript{1589} On 29 June 2020, 1580 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, url, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, url, p. 72 1578 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, pp. 69, 94 1579 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Ghazni; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, url 1580 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Nimroz; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, url 1581 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 94 1582 Afghanistan Times, 8 killed in Helmand after vehicle hit by roadside bomb, 25 March 2020, url 1583 SATP, Helmand Timeline 2020, url 1584 HRW, “You Have No Right to Complain” Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, url, pp. 53-55; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 42 1585 PBS, 40 civilians killed in anti-Taliban raid in Afghanistan, 23 September 2019, url; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 60; NYT, Ally of Al Qaeda Killed in Afghanistan Raid, Officials Say, but Taliban Deny It, 8 October 2019, url 1586 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 60 1587 PBS, 40 civilians killed in anti-Taliban raid in Afghanistan, 23 September 2019, url 1588 PBS, 40 civilians killed in anti-Taliban raid in Afghanistan, 23 September 2019, url; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 60; NYT, Ally of Al Qaeda Killed in Afghanistan Raid, Officials Say, but Taliban Deny It, 8 October 2019, url 1589 PBS, 40 civilians killed in anti-Taliban raid in Afghanistan, 23 September 2019, url
in Sangin district of Helmand province, ANA forces fired three mortars that landed in a busy marketplace, killing 19 civilians (including 6 children), and injuring 31 others (including 11 children).\textsuperscript{1590}

The second leading cause of casualties were air strikes.\textsuperscript{1591} Throughout 2019 and early 2020, US and Afghan forces continued operations in the province\textsuperscript{1592}, including air strikes reportedly inflicting considerable damage among civilians.\textsuperscript{1593} Although a peace agreement between US and Taliban was signed in February 2020, US and Afghan forces continued air strikes in Helmand province because Taliban continues attacking military checkpoints of Afghan security forces.\textsuperscript{1594}

Besides suicide and non-suicide IEDs attacks, AGEs targeted selected groups of civilians in Helmand. There were reports of cases of killing tribal elders, government employees and journalists in Lashkar Gah City during the reporting period.\textsuperscript{1595} According to a Human Rights Watch report, any contact with the Afghan government for civilian population is prohibited in Taliban-controlled areas. For example, Taliban targeted a resident of Helmand whose relatives worked for the police and accused him of being ‘a police spy’.\textsuperscript{1596} Taliban also used civilian homes for military purposes and punished residents who tried to oppose.\textsuperscript{1597} There were cases when Taliban tried to intimidate the workers of de-mining NGOs in Grishk (Nahr-e-Saraj) district.\textsuperscript{1598}

### 2.12.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 9233 persons displaced from Helmand province. 7481 persons were displaced within the province itself from different localities mainly to Lashkargah and Washer district. 1752 persons were displaced from Helmand to other provinces, mainly to Kandahar.\textsuperscript{1599} A significant number of IDPs came from Marja / Nad-e Ali\textsuperscript{1600} where the Afghan army conducted a military operation trying to recapture the district from Taliban.\textsuperscript{1601}

In the reporting period 103 persons arrived to the Helmand’s district Nahr-e Saraj from Daykundi province.\textsuperscript{1602}

\begin{itemize}
\item UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 2020 Mid-year Update, 27 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 15; Stars and Stripes, Afghan forces launched mortar attacks that killed civilians in Helmand, UN says, 30 June 2020, \url{url}; Tolonews, 23 Civilians Killed in Rocket Attacks in Helmand 29 June 2020, \url{url}.
\item UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, pp. 69, 94
\item Quilty A., Static War: Helmand after the US Marines’ return, AAN, 23 April 2020, \url{url}
\item UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 60;
\item CNBC, US carries out first airstrike on Taliban since Doha deal, 4 March 2020, \url{url}.
\item EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Helmand; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Media staff killed in Afghanistan’s southern province Helmand, 2 January 2020, \url{url}; 1 TV, Afghan media worker killed in Afghanistan, 2 January 2020, \url{url}.
\item HRW, “You Have No Right to Complain” Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, \url{url}, pp. 5-7
\item HRW, “You Have No Right to Complain” Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, \url{url}, pp. 53-54
\item HRW, “You Have No Right to Complain” Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, \url{url}, p. 44.
\item UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}.
\item UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, \url{url}.
\item RFE/RL/Gandhara, Can Afghan Forces Hold On To Former Taliban Territories?, 23 July 2019, \url{url}; Tolonews, Helmand’s Marjah Cleared of ‘Insurgents’ After Four Years, 1 December 2019, \url{url}.
\item UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}.
\end{itemize}
2.13 Herat

2.13.1 General description of the province

The province of Herat is located in the west of Afghanistan, sharing an international border with Iran to the west and Turkmenistan to the north, as well as with the provinces of Badghis to the north-east, Ghor to the east, and Farah to the south. Herat province is divided into the following administrative units: Adraskan, Chisti Sharif, Farsi, Ghoryan, Gulran, Guzara (Nizam-e Shahid), Herat, Injil, Karukh, Kohsan, Kushk (Rubat-e Sangi), Kushki Kohna, Obe, Pashtun Zarghun, Shindand, Zinda Jan. Additionally, there are four ‘temporary’ districts – Poshtko, Koh-e Zore (Koh-e Zawar), Zawol, and Zer Koh. The provincial capital of Herat is the city of Herat. According to Pajhwok Afghan News, Herat is one of the largest provinces of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan NSIA estimated the population of Herat province at 2,140,662 in 2020-21, with 574,276 of its residents living in the provincial capital. According to Pajhwok Afghan News, Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazara, Turkmen, Uzbeks and Aimaqs are the main ethnic groups in the province, with Pashtuns representing the majority in 11 border districts. A 2015 USIP report stated that ‘historically, Herat City has been a Tajik-dominated enclave in a Pashtun-majority province that includes sizeable Hazara and Aimaq minorities.’ Large-scale migration reportedly changed the ethnic composition of the city.

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1603 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Herat Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
1604 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Herat Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
1605 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, n.d., url, p. 42
1606 Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Herat, 2020, url
1607 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, n.d., url, p. 42
1608 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Herat province, n.d., url
1609 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-21, n.d., url, pp. 5 and 42
1610 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Herat province, n.d., url
1611 USIP, Political and Economic Dynamics of Herat, 2015, url, p.8
According to AAN, the share of Shia Hazaras has been particularly increasing since 2001 due to repatriation from Iran and displacement from provinces of central Afghanistan.1611

The province is connected to other major cities by the Ring Road.1612 A primary road leads from Herat eastwards to Ghor and Bamyan and on to Kabul.1613 Other highways connect the provincial capital with the Afghan-Turkmen border crossing at Torgundi, as well as with the Afghan-Iranian border crossing at Islam Qala.1614 According Railway Gazette, Herat will be connected to Iran through a railway, which was under construction during the reporting period.1615

Herat International airport is located about 10 kilometres west of Herat City, with a capacity of managing 350 000 passengers per year, and the airport is managed by NATO forces, under the Italian command.1616 While agriculture is an important source of income for many dwellers in rural parts of Herat, ‘[…] urban commercial and industrial ventures dominate Herat City’s economy’ and the proximity of Iran is a determining factor for the city.1617

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Herat was not one of the ten main opium-poppy cultivating provinces of Afghanistan in 2018.1618 Compared to 2017, Herat's opium-poppy cultivation decreased by 46 % in 2018. The main opium-poppy cultivating districts in 2018 have been Kushk and Shindand.1619 According to AAN, in 2019, opium-poppy cultivation in the western provinces including in Herat has decreased by 23 % compared to 2018.1620

2.13.2 Conflict background and actors in Herat

According to Khaama Press, ‘Herat has been among the relatively calm provinces in the west of Afghanistan but the Taliban militants are active in some of its remote districts and often attempt to carry out terrorist related activities.’1621 In October 2018, AAN reported that ‘large swathes of territory in the province, particularly areas far from the provincial and district centres, are either contested or partially or completely controlled by the Taleban.’1622 In December 2019, Etilaatroz reported on widespread presence of Taliban fighters in a number of districts of Herat province.1623 In a separate article, Etilaatroz quoted Mehdi Hadid, a member of Herat provincial council, stating the Taliban have presence in Shindand, Kushki Kohna, Gulran, Rubat-e Sangi, Pashtun Zarghun, Adraskan and Farsi districts, and the group has established checkpoints on the Islam Qala Highway. Mehdi also indicated that the government controlled the capitals of all districts, within a limit of 5 kilometres from the district capitals. The source added that, Jilani Farhad, spokesperson for the governor of Herat province claimed that [informal translation] ‘Taliban have presence in Gulran, Shindand and Kushki Kohna, but

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1611 Kazemi, R.S., Speculation Abounding: Trying to make sense of the attacks against Shias in Herat city, AAN, 3 February 2019, url
1612 Diplomat (The), Kabul’s Plan to Realize Afghanistan’s Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, url
1613 iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, url
1614 iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, url
1615 Railway Gazette International, Herat province railway construction contract signed, 12 December 2019, url
1616 Technical, Herat International Airport (Afghanistan), 19 July 2019, url
1617 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Herat Provincial Overview, n.d., url
1618 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 17
1619 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 33
1620 AAN, New world drug report: opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, 25 June 2020, url
1621 Khaama Press, Prominent Taliban leader killed in Herat drone strike, 17 December 2018, url
1622 Kazemi, R.S., The 2018 Election Observed (6) in Herat: Insecurity, organisational shambles, alleged rigging, AAN, 20 December 2018, url
1623 Etilaatroz، اعتراض شهروندان هرات؛ نماینده‌گان این ولایت خواستار برکناری فرمانده پولیس شدند [informal translation ‘Herat citizen protest; representatives of this province demanded the removal of the police chief’], 30 December 2019, url
the government holds its state sovereignty [over the province] and the security forces maintain security.\textsuperscript{1624}

According to information LWJ collected and presented in a map released on 6 July 2020, Gulran, Koshk, Kushki Kohna, Obe, Adraskan, Ghoryan and Shindand districts of Herat province were contested and Farsi district was ‘unconfirmable Taliban claim of control’.\textsuperscript{1625} In January 2020, Stars and Stripes indicated the presence of Rasool group [Taliban’s separatist group] in Herat province that continued to fight the main Taliban groups in the province. The source claimed Rasool group ‘operated with the tacit support of the Afghan Government’.\textsuperscript{1626}

According to the UN Security Council report, the Taliban shadow governor for Herat was Mawlawi Abdul Rashid in May 2020.\textsuperscript{1627} On 23 May 2020, Tolonews reported that NDS arrested a key Taliban commander and ‘a member of the Taliban’s leadership commission named Qari Shafi (also known as Hafiz Omeri) in Herat province at the border with Iran.\textsuperscript{1628}

In terms of government presence, the 207\textsuperscript{th} Zafar Corps is in charge of the ANA operations in the province of Herat.\textsuperscript{1629} As part of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, Italian forces provide ‘functionality-based’ security assistance to ANA 207\textsuperscript{th} Corps and ANP in Herat province.\textsuperscript{1630}

In December 2019, Gandhara news quoted the chief of Herat police stating there was a shortage in the number of police in Herat province and only in Herat City there was a need for 1 200 Afghan National Police (ANP) in order to tackle insecurity.\textsuperscript{1631} According to Pajhwok, residents of Herat City complained that there were not enough police personal in the city to provide security for the population.\textsuperscript{1632} According to Etilaatroz, on 30 August 2019, there was one police officer per 1 000 people in Herat province. The source cited Ghulam Hussain Majrohi, a military expert stating that due to insecurity in several districts of Herat province, there were no judiciary institutions, and people used Taliban courts to resolve their problems.\textsuperscript{1633} In December 2019, Pajhwok reported that the chief of Police District 10 (PD 10) of Herat City has been removed from the office for the lack of efficiency to provide security in the city.\textsuperscript{1634}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1624} Etilaatroz, بررسی اوضاع امنیتی غرب کشور؛ از افزایش تحرکات طالبان تا تلفات سنگین این گروه [informal translation: ‘security assessment of the west of the country; from the increase of Taliban’s mobility to heavy losses of the group’], 30 August 2019, \url{http://www.etilaatroz.com/}
\item \textsuperscript{1625} LWJ, Several Districts Change Hands as Fighting Rages in Northern Afghanistan, 6 July 2020, \url{http://www.etilaatroz.com/}, however the source does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated
\item \textsuperscript{1626} Stripes, Airstrike in western Afghanistan kills leader of Taliban splinter group, may have killed civilians, 9 January 2020, \url{http://www.etilaatroz.com/}
\item \textsuperscript{1627} UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2020/415, 27 May 2020, \url{http://www.undc.org/}
\item \textsuperscript{1628} Tolonews, “Key” Taliban member arrested in Herat by NDS, 23 May 2020, \url{http://www.etilaatroz.com/}
\item \textsuperscript{1629} Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., \url{http://www.undc.org/}, USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, \url{http://www.undc.org/}, p. 59
\item \textsuperscript{1630} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, 1 July 2020, \url{http://www.undc.org/}, p. 14
\item \textsuperscript{1631} Radio Azadi, فرمانده پولیس هرات: اگر نیروهای پولیس افغانستان نیابد اقتصاد هرات فلج می‌شود [informal translation: ‘Herat Police commander: if the number of police personnel does not increase, economy of Herat will be impacted’], 17 December 2019, \url{http://www.etilaatroz.com/}
\item \textsuperscript{1632} Pajhwok Afghan News, Worsening insecurity worries Herat residents, 19 December 2019, \url{http://www.etilaatroz.com/}
\item \textsuperscript{1633} Etilaatroz, بررسی اوضاع امنیتی غرب کشور؛ از افزایش تحرکات طالبان تا تلفات سنگین این گروه [informal translation: ‘security assessment of the west of the country; from the increase of Taliban’s mobility to heavy losses of the group’], 30 August 2019, \url{http://www.etilaatroz.com/}
\item \textsuperscript{1634} Pajhwok Afghan News, آمر حزره دهم امنیتی پولیس هرات به دلیل غفلت وظیفه برکنار شد [informal translation: ‘chief of Police District 10 of Herat has been removed from office due to negligence’], 17 December 2019, \url{http://www.etilaatroz.com/}
\end{itemize}
2.13.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.13.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 400 civilian casualties, including 144 killed and 256 injured in Herat province, which represents 54% increase compared to 2018. The leading causes of casualties were Non-Suicide IEDs, ground engagements and targeted/deliberate killings. According to SIGAR, RS (Resolute Support) recorded between 51 and 75 civilian casualties in Herat province during the first quarter of 2020, and the mentioned source recorded between 101 and 125 civilian casualties during the second quarter of 2020.

According to ACLED data, between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 there were 529 security incidents recorded in Herat province, of which 360 were coded as battles, 141 remote violence and 28 incidents of violence against civilians.

Figure 15. Herat - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data

A local media source indicated that Herat district roads are not safe and residents complain about armed thieves who rob civilians’ vehicles, particularly motorcycles, sometimes nearby the security checkpoints. There is reportedly rising insecurity on the Islam Qala-Herat Highway. On 30 March 2020, Herat special police reportedly seized in a raid in Kang village of Ghoryan district a truck loaded with four tons of explosives. The source quoted the Ministry of Interior (MoI) stating that ‘militants wanted to use the material in making roadside bombs and explosives for suicide attacks.

According AAN, ‘in late 2019 and early 2020, Afghanistan’s key western city of Herat witnessed a series of security incidents, including targeted killings and attacks on the police.’ On 12 February 2020, a local media in Herat province reported that the Taliban military commission issued a statement that called on its fighting commanders to stop using civilian houses, mosques and other public infrastructures as hideouts during the clashes with the security forces, or during air strikes. The source indicated that the mentioned Taliban statement has been disseminated in several districts of Herat province. The source also posted a copy of the original statement in Pashto language dated 3 February 2020.

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1635 UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict, 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 94
1636 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, url, p. 69
1637 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, url, p. 72
1638 Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Herat; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, url
1639 News Vim, [informal translation ‘endless serial killings and assassinations in Herat’], 2 December 2019, url
1640 Kabul Now, Customs staffs on strike over growing insecurity on Islam Qala-Herat highway, 7 July 2020, url
1641 1 TV News, Afghan police finds four tons of explosives in truck in Herat, 30 March 2020, url
1642 AAN, Herat City’s reported spike in insecurity: what a sober of reading events reveals, 21 April 2020, url
1643 News Vim, [informal translation ‘Taliban military leadership banned the usage of residential houses as hideouts’], 12 February 2020, url
Recent security incidents that caused civilian casualties in Herat province in 2019 and 2020 include:

five civilians reportedly killed and 29 wounded on 6 August 2019, when a motorcycle laden with explosives detonated in the Haji Abbas area of Herat City; on 28 August 2019, eight civilians and six pro-government militias were killed, and nine people including seven civilians and two pro-government militias were wounded in a Taliban attack in the Chahardarah village of Koshk-e Robatsangi district; on 28 September 2019, one civilian was killed, and two others wounded in a Taliban attack on a polling centre in Obe district; on 29 September 2019, two separate roadside bombs killed two civilians in Golran; 14 members of a pro-government militia were killed in Rubat-e Sangi district of Herat after several Taliban fighters stormed security checkpoints in the Chahardara area, wounding several civilians; on 2 October 2019, two police officers and one civilian were killed in a Taliban attack on the centre of Farsi district, in a separate incident, three civilians were killed including women, children, and a retired Afghan army officer when the Taliban attacked a civilian vehicle in the village of Barnobad in Ghoryan district; on 17 October 2019, two civilians were killed, and three others were wounded when the Taliban attacked a vehicle, due to errant intelligence information, on the Kandahar-Herat Highway in the village of Kalesk in Zawol district; on 23 October 2019, one civilian was killed, and two others wounded by the explosion of a roadside bomb in the Buran village of Pashtun Zarghun district; on 28 October 2019, a suicide attack near the Imam Hadi Mosque in the Darb-e Khosh area of Herat City, killed one civilian and injured six others; on 7 November 2019, the Taliban killed one civilian in the Pal Pada village of Pashton Zarghun district; on 31 December 2019, one civilian was killed and another injured by a roadside bomb in Golran; on 7 January 2020, around 40 civilians were killed by a US drone attack in the centre of Shindand district after the strike targeted and killed a Taliban key member and nearly 30 of his men; on 18 February 2020, five civilians were killed including two women and three children after foreign troops carried out an air strike targeting a Taliban commander, Mullah Ahmad Ahmadi, in Kushki Kohna district. According to AAN, different sources including oral ones reported different numbers of civilian casualties during the mentioned incident; on 7 March 2020, seven civilians were killed and 17 others were wounded in Khwaja Noor village of Kushk Rubat-e Sangi district after Taliban fighters attacked the area and ‘opened fire on women and children’. According to the New York Times, Taliban attacked a pro-government outpost in the mentioned area, and the group ‘kidnapped six civilians, including one teacher, all of whom were later killed’; on 18 March 2020, one civilian was killed and another injured during a Taliban attack on a government outpost in Kal-e Sorkh village of Adraskan district; on 14 May 2020, one woman was killed and two other civilians were wounded when the Taliban opened fire on a security checkpoint in Sarak-e Naw village of Ghoryan district; on 18 May 2020, one civilian was killed in Khwaja Nooh village of Shindand district after the Taliban...
ambushed a military convoy\(^\text{1663}\); on 12 June 2020, one civilian was killed and seven others were injured (including five teenagers) in a rocket attack by the Taliban in Golran-e Timory village in Golran district\(^\text{1664}\); on 14 June 2020, one civilian was killed in the village of Band-e Benafsh in Obe district due to the clashes between the Taliban and ANSF\(^\text{1665}\); on 20 June 2020, one civilian (shopkeeper) and four police officers were killed when a police vehicle hit a roadside bomb in Dahana village of Kohsan district\(^\text{1666}\); on 1 July 2020, one civilian was killed, and nine security forces were injured including the police chief of Herat province, Obaidullah Noorzai, after the Taliban attacked ANSF convoy in Fooshkan village of Pashton Zarghun district.\(^\text{1667}\)

2.2.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 3,761 persons displaced from Herat province, with almost 99% displaced within the province itself.\(^\text{1668}\)

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 9,398 persons displaced to Herat province, with 42% coming from Badghis, 6% from Ghor, 5% from Farah, 4% from Faryab, 3% from Ghazni, Kunduz and Uruzgan, and the remaining 40% coming from within the province itself.\(^\text{1669}\)

UNOCHA weekly Humanitarian update (1 to 7 June 2020) indicated that the security situation in west of Afghanistan remained unstable during the reporting period, and over 100,000 IDPs living in informal settlements in Herat province was going to receive humanitarian aid.\(^\text{1670}\) According to Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR), more than 17,000 IDPs families we living in Herat province in February 2020,\(^\text{1671}\) a much lower figure compared to the AAN/Nadim figure indicating that around 158,000 IDP families were living in Herat province during the reporting period including 70,000 IDP families in Herat City.\(^\text{1672}\)

\(^\text{1663}\) NYT, Afghan war casualty report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, url
\(^\text{1664}\) NYT, Afghan war casualty report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, url
\(^\text{1665}\) NYT, Afghan war casualty report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, url
\(^\text{1666}\) NYT, Afghan war casualty report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, url
\(^\text{1667}\) NYT, Afghan war casualty report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, url
\(^\text{1668}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url
\(^\text{1669}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url
\(^\text{1670}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian update, 7 June 2020, url, p. 2
\(^\text{1671}\) DACAAR, Remember the plight of drought IDPs in Herat, 4 February 2020, url
\(^\text{1672}\) AAN, Herat City’s reported spike in insecurity: what a sober of reading events reveals, 21 April 2020, url
2.14 Jawzjan

2.14.1 General description of the province

Map 14: Afghanistan – Jawzjan province, source: UNOCHA.\(^{1673}\)

\(^{1673}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Jawzjan Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
Jawzjan province is located in the north of Afghanistan and has borders with Balkh province to the east, Sar-e Pul to the south, and Faryab to the west and an international border with Turkmenistan to the north.\textsuperscript{1674} Jawzjan province is divided into the following administrative units: Aqcha, Darzab, Fayzabad, Khamyab, Khanaqa, Khwaja Dukoh, Mardyjan, Mingajik, Qarqin, Qushtepa and Shiberghan. The provincial capital is Shiberghan.\textsuperscript{1675} According to AAN, Darzab has been transferred from Faryab to Jawzjan because of security reasons. Later, the district of Qushtepa was carved out of Darzab.\textsuperscript{1676}

According to estimates for 2020-2021 by NSIA, the province has a population of 602 082, 192 724 of whom live in the provincial capital, Shiberghan.\textsuperscript{1677} The main ethnic groups in the province are Uzbek and Turkmen. Other groups present include Pashtuns and so-called Arabs – i.e. descendants of migrants who left the Arabian Peninsula in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century, as well as some Tajiks and Kuchi nomads, whose numbers vary depending on the season.\textsuperscript{1678}

The Ring Road connects the provincial capital of Jawzjan with the major population centre Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh, as well as Faryab to the west. Another main road connects neighbouring Sar-e Pul to the Ring Road in Shiberghan.\textsuperscript{1679} Jawzjan was one of four provinces in Afghanistan where ANDSF particularly ‘dedicated significant resources to improving security along the major roads’ in the third quarter of 2019.\textsuperscript{1680} According to UNOCHA, the road between Mazar-e Sharif and provincial capital Shiberghan remained contested in January 2020.\textsuperscript{1681} AGEs had control and were taxing commercial and logistic vehicles.\textsuperscript{1682}

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Jawzjan lost its poppy-free status in 2016. While opium-poppies cultivation reached a peak in 2017 – with a nearly eightfold increase compared to 2016 –, the size of the opium-poppies cultivating area in Jawzjan decreased by 90 % in 2018 compared to 2017.\textsuperscript{1683} UNODC links the decrease in acreage to 2018’s severe drought in northern Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{1684} Jawzjan was not among the ten main opium-poppies cultivating provinces of Afghanistan in 2018.\textsuperscript{1685}

## 2.14.2 Conflict background and actors in Jawzjan

Despite being home to the former powerful Uzbek militia leader Abdul Rashid Dostum and the presence of his ‘former militia fighters’, insurgent activity reportedly increased in Jawzjan after NATO-led forces handed over control to Afghan security forces in 2012.\textsuperscript{1686} A 2017 study on Islamic State (IS) presence in Afghanistan found that ‘there are enormous numbers of armed forces in […] Jawzjan […], among which the irregular (arbaki, private paramilitary units of commanders) and anti-government forces (mostly various local Taliban groups) clearly outnumber the ANSF (ANA, ANP and ALP) and National Uprising units.’\textsuperscript{1687}

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\textsuperscript{1674} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Northern Region - District Atlas, April 2014, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1675} Afghanistan, NSIA, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Jawzjan, 2020, \url{url}; Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, \url{url}, p. 38
\textsuperscript{1676} Rutti, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1677} Larsson, K., A Provincial Survey of Balkh, Jawzjan, Samangan and Saripul, November 2008, \url{url}, p. 68
\textsuperscript{1678} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Northern Region - District Atlas, April 2014, \url{url}; iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, \url{url}; Diplomat (The), Kabul’s Plan to Realize Afghanistan’s Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1679} UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/73/990-S/2019/703, 3 September 2019, \url{url}, pp. 5-6
\textsuperscript{1681} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 January – 19 January 2020), 22 January 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1682} UNOCD and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, \url{url}, p. 19
\textsuperscript{1683} UNOCD and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, \url{url}, p. 26
\textsuperscript{1684} UNOCD and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, \url{url}, p. 17
\textsuperscript{1685} RFE/RL, Afghanistan’s New Northern Flash Points, n.d., \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1686} Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, \url{url}, pp. 28-29
AAN reported in 2017 that the Taliban became increasingly successful in Jawzjan, setting up administrative and military institutions, after opening their ranks to non-Pashtun fighters. The recruitment of Uzbeks allegedly proved particularly successful in the province.\(^{1688}\) Subsequently, the Taliban were able to expand their control in Jawzjan as well as in other provinces of northern Afghanistan.\(^{1689}\) Within Jawzjan, they have been reportedly pushing into the province’s northern and eastern parts, as well as the strategic areas around the provincial centre.\(^{1690}\)

AAN reported that conflict emerged between local Taliban commanders and the Taliban leadership in 2014 after the latter tried to enhance the accountability of the commanders in operations. According to AAN, the appearance of IMU in Qushtepa subsequently favoured the formation of an ‘Islamic State (IS)’ faction in the district.\(^{1691}\)

IMU, which appeared to have started infiltrating Jawzjan in early 2015 from neighbouring Faryab province according to RFE/RL\(^{1692}\), has been a former ally of the Taliban, but shifted allegiance towards IS after the disclosure of Taliban leader Mullah Omar’s death in 2015.\(^{1693}\) The presence of IMU in Jawzjan reportedly provided Qari Hekmat and his followers with an opportunity to pledge allegiance to IS. Subsequently, Hekmat succeeded in shaping his former Taliban unit into an independent IS-associated group.\(^{1694}\) AAN stated that it had found no reliable evidence of a connection between Hekmat’s IS group and Nangarhar’s Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), which is allegedly recognised by the ‘Daesh central’ in Syria and Iraq (i.e. the main franchise) as an IS branch.\(^{1695}\) A study on IS presence in Afghanistan published in 2017 supported this finding.\(^{1696}\)

According to AAN, Hekmat’s shift to ‘IS’ was rather driven by ‘[...] power-saving opportunism [...]’ than by ideological motives.\(^{1697}\) The self-proclaimed IS group managed to hold control over the districts of Qushtepa and Darzab for three years, fighting the Taliban\(^{1698}\) – though not expanding its territory due to the widespread Taliban presence in the province\(^{1699}\) – and initially outlasting the death of its founder by a US drone strike in April 2018.\(^{1700}\) In August 2018, the Taliban overran the group’s strongholds\(^{1701}\), prompting a faction of Hekmat’s former unit to surrender to the government forces in fear of retaliation by the Taliban, while others (reportedly mainly Central Asian fighters) surrendered to the Taliban.\(^{1702}\) There were reports of an insider attack in Qushtepa district in June 2019, claiming that the attackers were former members of groups affiliated with ISKP, who had surrendered to the government in

\(^{1688}\) Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, url

\(^{1689}\) RFE/RL, Afghanistan’s New Northern Flash Points, n.d., url; Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, url

\(^{1690}\) Ali, O., Qari Hekmat’s Island Overrun: Taleban defeat ‘ISKP’ in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, url

\(^{1691}\) Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, url

\(^{1692}\) RFE/RL, Afghanistan’s New Northern Flash Points, n.d., url

\(^{1693}\) Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, url

\(^{1694}\) Ali, O., Qari Hekmat’s Island Overrun: Taleban defeat ‘ISKP’ in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, url

\(^{1695}\) RFE/RL, Afghanistan’s New Northern Flash Points, n.d., url

\(^{1696}\) Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, url; AAN, Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taleban, 24 November 2015, url

\(^{1697}\) Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, url

\(^{1698}\) Ali, O., Qari Hekmat’s Island Overrun: Taleban defeat ‘ISKP’ in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, url

\(^{1699}\) Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective. June 2017, url, pp. 28-29

\(^{1700}\) Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective. June 2017, url, pp. 28-29

\(^{1701}\) Ali, O., Qari Hekmat’s Island: A Daesh enclave in Jawzjan?, AAN, 11 November 2018, url; Ali, O., Precarious Consolidation: Qari Hekmat’s IS-affiliated ‘island’ survives another Taleban onslaught, AAN, 4 March 2018, url; Der Spiegel, Afghanistan 120 Tote bei Kämpfen zwischen Taliban und IS [Afghanistan: 120 Dead in Clashes Between Taliban and IS], 19 July 2018, url

\(^{1702}\) Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, url

\(^{1703}\) Ali, O., Still under the IS’s Black Flag: Qari Hekmat’s ISKP island in Jawzjan after his death by drone, AAN, 15 May 2018, url; UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, p. 15

\(^{1704}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 85

\(^{1705}\) Ali, O., Qari Hekmat’s Island Overrun: Taleban defeat ‘ISKP’ in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, url; UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, url, p. 15
2018. \textsuperscript{1703} No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Jawzjan province between 1 March 2019 and 20 June 2020. \textsuperscript{1704}

In August 2019 provincial police officials stated that 1,500 fighters, forming 123 groups, have been involved in fighting against government forces under the Taliban leadership in Jawzjan province. \textsuperscript{1705} Darzab district was reported to be under Taliban control in March 2019. \textsuperscript{1706} There were reports of the Taliban capturing Qushtepa district in July 2019\textsuperscript{1707} and again during the presidential elections at the end of September 2019. \textsuperscript{1708} Demanding more attention from the central government to Jawzjan’s security in August 2019, the provincial police stated that next to Qushtepa, Khamyab district had also fallen to the Taliban while Mangajak, Qarqin, Muradyan and Darzab districts were under threat. \textsuperscript{1709} In the months that followed media reports, adding Aqcha and Khanaqa districts, also reflected this threat on those districts. \textsuperscript{1710} The Taliban took control of Darzab district on 31 December 2019. \textsuperscript{1711} The Afghan security forces reportedly withdrew peacefully from their Antan Hill military base on demand of the local residents. \textsuperscript{1712} Although officials claimed that government forces had retaken Khamyab district in April 2020 \textsuperscript{1713}, in its assessment, consulted on 11 June 2020, LWJ continued to indicate the district as ‘Taliban-controlled’. \textsuperscript{1714} As of 2 July 2020 the assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, additionally indicated Darzab and Qushtepa districts as ‘Taliban-controlled’, Mardyan, Mingajik and Shiberghan districts as ‘government-controlled’ and the remaining districts in Jawzjan province as ‘contested’. \textsuperscript{1715}

According to information at the disposal of the UN Security Council in 2019 and 2020, in Afghanistan Central Asian groups were under the direct operational and financial control of the Taliban. \textsuperscript{1716} The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan was said to have no more than 100 members and operates mainly in

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\textsuperscript{1703} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 21-27, 27 June 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 pro-govt militiamen killed in Jawzjan, Samangan, 26 June 2019, url.

\textsuperscript{1704} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Jawzjan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url.


\textsuperscript{1706} Pajhwok Afghan News, ’123 groups fight government forces under Taliban leadership in Jawzjan’, 3 August 2019, url.

\textsuperscript{1707} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-July 4, 4 July 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture Jawzjan’s Qush Tepa district, 2 June 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban release 54 security forces in Jawzjan, 9 July 2019, url.


\textsuperscript{1709} Pajhwok Afghan News, ’123 groups fight government forces under Taliban leadership in Jawzjan’, 3 August 2019, url.

\textsuperscript{1710} Tolonews, Over 3,700 Militants Killed In 88 Operations In North: Official, 19 March 2019, url.

\textsuperscript{1711} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-July 4, 4 July 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture Jawzjan’s Qush Tepa district, 2 June 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban release 54 security forces in Jawzjan, 9 July 2019, url.


\textsuperscript{1713} Pajhwok Afghan News, ’123 groups fight government forces under Taliban leadership in Jawzjan’, 3 August 2019, url.

\textsuperscript{1714} Tolonews, 11 Police Killed/Wounded In Balkh, Police Under Siege in Jawzjan, 1 October 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Darzab district residents seek arms for self-defense, 2 October 2019, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, url; Tolonews, Dostum Pledges Support to Afghan Forces, 31 October 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban torch 3 telecom antennas in Jawzjan, 1 January 2020, url.


Faryab and Jawzjan provinces where it maintained links to splinter groups such as Islamic Jihad Group and Khatiba Imama al-Bukhari.  

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Jawzjan province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen corps. Jawzjan province is included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North is led by German forces and has its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province.  

### 2.14.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.14.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 123 civilian casualties (29 deaths and 94 injured) in Jawzjan. This represents a decrease of 33% compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by explosive remnants of war and non-suicide IEDs. Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 75 civilian casualties in Jawzjan in the first half of 2020, reporting a decrease in the number of civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020, compared to the first.

ACLED collected data on 244 violent events in Jawzjan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, 180 of which were coded as battles, 58 as explosions/remote violence and 6 as violence against civilians. While ACLED registered violent events in all of Jawzjan’s districts, around one third of all violent incidents in Jawzjan between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 were registered in Fayzabad and Aqcha districts.  

![Figure 16. Jawzjan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data](url)

ACLED coded 74% of the violent incidents in Jawzjan province as battles, mostly armed clashes, representing the most prevalent incident type in all of Jawzjan’s districts. The majority of those incidents were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police or NDS forces.
personnel\textsuperscript{1724}, and members of pro-government militias or local uprising forces\textsuperscript{1725} or attacks on their facilities such as checkpoints\textsuperscript{1726}, headquarters\textsuperscript{1727} and military bases\textsuperscript{1728}, and to a lesser extent on convoys and vehicles.\textsuperscript{1729} At times these incidents resulted in civilian casualties, as for example in Khwajadukoh district where four civilians who were farming nearby were killed during a Taliban attack on a security post on 2 May 2019.\textsuperscript{1730} In Qushtepa district two police officers and one civilian were killed and another civilian wounded when clashes broke out after a Taliban attack on a security post 30 May 2019.\textsuperscript{1731} Two civilians were injured in a Taliban attack on a village in Aqcha district in May 2020.\textsuperscript{1732}

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs, such as in Fayzabad district in March 2019\textsuperscript{1733} or in Qarqin district in July 2019\textsuperscript{1734}, were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED.\textsuperscript{1735}

There were reports of groups of Taliban fighters attacking the centre of Mangajik district on 29 November 2019 and April 2020\textsuperscript{1736}, or Qarqin district on 30 May, 13 July and 10 August 2019 and 30 March 2020\textsuperscript{1737} and Mardyan district at the end of March 2020.\textsuperscript{1738} Some of these attacks resulted into hour-long clashes.\textsuperscript{1739}

Air/drone strikes represented 15\% of all violent incidents registered by ACLED in Jawzjan between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.\textsuperscript{1740} Most air strikes were carried out by Afghan forces, while a few

\textsuperscript{1724} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, \url{...}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, \url{...}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-July 4, 4 July 2019, \url{...}; NYT, War Casualty Report: March 20, 5 March 2020, \url{...}

NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 16-22, 22 August 2019, \url{...}; Xinhua, 13 killed in N. Afghanistan clashes, including pro-gov’t local leader, 4 February 2020, \url{...}; Khaama Press, Gen. Dostum reacts to killing of uprising commander in Taliban militants ambush in Jawzjan, 7 April 2019, \url{...}


\textsuperscript{1725} Bakhtar News, Terrorists With Two Commanders Killed in Jawzjan Clash, 4 December 2019, \url{...}


\textsuperscript{1727} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Jawzjan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{...}

\textsuperscript{1728} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, \url{...}

\textsuperscript{1729} Pajhwok Afghan News, Over 180 killed in deadliest week of current year, 1 June 2019, \url{...}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, \url{...}

\textsuperscript{1730} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, \url{...}

\textsuperscript{1731} Xinhua, Over 40 including 3 civilians killed within one day in Afghan fighting, 4 March 2019, \url{...}; Khaama Press, Up to 50 militants killed in Afghan Special Forces operations, airstrikes, 6 March 2019, \url{...}

\textsuperscript{1732} Khaama Press, Dadullah alias Surkhabi, one of the most dangerous leaders of Taliban killed in Jawzjan, 17 July 2019, \url{...}

\textsuperscript{1733} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Jawzjan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{...}

\textsuperscript{1734} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, \url{...}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, \url{...}

\textsuperscript{1735} Pajhwok Afghan News, Talibam’s Red Unit loses 7 men in Jawzjan firefight, 28 March 2020, \url{...}

\textsuperscript{1736} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 9-15, 15 August 2019, \url{...}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 12-18, 18 July 2019, \url{...}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, \url{...}

\textsuperscript{1737} These do not include air strikes carried out during operations categorised by ACLED under ‘battles’. For more information on ACLED’s methodology, please consult the introduction.
were attributed to NATO forces.\textsuperscript{1741} While air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs\textsuperscript{1742}, in one reported incident on 20 May 2020, six civilians were also killed when Afghan forces bombed houses in response to a Taliban attack in Mardy district.\textsuperscript{1743}

AGEs also used roadside bombs or IEDs, including VB-IEDs\textsuperscript{1744}, to target security forces, at times also causing casualties among civilians.\textsuperscript{1745} This happened on 31 October 2019 when explosives transported by the Taliban, went off prematurely in Mardy district.\textsuperscript{1746} An employee of Afghan Gas Company was killed and five of his colleagues were wounded as a result of a roadside bomb hitting their vehicle in Shiberghan City in December 2019.\textsuperscript{1747} One child was killed and two were wounded when a bomb exploded at an abandoned check point in Dazab district on 7 February 2020\textsuperscript{1748} and one child was killed and two were wounded when two roadside bombs exploded in Mangajik district on 27 June 2020.\textsuperscript{1749}

Six incidents categorised by ACLED as ‘violence against civilians’ included the killing of a tribal elder by a pro-government militia in Aqcha district in February 2020\textsuperscript{1750}, arson in several shops and schools by AGEs in Darzab district in November 2019, injuring civilians\textsuperscript{1751}, the killing of a child by the Taliban in Qushtepa district in March 2019\textsuperscript{1752}, the killing of a fuel tanker driver who refused to stop at a Taliban check point on the Balkh-Jawzjan Highway in Shiberghan district in March 2019\textsuperscript{1753} and the abduction of 40 elderly civilians from a funeral of a relative who belonged to a pro-government militia, in Fayzabad district by the Taliban in December 2019.\textsuperscript{1754} The men were released after two days.\textsuperscript{1755}

There were reports from the northern region, which includes Jawzjan province, about electricity and mobile phone networks being interrupted before and during the presidential election in September 2019.\textsuperscript{1756} This happened for example in Fayzabad district when the Taliban torched an antenna of Salaam Telecom, which covered the Fayzabad district centre and surrounding areas up to 10 kilometres and was the only company providing 24 hours’ service in the area.\textsuperscript{1757} Private mobile companies were warned to close down their networks until after the presidential election. By the end of September, early October 2019 all networks started functioning again.\textsuperscript{1758} Attacks by the Taliban were reported on

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1741} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Jowzjan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{...}
\item \textsuperscript{1742} Pajhwok Afghan News, Commander among 18 Taliban killed in Jawzjan blitz, 5 March 2019, \url{...}; Khaama Press, 9 Taliban militants killed in Helmand, Uruzgan and Jawzjan provinces, 5 march 2019, \url{...}; Khaama Press, At least 40 Taliban militants killed, wounded in Jawzjan airstrikes, 31 August 2019, \url{...}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 volleyball players killed in Kapisa ground blast, 14 September 2019, \url{...}
\item \textsuperscript{1744} Pajhwok Afghan News, Security personnel among 14 killed in Jawzjan incidents, 28 December 2019, \url{...}
\item \textsuperscript{1745} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Jawzjan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{...}; Khaama Press, Talibani’s IED expert blown up by own bomb in Jawzjan province, 29 June 2019, \url{...}
\item \textsuperscript{1746} Khaama Press, 31 Taliban militants, civilians killed, wounded as explosives-laden vehicle goes off in Jawzjan, 31 October 2019, \url{...}
\item \textsuperscript{1747} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, \url{...}
\item \textsuperscript{1748} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, \url{...}
\item \textsuperscript{1749} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, \url{...}
\item \textsuperscript{1750} Voice of Jihad, Tribal elder martyred, another one injured in enemy aggression, 21 February 2020, \url{...}
\item \textsuperscript{1751} 1TV, Civilians injured after militants torch schools, shops in Jawzjan: official, 16 November 2019, \url{...}; Bakhtar News, Taliban Sustained Casualties in Jawzjan Operation, 17 November 2019, \url{...}
\item \textsuperscript{1752} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 1-7, 7 March 2019, \url{...}; Khaama Press, 8-year-old child shot dead by Taliban militants in Jawzjan province, 7 March 2019, \url{...}
\item \textsuperscript{1753} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 1-7, 7 March 2019, \url{...}
\item \textsuperscript{1754} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban abduct 40 elderly men from Jawzjan funeral, 10 December 2019, \url{...}
\item \textsuperscript{1755} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban set free 40 elderly individuals in Jawzjan, 12 December 2019, \url{...}
\item \textsuperscript{1756} UNOCHA, 18 October 2019, \url{...}
\item \textsuperscript{1757} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban torch Salaam Telecom tower in Jawzjan, 7 September 2019, \url{...}
\item \textsuperscript{1758} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, \url{...}
presidential election day, 28 September 2019, in Fayzabad district. A woman was injured as a result of one of those incidents. 

In August 2019, increased insecurity was reported along the highway between Mazar-e Sharif and Shiberghan. Security incidents along the Balkh-Jawzjan Highway occurred in October 2019 and in February 2020 and also on the highway connecting Sar-e Pul to Jawzjan in March and August 2019 and in February, March and June 2020.

During clashes leading up to the capture of Qushtepa district in July 2019, connection between the district and the provincial capital was cut off. Within the framework of its attacks on health care initiative, the World Health Organisation (WHO) did not register such attacks in Jawzjan province in 2019. However UNAMA documented a Taliban attack on the district hospital in Aqcha district on 28 October 2019. The Taliban occupied the hospital and used it for military purposes until ANDSF regained control. As a result of the attack two civilians were killed and two were injured. Upon taking control of Darzab district at the end of December 2019 the Taliban set fire to three different telecom towers in Darzab. Local residents reportedly were able to prevent the Taliban from destroying the local public hospital.

2.14.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 4 186 persons displaced due to conflict from Jawzjan province, 67% of whom were displaced within the province itself, while others sought refuge in Sar-e Pul, Balkh, Kandahar and Kabul provinces. Most IDPs were registered from Darzab district, followed by Aqcha, Khanaqa and Mingajik districts. UNOCHA reported how fighting caused displacement in Jawzjan in May 2020, in particular from Mingajik districts as a result of armed clashes between AGEs and the ANDSF. No conflict-induced displacement was registered by UNOCHA from Shiberghan during the reporting period.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 6 384 persons displaced to Jawzjan province. In addition to the 2 821 people displaced within the province, Jawzjan hosted a large group of IDPs from Faryab province, all displaced to Shiberghan. Shiberghan, Aqcha and Qarqin were the districts hosting people displaced to Jawzjan province in the reporting period, with Shiberghan hosting 80%.

1759 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url]
1761 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url]
1763 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url]; Tolonews, Security In Balkh Highway Concerning: Residents, 10 August 2019, [url]; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 8-14, 14 March 2019, [url]; Xinhua, 13 killed in N. Afghanistan clashes, including pro-gov’t local leader, 4 February 2020, [url]; Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 uprising members killed in Jawzjan clashes, 3 March 2020, [url]; Khaama Press, Taliban militants suffer heavy casualties in Jawzjan province, 30 June 2020, [url]
1764 Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 Taliban, 6 security forces perish in Jawzjan battle, 1 July 2019, [url]; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture Jawzjan’s Qush Tepa district, 2 June 2019, [url]; Tolonews, Qush Tepa District In Jawzjan Falls To Taliban: Sources, 2 July 2019, [url]
1765 WHO, Afghanistan, Attacks on Health Care in 2019 as of December 31, 2019, 31 December 2019, [url]
1766 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url], p. 29
1767 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban torch 3 telecom antennas in Jawzjan, 1 January 2020, [url]; Khaama Press, Taliban destroys telecom towers following occupancy of a district in northern Jawzjan province, 2 January 2020, [url]
1771 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url]; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12
2.15 Kabul province

2.15.1 General description of the province

Kabul province is located in the central region of Afghanistan and has borders with the provinces of Parwan and Kapisa to the north, Laghman to the east, Nangarhar to the south-east, Logar to the south and Wardak to the west. More than half of the province consists of mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain. Kabul province is divided into the following administrative units: Bagrami, Chaharasyab, Dehsabz, Estalef, Farza, Guldara, Kabul, Kalakan, Khak-e Jabbar, Mirbachakot, Musayi, Paghman, Qarabagh, Shakardara and Surobi. The provincial capital is Kabul City, the capital of Afghanistan. North of Kabul City lies the Shomali plain, a plateau stretching from the outskirts of the city to the Salang Pass. According to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, the Shomali area has been a central part of Afghan economy and politics in the last couple of centuries - featuring strong political-armed networks dating back to the mujahideen time.

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Kabul province has a population of 5,204,667. Kabul province has the largest share of population of any province, an estimated 16% of the national total.

AAN describes Kabul province as the most ethnically diverse of all provinces. The main ethnic groups in Kabul are Tajik, Pashtun and Hazara. Other groups present include Uzbek, Turkmen and Baloch. The majority of the population of Kabul province are Sunni Muslim, but there are also Shia, Sikh and Hindu.

Major roads depart from Kabul City and connect the Afghan capital with the rest of the country. The main highway to Mazar-e-Sharif passes through the districts of Shakardara, Mirbachakot, Kalakan and Qarabagh. Another primary road connects Kabul City with Bagram in Parwan province and passes through Dehsabz and Qarabagh districts. The Kabul-Jalalabad Highway leads to Nangarhar province through the districts of Bagrami, Khak-e-Jabbar and Surobi. The Kabul-Kandahar Highway connects Kabul to Wardak province through Paghman district in the south-west of the province. Another primary road passes through Bagrami and Chaharasyab districts in the south and connects Kabul City with Logar province. Kabul City hosts an airport served by international and domestic scheduled passenger flights.

UNODC data obtained by AAN in June 2020 indicated a 52% reduction in opium poppy cultivation in the provinces of the central region (including Kabul province) and the central highlands. According to UNODC’s Opium Survey from 2018, opium-poppy cultivation in Kabul province was limited to the Uzbin Valley of Surobi district. Surobi district is additionally mentioned as home to the ephedra sinica plant, which contains the natural stimulant ephedrine, used to make the drug methamphetamine and expected to take up a central role in Afghanistan’s drug economy soon. According to the July 2019 Quarterly Update from SIGAR, the provinces of Kabul and Nangarhar recorded most cases related to drug smuggling and trafficking. Also in July 2019, UNODC reported that 20% of the drug trafficking cases recorded in 2018-2019 were attempts to smuggle drugs out of Afghanistan through Kabul airport. In February 2020, the Kabul counter-narcotics police chief was arrested for extortion, distributing drugs and collusion with drug smugglers.

### 2.15.2 Conflict background and actors in Kabul

In May 2020, the UN Security Council reported on a reorganisation of the Taliban shadow governance and military structure in several provinces, with key new appointments made in Kabul province. An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 2 July 2020, indicated all Kabul’s districts as ‘government-
controlled’ or ‘undetermined’. As confirmed by USDOD and SIGAR, the capital, Kabul City, has remained under the control of the Afghan government.

According to UNOCHA, the situation in Surobi district, in the eastern part of the province, has become increasingly volatile due to a rising number of militant attacks on ANDSF positions. The district has a significant strategic relevance because of its proximity to Kabul City and the Salang Highway. As reported by AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini in 2015, the government’s control over the Uzbin Valley in Surobi district had decreased and members of Hezb-e Islami, which has historically been the stronger group in the area, as well as the Taliban, have been reported present in the district. The Uzbin Valley has been serving as a relatively easily traversable connection to the insecure districts of Tagab in Kapisa province and Bad Pakh in Laghman province. According to Foschini, this broader region is ‘an important crossing point and sanctuary for insurgents moving deeper into Afghanistan from the border area [with Pakistan].’

Media sources in 2019 and 2020 reported on a Taliban presence in Surobi district, as well as on the arrest and killing of several prominent figures of the militant group in the area. In March 2019, two Taliban militants, reportedly planning a suicide attack in the district, were arrested during an NDS operation. In an ANDSF operation with US air support in the same month, the Taliban shadow district governor for Surobi was reportedly probably killed, as well as a key Taliban commander known as Mullah Rasheed. In May 2020, a Taliban commander known as Mullah Jan was injured, when a mortar, he was reportedly attempting to launch on a security forces’ base in the Uzbin Valley, went off prematurely.

According to UNAMA, Surobi district has in recent years witnessed several community conflicts. In 2018, for example, ‘a mediation process [...] helped two tribes resolve a longstanding land dispute that had turned violent’. According to the Surobi local council head, ‘the major causes of conflict in the district are underdevelopment and poverty.’

In July 2020, a rising Taliban presence and activity in several villages of the Arghandi area in Paghman district was reported. According to local residents, well-armed Taliban militants were launching attacks on security checkpoints, planting IEDs and extorting people. NDS officials, cited by Tolonews, confirmed two prominent Taliban commanders were operating in the area between Arghandi and the Kohna Kumar valley in Wardak province.

ISKP is reported as active and capable of carrying out attacks in Kabul, as well as to have caused civilian casualties in the province in 2019. However, due to continued ANDSF pressure to disrupt its

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1791 LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.)
1794 War on the Rocks, Remembering the French War in Afghanistan, 10 September 2018, [url]
1795 Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing Some of Afghanistan’s Most Notorious Hotspots, AAN, 9 July 2015, [url]
1796 See sources mentioned below.
1797 Khaama Press, Suicide Bomber and His Companion Arrested in Kabul: NDS, 10 March 2019, [url]
1798 Tolonews, Five Civilians Killed in Afghan Forces Operation in Surobi, 26 March 2019, [url]
1799 Khaama Press, Taliban Commander Loses Both Legs in Premature Mortar Round Explosion in Kabul, 4 May 2020, [url]
1800 UNAMA, Kabul Elders Call for Participation of Afghans in Peacefully Resolving Community Conflict, 15 November 2018, [url]
1801 Tolonews, Residents West of Kabul City Report Rise in Taliban Activity, 15 July 2020, [url]
1803 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url], p. 36
activities, the militant group exhibited a reduced capacity to carry out high-profile attacks in Kabul in 2019. While ISKP represents a diminished threat since receiving a significant setback in late 2019 in what had been its Afghan headquarters in Nangarhar province, several sources indicate the group has not been eradicated entirely and has shown notable resilience in the past. Grounds for concern are added that several ISKP groups might have relocated to Kunar and Kabul provinces, raising the potential for a resurgence, although reversing the groups networks would probably need time.

Between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020, ACLED recorded one incident specifically attributed to ISKP in Kabul province, outside of Kabul district (for information on the presence of ISKP in Kabul City, recruitment and incidents attributed to the group in the capital region, see the chapter on Kabul City). In February 2020, ISKP reportedly fired missiles on a US military base in Bagrami district, no casualties were recorded. In the same district in August 2019, two ISKP militants were reportedly killed in an ANSDF operation. Additionally, ACLED recorded two incidents in which Taliban and/or ISKP militants were wounded and/or killed during military operations in Surobi district in July 2019 and in Paghmans district in November 2019. In May 2020, various ISKP and Haqqani Network hideouts in the capital (see chapter on Kabul City) as well as in Shakardara district were raided during an operation by NDS special units. Several members of the militant groups, including a regional ISKP leader, were reportedly arrested and killed.

In terms of the presence of government security forces, the main part of Kabul province falls under the responsibility of the Train, Advise and Assist Command - Capital (TAAC-C), which is part of NATO's Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-C is currently led by Turkish forces together with contingents from other nations. The district of Surobi falls under the responsibility of the 201st ANA corps. According to USDOD, about 10% of US' and Afghan Forces' operations in 2019 focused on the Kabul region, preventing high-profile attacks. The Special Mission Wing (SMW), an ANDSF unit established in 2012, has several assault squadrons in Kabul to conduct counterterrorism and

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1807 Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the Recent Victory Against the ISKP in Nangarhar, AAN, 1 March 2020, url.
1808 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url.
1809 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url.
1810 Tolonenews, Afghan Forces Raid Militants Hideouts in Kabul, 7 August 2019, url.
1811 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url.
1812 RFE/RL, Afghan Forces Capture Key Figures From Islamic State's South Asia Branch, 11 May 2020, url.
1813 Tolonenews, Afghan Forces Raid Daesh Hideout North of Kabul, 6 May 2020, url; Khaama Press, 5 killed As Special Forces Bust Major Network Led by ISIS, Haqqani Network in Kabul, 6 May 2020, url; RFE/RL, Afghan Forces Capture Key Figures From Islamic State's South Asia Branch, 11 May 2020, url.
counternarcoic missions. NDS unit 01, a paramilitary CIA-backed militia accused of human rights abuses, is reported to operate in the central region, including in Kabul province.

2.15.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.15.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 1,563 civilian casualties (261 deaths and 1,302 injured) in Kabul province. This represents a decrease of 16% compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were suicide IEDs, followed by non-suicide IEDs and targeted/deliberate killings. Compared to 2018, UNAMA listed Kabul as the second province with the largest increase in civilian casualties (+130) from ground engagements in 2019. According to UNAMA, civilians living in Kabul province were most directly impacted by the conflict in 2019, as well as in the first half of 2020 (together with Balkh province) with 338 civilian casualties recorded from 1 January to 30 June 2020. According to Resolute Support, Kabul province suffered the highest countrywide number of civilian casualties (208) in the first quarter of 2020, representing the most substantial countrywide increase (151%) compared to the last quarter of 2019. In the second quarter of 2020, Resolute Support indicated Kabul as one out of three provinces, together with Nangarhar and Ghazni, that experienced the highest number of civilian casualties countrywide, with an average of 204 civilian casualties each, among the three provinces.

ACLED collected data on 339 violent events in Kabul province from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, of which 172 were coded as ‘battles’, 132 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ and 35 as ‘violence against civilians’. Kabul district, where the capital Kabul City is located (see chapter on Kabul City), stood out as the district where most incidents were reported, with 142 incidents recorded - followed by Surobi, Mussahi, Paghman, Qarabagh and Dehsabz districts. In each of the rest of Kabul’s districts, less than 15 incidents were reported. Most violent incidents in Kabul province were recorded in the third quarter of 2019. Kabul witnessed the highest reported number of security incidents on record in July 2019.

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1816 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, p. 122; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, p. 75
1818 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, p. 94
1819 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, p. 119
1822 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, pp. 69-70
1823 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, pp. 71-72
1824 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
ACLED coded around 51% of the violent incidents in Kabul province as ‘battles’, all ‘armed clashes’. This category represented the most prevalent incident type in the majority of Kabul’s districts -with the exception of Kabul, Dehsabz and Chaharasyab districts, where most or an equal number of incidents were registered under the category of ‘explosions/remote violence’. The majority of the armed clashes in Kabul province were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police and NDS personnel as well as members of pro-government militias or so-called arbakis (the term arbaki is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan local police or other pro-government militias). Examples of such incidents included attacks on military or police checkpoints/bases, such as a Taliban assault on security outposts in Shakardara district in June 2019 and in July 2020, as well as Taliban attacks on police checkpoints in Paghman district in May 2020 and in Guldara district in June 2020, resulting in several casualties among ANDSF forces; as well as ambushes on security convoys/vehicles, such as a Taliban attack on an Afghan military convoy in the Tangi area of Surobi district in February 2020, resulting in several soldiers being killed and/or wounded. No civilian casualties were reported in these incidents.

Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs and criminal groups were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED. For example in March 2019, an ANDSF operation with US air support in Surobi district resulted in the killing of several Taliban militants as well as five civilians. In May 2020, a criminal gang leader was killed by police forces in the Cheh Dukhtaran area of Chaharasyab district. Also in May 2020, several ISKP militants were killed and arrested in ANP
and NDS operations in Shakardara district (see above).\textsuperscript{1836} In June 2020, two prominent Taliban members were reportedly arrested during an operation in Qarabagh district.\textsuperscript{1837}

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeting the Afghan security forces, represented 28% of all reported security incidents in Kabul province. The majority of these IED incidents were recorded in Kabul district (see chapter on Kabul City).\textsuperscript{1838} In August 2019, a girls’ school was destroyed in a Taliban-claimed explosion in Shakhardara district.\textsuperscript{1839} Some of the IED incidents in Kabul province resulted in casualties among civilians. This happened for example in June 2020, when a roadside bomb detonated in Qarabagh district\textsuperscript{1840} and in Paghman district, killing several family members of writer and analyst Assadullah Walwalji.\textsuperscript{1841}

ACLED coded 5% of all violent events in Kabul province as ‘suicide bombs’. Nearly all these events were reported in Kabul district (see chapter on Kabul City).\textsuperscript{1842} According to UNAMA, Kabul remained the province suffering the highest number of suicide attacks in 2019, with 15 suicide attacks in the capital region (see chapter on Kabul City) out of a nationwide total of 26.\textsuperscript{1843} Two suicide bomb attacks were reported in Chaharasyab district: a Taliban suicide bomber targeted an Afghan special forces base in September 2019, killing several soldiers\textsuperscript{1844}, and an unidentified suicide bomber detonated his explosives near an ANDSF special operations facility in the Reshkor area in April 2020, causing several civilian casualties.\textsuperscript{1845}

Six air/drone strikes were recorded in Kabul province by ACLED, all carried out in Mussahi and Paghman districts in the third and fourth quarters of 2019. All but one of these air/drone strikes were carried out by Afghan military forces, one was attributed to NATO forces, reportedly killing two civilians.\textsuperscript{1846}

ACLED categorised 10% of all reported violent incidents in Kabul as ‘violence against civilians’.\textsuperscript{1847} These incidents involved for example: the killing of a government employee by a militant of the Haqqani Network in Tarakhel village of Dehsabz district in August 2019\textsuperscript{1848}; the killing of a Ministry of Finance employee by unidentified gunmen in Paghman district in October 2019\textsuperscript{1849}; the shooting of two prosecutors on their way to Parwan province in Qarabagh district in November 2019\textsuperscript{1850}; the shooting of several members of President Ashraf Ghani’s personal security team while off-duty by

\textsuperscript{1836} Tolonews, Afghan Forces Raid Daesh Hideout North of Kabul, 6 May 2020, \url{url}; Khaama Press, 5 killed as Special Forces Bust Major Network Led by ISIS, Haqqani Network in Kabul, 6 May 2020, \url{url}; RFE/RL, Afghan Forces Capture Key Figures From Islamic State’s South Asia Branch, 11 May 2020, \url{url}; Tolonews, ‘Key’ Daesh Leaders Arrested in Kabul: NDS, 11 May 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1837} Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Key Taliban Figures Arrested in Kabul’s Qarah Bagh, 26 June 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1838} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1839} Bakhtar News, Taliban Torched Girls’ School Building in N. Kabul, 21 August 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1840} Khaama Press, Explosion Leaves 4 Dead, Wounded in Kabul, 4 June 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1841} Tolonews, Afghan Writer Walwalji Loses 4 Family Members in IED Blast, 20 June 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1842} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1843} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1844} Al Jazeera, Taliban Suicide Attack in Kabul Kills Afghan Troops, 12 September 2019, \url{url}, p. 39

\textsuperscript{1845} Al Jazeera, Taliban Suicide Attack in Kabul Kills Afghan Troops, 12 September 2019, \url{url}, p. 39

\textsuperscript{1846} RFE/RL, Afghanistan Suicide Bombing Kills at least Three, Wounds 15, 29 April 2020, \url{url}; Reuters, Bombing near Afghan Capital Kills Three amid Unabated Violence, 29 April 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1847} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1848} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kabul; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1849} Khaama Press, Haqqani Terrorist Network’s Target Killer Arrested in Kabul, 26 August 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1850} Pajhwok Afghan News, Ministry Official Gunned Down in Kabul, 17 October 2019, \url{url}
unknown gunmen in Paghman district in April 2020\footnote{NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020 (updated 30 April 2020), url; RFE/RL, Gunmen Shoot Dead Afghan Presidential Guard on Kabul Outskirts, 4 April 2020, url}; the killing of the Supreme Court’s administrative chief by unidentified gunmen in Surobi district in May 2020\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Supreme Court Official Gunned Down in Kabul, 3 May 2020, url}; the shooting of two prosecutors and three other employees of the office of the Attorney General in Dehsabz district in June 2020\footnote{AP, Gunmen Kill 5, Including 2 Prosecutors, in Afghan Capital, 22 June 2020, url}; and the killing of the head of the biometrics department of the Ministry of Interior by unknown gunmen in Chaharasyab district in July 2020.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Monthly Humanitarian Update (August 2019), 24 September 2020, url, p. 2}

In August 2019, UNOCHA reported on Kabul as the province where most attacks on health facilities and medical personnel were recorded.\footnote{SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, url, p. 97-98}

Although Kabul stood out for having the largest number of both registered voters and recorded votes for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019, the province’s voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters reached only around 20 %, remaining just below the national average.\footnote{Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, url, p. 62} In the Asia Foundation 2019 Survey of the Afghan People, 51-75 % of respondents in Kabul province reported to have experienced fear while voting.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghan Capital, 22 June 2020, url} Without providing further details, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on election related attacks on polling day in Kabul province.\footnote{Ruttig, T. and Bjelica, J., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (11): A First Look at How E-Day Went, AAN, 28 September 2019, url} A hand grenade was reportedly detonated near a polling centre in a school in Shakardara district, causing no casualties. The Khalazai polling centre in Qarabagh district reportedly came under Taliban fire in the morning of election day and remained closed for several hours.\footnote{RFE/RL, Gunmen Shoot Dead Afghan Presidential Guard on Kabul Outskirts, 4 April 2020, url} Additionally ‘dozens of bombs’ were reported discovered and defused by the Afghan authorities in Kabul’s districts of Qarabagh, Musahi, Khak-e Jabbar and Shakardara.\footnote{Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People, 51}

In recent years, many of the security incidents outside of Kabul City have taken place along Afghanistan’s main highways and transit routes, with AGEs regularly attacking Afghan security forces’ outposts and civilians often being caught in the crossfire.\footnote{Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, url, p. 97} About 85 % of respondents of the Asia Foundation’s 2019 Survey of the Afghan People in Kabul province reported to experience fear while travelling.\footnote{SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 2019-2020, url} In July 2020, a surge in security threats on the main highways connecting Kabul with neighbouring provinces was reported.\footnote{Tolonews, Fierce, Widespread Fighting Surges to Control Afghan Highways, 7 July 2020, url} Several road security incidents and road blocks/closures were reported in 2019 and 2020.

In April 2019, the North-Kabul Highway to Baghlan was blocked in Pul-i Khumri by angry parliamentary election candidates and their supporters, resulting in several civilian casualties.\footnote{Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People, 51} In the beginning of 2020, road movements from Pul-i Khumri to Kabul were reportedly interrupted due to the presence of non-state armed groups.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Monthly Humanitarian Update (November 2019), 20 December 2019, url, p. 4; UNSG, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, A/75/777-S/2019/193, 28 February 2019, url, p. 14; US DOD, Lead Inspector General (IG) for Overseas Contingency Operations, Operation Freedom’s Sentinel - Report to the United States Congress 1 April - 30 June 2019, 16 August 2019, url, p. 35} In January 2020, the Taliban attacked the security outpost of Khwaja Zaid on the Kabul-Baghlan Highway, causing several police casualties.\footnote{NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020 (updated 30 January 2020), url} The same highway was
attacked by the Taliban once more in February 2020 in the area of Doshi district, resulting in the killing of a truck driver and the kidnapping of two civilians.\textsuperscript{1867}

According to an international source Lifos spoke to in January 2020, the highway between Kabul and Kandahar, passing through the provinces of Wardak and Ghazni, has been insecure for years\textsuperscript{1868}—with more incidents recorded in 2019 compared to previous years. AGEs were reported active on this highway\textsuperscript{1869}, controlling some parts of the road\textsuperscript{1870} and using roadblocks to target government employees and members of the Afghan security forces.\textsuperscript{1871} In August 2019, a police outpost securing the Kabul-Kandahar Highway was attacked by the Taliban, killing and wounding several police officers.\textsuperscript{1872} In November 2019, the same highway was blocked by hundreds of drivers protesting the killing of a truck driver extorted by ANP officers in Zabul province. The highway was reopened after mediation by local elders and provincial council members.\textsuperscript{1873}

The Kabul-Jalalabad Highway, an important trade route and often considered ‘one of the world’s most dangerous roads’ (referring to the numerous traffic accidents that have happened on this road), passes through areas where AGEs have been reported active—such as Surobi district.\textsuperscript{1874} Along this highway lies the highly secured Green Village compound in Kabul City, which has been attacked several times in 2019\textsuperscript{1875}, resulting in temporary road closures.\textsuperscript{1876} An international source Landinfo spoke to in October 2019, described the highway between Kabul and Jalalabad as ‘sufficiently safe’, also for international travellers.\textsuperscript{1877} In July 2020, 22 Taliban militants were killed or wounded during an ANDSF operation along this highway\textsuperscript{1878}, which reportedly faced increased security threats.\textsuperscript{1879}

According to AAN analyst Ehsan Qaane, 20 kilometres of the Kabul-Bamyan Highway, which connects the Hazarajat region to the capital, are under Taliban control. The militant group directly intervenes in several areas of service delivery in the region, government provision remaining limited. The Kabul-Bamyan Highway, going through Jalrez district in Wardak province, has many side roads and mountain paths leading to several districts in Wardak, Parwan and Kabul provinces. Qaane describes these as ‘supply and escape routes’ providing safe havens to militant groups and impeding the movement of government forces. The highway has two direct passes to Kabul’s Paghman district through Kohna Khumar and Sang lakh.\textsuperscript{1880}

Security threats reportedly increased on the highway connecting Kabul to Logar and Paktia provinces in July 2020.\textsuperscript{1881} According to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, the location of Chaharasyab district along this highway is strategic for both the government and AGEs, affecting the security situation of the district’s areas beside the highway.\textsuperscript{1882}

\textsuperscript{1867} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020 (updated 27 February 2020), url\textsuperscript{.}

\textsuperscript{1868} Tolonews, Fierce, Widespread Fighting Surges to Control Afghan Highways, 7 July 2020, url\textsuperscript{.}


\textsuperscript{1870} An international source Landinfo spoke to in October 2019. Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22 January 2020, url\textsuperscript{,} p. 29

\textsuperscript{1871} Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, url\textsuperscript{,} p. 52

\textsuperscript{1872} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23 - 29, 29 August 2019, url\textsuperscript{.}

\textsuperscript{1873} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url\textsuperscript{,} p. 67

\textsuperscript{1874} Diplomat (The), Next Stop Jalalabad: Traveling One of the World's Most Dangerous Roads, 13 December 2015, url\textsuperscript{.}

\textsuperscript{1875} NYT, After Bombing, Afghans Demand That Foreigners Leave Their Neighbourhood, 4 September 2019, url\textsuperscript{.}

\textsuperscript{1876} Al Jazeera, Fatal Blast Rocks Afghan Capital Kabul, 15 January 2019, url\textsuperscript{.}

\textsuperscript{1877} Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22 January 2020, url\textsuperscript{,} p. 29

\textsuperscript{1878} Khaama Press, 22 Taliban Militants Killed, Wounded on Kabul-Jalalabad Highway, 7 July 2020, url\textsuperscript{.}

\textsuperscript{1879} Tolonews, Fierce, Widespread Fighting Surges to Control Afghan Highways, 7 July 2020, url\textsuperscript{.}

\textsuperscript{1880} Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, url\textsuperscript{.}

\textsuperscript{1881} Tolonews, Fierce, Widespread Fighting Surges to Control Afghan Highways, 7 July 2020, url\textsuperscript{.}

\textsuperscript{1882} Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked - A Geographical Guide to a Metropolis in the Making, AAN, 19 March 2019, url\textsuperscript{,} p. 25
2.15.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 27 persons displaced from Kabul province, constituting a group of 5 families coming from Paghman district and finding refuge in neighbouring Laghman province (in Mehtarlam/Bad Pash district) in August 2019.\textsuperscript{1883}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 4 062 persons displaced to Kabul province, coming from different provinces (Ghazni\textsuperscript{1884}, Logar, Farzyan, Jawzjan, Baghlan\textsuperscript{1885}, Kunar\textsuperscript{1886}, Nangarhar\textsuperscript{1887}, Kapisa\textsuperscript{1888}, Wardak\textsuperscript{1889}, Badakhshan, Kunduz\textsuperscript{1890}, Samangan, Takhar, Sar-e Pul, Balkh, Laghman, Daykundi and Bamyan) and all finding refuge in Kabul district. Most IDPs arriving in Kabul province came from Kunar (679) (mainly from Chapadara district) and Baghlan (651) (mainly from Dahan-e Ghori district) provinces. Smaller groups of more than 300 IDPs came from the provinces of Logar (all from Baraki Barak district), Kunduz (mainly from Khanabad and Chardarah districts) and Nangarhar (mainly from Sherzad and Khogyani districts).\textsuperscript{1891} In June 2019 during an Operational Coordination Team (OCT) meeting in Kabul, the head of the Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) reported on the arrival of nearly 100 IDP families in Kabul, displaced from Khwaja Omari district in Ghazni province after the area had been recaptured by armed opposition groups.\textsuperscript{1892} In January and February 2020, UNOCHA registered 336 IDPs arriving in Kabul from the region of the central highlands (Bamyan and Daykundi provinces).\textsuperscript{1893}

IOM ranked Kabul province as fourth out of five provinces hosting the most IDPs and returnees and Kabul district sixth out of the countrywide top 25 districts hosting the most returnees and IDPs.\textsuperscript{1894} According to IOM displacement data published in August and October 2019, most IDPs and returnees in Kabul province resided in Kabul district, followed by Bagrami, Dehsabz and Chaharasyab districts.\textsuperscript{1895} According to UNHCR, Kabul and Nangarhar provinces remain the most attractive return destinations\textsuperscript{1896}, counting for a third of all returnees countrywide and ‘returnees who do not settle in their provinces of origin move to relatively urban areas in search of safety, services and jobs.’\textsuperscript{1897}

\textsuperscript{1883} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1884} UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 - 27 October 2019), 27 October 2019, \url{url}, p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October - 3 November), 3 November 2019, \url{url}, p. 2

\textsuperscript{1885} UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 - 27 October 2019), 27 October 2019, \url{url}, p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October - 3 November), 3 November 2019, \url{url}, p. 2

\textsuperscript{1886} UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (12 - 19 August 2019), 19 August 2019, \url{url}, p. 2

\textsuperscript{1887} UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (12 - 19 August 2019), 19 August 2019, \url{url}, p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October - 3 November), 3 November 2019, \url{url}, p. 2

\textsuperscript{1888} UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 - 27 October 2019), 27 October 2019, \url{url}, p. 2

\textsuperscript{1889} UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 - 27 October 2019), 27 October 2019, \url{url}, p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October - 3 November), 3 November 2019, \url{url}, p. 2

\textsuperscript{1890} UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (21 - 27 October 2019), 27 October 2019, \url{url}, p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October - 3 November), 3 November 2019, \url{url}, p. 2

\textsuperscript{1891} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1892} UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kabul Province - Meeting Summary, 25 June 2019, \url{url}, p. 1

\textsuperscript{1893} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 14 June 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1894} IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results March - June 2019, 1 July 2019, \url{url}, pp. 1, 6, 9

\textsuperscript{1895} IOM, Afghanistan - Kabul Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results Round 7 (October - December 2018), 1 August 2019, \url{url}, pp. 1, 2, 6; IOM, DTM Afghanistan Baseline Mobility Assessment I District Level I Total Inflow (Returnees+IDPs) I June 2019 I Province: Kabul, 9 October 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1896} UNHCR, Pakistan: Voluntary Repatriation of Afghans from Pakistan Update, 30 April 2019, \url{url}, p. 1; IOM and UNHCR, Returns to Afghanistan 2018 - Joint IOM-UNHCR Summary Report, 25 June 2019, \url{url}, p. 6; UNHCR, Afghanistan: Voluntary Repatriation Update, 23 July 2019, \url{url}, p. 4

\textsuperscript{1897} WBG and UNHCR, Living Conditions and Settlement Decisions of Recent Afghan Returnees, June 2019, \url{url}, p. 6
2.16 Kandahar

2.16.1 General description of the province

Map 16: Afghanistan – Kandahar province, source: UNOCHA

UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kandahar Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url]
The province of Kandahar is situated in the south of Afghanistan, bordering on Uruzgan and Zabul to the north, Helmand to the west, and Pakistan to the south and east. The province is divided into the following administrative units: the provincial capital Kandahar, Arghandab, Daman, Panjwayee, Zhire, Shah Wali Kot, Khakrez, Arghistan, Maiwand, Ghorak, Spin Boldak, Nesh, Miyanishin, Shorabak, Maruf, Reg (Shiga), and the ‘temporary’ districts of Dand and Takhtapul. Temporary districts are administrative units that ‘[...] have been approved after entry into force of the 2004 constitution by the president due to security or other considerations, but have not yet been approved by parliament’.

According to NSIA estimates, the population of the province is 1,399,594 in 2020-21, with 523,259 of its residents living in the provincial capital Kandahar City, which is the second largest city in Afghanistan. The majority of Kandahar’s population belongs to Pashtun tribes with the confederation of the Durani tribes being the largest one. The Balochs live in the Kandahar’s desert leading a nomadic life and they often deals with smuggling. Hazara and Tajiks, as well as other ethnicities are usually referred to as Farsiwan, i.e. Farsi/Dari speakers. They mainly live in cities and towns.

The Ring Road connects the provincial capital of Kandahar with the major population centres of Herat and Kabul. A northbound road towards Uruzgan forks in Kandahar City. In March 2018, the Afghan news portal Tolonews described the highway as being ‘[...] in extremely bad condition due to heavy road usage, a lack of maintenance and continued attacks by insurgents’.

Heading southwards, a road connects the city of Kandahar with the Afghan-Pakistani border crossing at Spin Boldak-Chaman. It is one of the most important border-crossing with Pakistan, leading to Quetta at Pakistani side. Border towns Spin Boldak and Chaman are considered as the major smuggling hubs with flourishing bazaar called Wesh situated in Spin Boldak. Pakistani government has been trying to build a fence along the border to prevent illegal border-crossing from Afghanistan. Spin Boldak residents protested against the fence and Afghan security services tried many times to prevent the fence construction anytime Pakistani forces attempted to have a fencing operation completed, which leads to frequent cross-border clashes and shelling.

According to the airport website, an airport with scheduled passenger services to domestic and international destinations exists in Kandahar City.

In 2016, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project, aiming at transporting gas from Turkmenistan to India, was inaugurated. The pipeline was projected to lead through Afghanistan alongside the Ring Road from Herat to Kandahar and would therefore intersect Taliban-

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1899 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kandahar Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
1900 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, url, p. 37
1901 Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, url
1902 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, url, p. 37
1903 Reporterly.net, 80% People Infected With COVID-19: How Did Kandahar Get Here? 23 June 2020, url
1905 iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, url; Diplomat (The), Kabul’s Plan to Realize Afghanistan’s Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, url
1906 Tolonews, Seven Die In Kandahar-Herat Highway Accident, 14 March 2018, url
1907 iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, url; Diplomat (The), Kabul’s Plan to Realize Afghanistan’s Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, url
1909 Afghanistan Times, Army repulses Pakistan’s Durand Line fence bid, 13 April 2020, url
1911 Kandahar Airport Webpage, n/d, https://kandaharairport.net/
1912 Tolonews, All You Need To Know About TAPI Project, 24 February 2018, url
1913 Tolonews, All You Need To Know About TAPI Project, 24 February 2018, url
controlled areas.\textsuperscript{1914} The project on Afghan side has not started due to security reasons, however authorities prepared special combat unit to secure pipeline construction.\textsuperscript{1915} According to the UNODC data obtained by AAN, poppy cultivation in Kandahar province decreased by 38 % in 2019, compared to 2018.\textsuperscript{1916}

In March and April 2019, Kandahar was affected by severe flood, which also stopped some AGEs activities.\textsuperscript{1917} As of end of June 2020, Kandahar was the third worst COVID-19 affected province in Afghanistan. It was put under lockdown at the end of March, but most people did not comply with the restrictions imposed. Diagnostic laboratory in Kandahar was able to make tests and was also responsible for testing people from Zabul, Nimroz, Helmand and Uruzgan provinces.\textsuperscript{1918}

### 2.16.2 Conflict background and actors in Kandahar

Kandahar is under the responsibility of the 205\textsuperscript{th} ANA Corps, supported by the US Train, Advice, and Assist Command-South (TAAC-S) which has its headquarters in the province.\textsuperscript{1919} There is also an US military airfield in the province. The number of foreign soldiers decreased after 2014 but in 2018 more US troops were deployed along with A-10 aircraft and several MQ-9 reaper drones.\textsuperscript{1920} The counterterrorism operations are under responsibility of NDS 03, called also Kandahar Strike Force (KSF) which is based in the former headquarters of Mullah Omar.\textsuperscript{1921}

AAN credited the years of relative stability in the centre of the province to the presence of the powerful strongman and police chief General Abdul Razeq.\textsuperscript{1922} Razeq managed to attract some local commanders who helped US to push out the Taliban from the province between 2010 and 2014. Razeq appointed them as police chiefs of key districts. ALP, in particular, was an important element of security management. Razeq was, however, accused of serious human rights abuses.\textsuperscript{1923} He managed to keep the Taliban away from the central Kandahar districts but he did not prevent some Taliban activity there, including bomb attacks and targeted killings. Since 2016, however the Taliban have started regaining control in more remote districts of the province and in October 2018, Razeq was assassinated, allegedly by the Taliban\textsuperscript{1924} and soon replaced by his brother, Tadin Khan Atsakzai.\textsuperscript{1925} According to local officials and residents, the security situation deteriorated following the assassination of Razeq, with the number of targeted killing increasing and security services losing more staff.\textsuperscript{1926} In 2019, attacks increased in the remote districts, but the central parts remained relatively stable under government control. In order to prevent expansion by the Taliban, the government carried out armed operations, including air strikes.\textsuperscript{1927}

\textsuperscript{1914} Reuters, Five working to clear way for gas pipeline killed in Afghanistan, 21 May 2018, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{1915} Xinhua, Special Afghan combat unit starts operation for TAPI project security 21 October 2019, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{1916} Bjelica J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{1917} Sabawoon A., Rutting Th, Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (2): The collapse foretold that did not happen, AAN, 14 August 2019, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{1918} Reporterly, 80% People Infected With COVID-19: How Did Kandahar Get Here? 23 June 2020, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{1919} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, \url{url}, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{1920} Stars and Stripes, Violence escalates in strategic Afghan province as US continues peace talks, 6 July 2019, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{1921} HRW, “They’ve Shot Many Like This”, 31 October 2019, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{1922} Ruttig, T., The Killing of Razeq: Removing the Taleban’s strongest foe in Kandahar, an indirect hit at elections, AAN, 19 October 2018, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{1923} Sabawoon A., Rutting Th, Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (1): Building the ‘American tribe’, AAN, 12 August 2019, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{1924} Ruttig, T., The Killing of Razeq: Removing the Taleban’s strongest foe in Kandahar, an indirect hit at elections, AAN, 19 October 2018, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{1925} Sabawoon A., Rutting Th, Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (1): Building the ‘American tribe’, AAN 12 August 2019, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{1926} Stars and Stripes, Violence escalates in strategic Afghan province as US continues peace talks, 6 July 2019, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{1927} Sabawoon A., Rutting Th, Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (2): The collapse foretold that did not happen, AAN, 14 August 2019, \url{url}.
For the Taliban, Kandahar is a strategic province, not only because it is considered to be the birthplace of the group, but also because it borders with the Pakistani province of Baluchistan, which ‘serves as the group’s safe haven as well as a prime recruitment center’. In addition, Kandahar is a main producer and distributor of opium, a major source of the Taliban’s income.\textsuperscript{1928}

As of August 2019, AAN noted that except from the provincial capital, ‘government forces only fully or predominantly control the districts of Spin Boldak, Dand, Daman and Arghandab out of Kandahar’s 17 official and unofficial districts’, while the Taliban continued to control most of Kandahar province. AAN also stated that ‘in Maruf in the east and Ghorak, Nesh, Miyaneshin and, after recent Taliban forays, in Khakrez – all in the north – only the district centres are in the government’s hands and remain practically under Taliban siege. In Arghestan, also in the east, in Maiwand in Middle Kandahar and in the southern districts of Reg and Shorabak, the situation is not much different.’ Kandahar City is surrounded by Taliban from all four sides, but AGEs are still kept in the distance from it and they are not able to storm the city directly as it happened in case of Lashkargah (Helmand) and Tarin Kot (Uruzgan). The Taliban however is capable to conduct the terrorist attacks, assassinations and small-scale shootings there.\textsuperscript{1929} Similarly, local officials stated that, in many Kandahar’s districts only the district centre is controlled by the government and the rest of the district is under Taliban control.\textsuperscript{1930} According to LWJ, the districts of Ghorak, Nesh, Miya Nishin and Maruf are under total control of Taliban. Maywand, Khakrez, Shah Wali Kot, Arghandab, Tarnak Wa Jaldak, Arghistan on the north and Registan and Shorbak on the south are still contested.\textsuperscript{1931} In October 2019, US and Afghan forces reportedly conducted air raids on Taliban positions in Maruf, Shah Wali Kot.\textsuperscript{1932}

The UN reported on increased presence of anti-government elements on major transit routes in Afghanistan, including highways between Kabul and Kandahar, and Kandahar and Tirin Kot.\textsuperscript{1933} It is reported that ISKP is also present in the province. At the beginning of April 2020, NDS forces detained several members of the top leadership of the organisation in Kandahar, including the ISKP’s leader in Afghanistan, Abdullah Orakzai alias Aslam Farooqi, who originates from Pakistan.\textsuperscript{1934}

### 2.16.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.16.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 467 civilian casualties (121 deaths and 346 injured) in the province of Kandahar. This represents a decrease of 13 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were non-suicide and suicide IEDs, followed by search operations.\textsuperscript{1935} Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Kandahar in the first quarter of 2020, reporting an increase in the number of civilian casualties in the second quarter of the year, with 101-125 casualties recorded (from 1 April to 30 June 2020).\textsuperscript{1936}

\textsuperscript{1928} LWJ, Taliban overruns Afghan army camp in Kandahar, 19 October 2017, \url{www.lwj.org}

\textsuperscript{1929} Sabawoon A., Rutting Th, Kandahar from Razeq to Tadin (2): The collapse foretold that did not happen, AAN, 14 August 2019, \url{www.aan.com}

\textsuperscript{1930} Stars and Stripes, Violence escalates in strategic Afghan province as US continues peace talks, 6 July 2019, \url{www.stripes.com}

\textsuperscript{1931} LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., \url{www.lwj.org}. The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

\textsuperscript{1932} Anadolu Agency, Afghan, US forces kill over 80 Taliban insurgents, 27 October 2020, \url{www.anadoluagency.com}


\textsuperscript{1934} The Diplomat, The Islamic State Remains Alive in Afghanistan, 27 April 2020, \url{www.thediplomat.com}

\textsuperscript{1935} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{www.unama.org}, p. 94

\textsuperscript{1936} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{www.sigar.mil}, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, \url{www.sigar.mil}, p. 72
In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED reported total 1,197 incidents related to security in Kandahar province, of which 687 battles, 475 remote violence, 35 cases of violence against civilians.\(^{1937}\)

![Figure 18. Kandahar - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data.\(^{1938}\)](image)

According to UNAMA, the main cause of civilian deaths in 2019 were IEDs explosions.\(^{1939}\) According to ACLED data, IEDs and other remote violence caused over 1,290 fatalities in the reporting period in the province, most of them were security forces members and AGEs fighters, however among them there were also civilians.\(^{1940}\) On 15 July 2019, a convoy of cars heading for the mosque exploded on the pressure-plate IED planted by Taliban, killing 13 civilians and wounding 40 others.\(^{1941}\) On 24 September 2019, four civilians were killed including two children and a local journalist when a bomb exploded next to the gate of Ashraf Ghani’s campaign office in Kandahar City.\(^{1942}\) On 3 June 2020, nine passengers travelling by bus between different districts of the province were killed by explosion of roadside bomb.\(^{1943}\)

In July 2019 Taliban allegedly attacked residents of eight villages in the Shah Wali Kot district, forcing their dwellers to provide food and shelter to the fighters. When they refused, elders in the villages were severely beaten. The Taliban also blocked the road and villagers could not get to their fields. According to the elders, many villagers moved out from the area to the Kandahar and other districts.\(^{1944}\)

Kandahar City witnessed a number of targeted killings in the reported period. AGEs targeted a food contractor in May 2019, an off-duty military pilot in January 2020, a money changer, a policeman, a doctor and a former district governor of Sangin district in three separate attacks in June 2020.\(^{1945}\) On 30 June 2019 the Taliban killed eight election officials registering voters in Maruf district.\(^{1946}\) On 28 September 2019, Taliban claimed that election centres in Khakrez, Maruf, Miyanishin, Naish, Shorbak, and Ghorak districts were closed because personnel responsible of validating identity documents were killed.\(^{1947}\)

\(^{1937}\) EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Kandahar; Event types: Explosions/Remote Violence; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, \url{url}).

\(^{1938}\) EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Kandahar; Event types: Explosions/Remote Violence; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, \url{url}).

\(^{1939}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, p. 68

\(^{1940}\) EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Kandahar; Event types: Explosions/Remote Violence; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, \url{url}).

\(^{1941}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, p. 43

\(^{1942}\) NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, \url{url}.

\(^{1943}\) Associated Press, Bus strikes roadside bomb in southern Afghanistan; 9 killed, 3 June 2020, \url{url}.

\(^{1944}\) Salaam Times, Taliban attack Kandahar residents for refusing to abandon homes, 19 June 2019, \url{url}.

\(^{1945}\) EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Kandahar; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, \url{url}).

\(^{1946}\) Associated Press, Taliban attack kills 8 election officials in Afghanistan, 30 June 2019, \url{url}.

\(^{1947}\) EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Kandahar; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, \url{url}).
One of the most important causes of civilian deaths in the province were search operations also called ‘night raids’ usually conducted by NDS Special Forces. These forces are reportedly guilty of extrajudicial killings, torture and unlawful and arbitrary detentions. On 10 April 2019, NDS SF killed a school principal and arrested five other persons in Panjwai district. In September 2019, NDS allegedly tortured and killed local imam in Kandahar City what sparked mass protests in the front of governor house. On 16 September 2019, one woman was killed, the second was mutilated and three others were arrested by Afghan and NATO forces in Shah Wali Kot district. In the same district in December 2019, NATO and Afghan security forces killed 8 civilians and arrested another 4 and on 10 April 2020 US drone killed three civilians there.

2.16.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 5 051 persons displaced from Kandahar province. They were mainly displaced within the province itself. Main destinations were Kandahar and Spin Boldak districts. The biggest group nearly 1 800 persons left Shah Wali Kot district in December 2019 and resettled to Kandahar/Dand district. The group of 377 persons was displaced to Tirinkot City in Uruzgan province.

In the reporting period, 5 286 persons were displaced to Kandahar province (Kandahar city or Spin Boldak) from other provinces, including 1 712 persons from Helmand, 1 378 from Farah, 983 from Daykundi, 863 from Uruzgan and 350 persons from Jawzjan.

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1948 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 64; Human Rights Watch, “They’ve Shot Many Like This”, 31 October 2019, url.
1949 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 64; Human Rights Watch, “They’ve Shot Many Like This”, 31 October 2019, url.
1950 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Kandahar; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, url.
1952 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Kandahar; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, url.
2.17 Kapisa

2.17.1 General description of the province

Kapisa province is located in the central region of Afghanistan and has borders with the provinces of Panjsher to the north, Laghman to the east, Kabul to the south, and Parwan to the west. Kapisa is divided into the following administrative units: Alasay, Hisa-i Awal-e Kohestan, Hisa-i Duwum-e Kohestan, Kohband, Mahmud-e Raqi, Nejrab and Tagab. The provincial capital is Mahmud-e Raqi.

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Kapisa province has a population of 488,298. The main ethnic groups in Kapisa are Tajik, Pashtun, and Nuristani. Tajiks, constituting the largest single group, are mainly living in the northern part of the province. Pashtuns, mainly from the Ghilzai tribe, inhabit the southern district of Tagab. Other groups present include Hazara and Pashai, the latter residing in the mountainous areas of Alasay and Kohband districts.

A primary road connects Kapisa’s capital Mahmud-e Raqi to Kabul City.

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1955 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kapisa Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
1956 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kapisa Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
1957 Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections - Final Results by Polling Stations: Province Kapisa, 2020, url
1959 FP, Are Ethnic Politics Afghanistan’s Great Hope?, 11 November 2014, url
1962 Tolonews, Provincial Profile: Kapisa, n.d., url
1963 Ali, O., Fire in the Pashai Hills: A Two-District Case Study from Kapisa, AAN, 6 April 2015, url
1964 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kapisa Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url; iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, url
UNODC data obtained by AAN in June 2020 indicated a 52% reduction in opium-poppy cultivation in the provinces of the central region (including Kapisa province) and the central highlands. According to UNODC’s Opium Survey from 2018, opium-poppy was mainly cultivated in the districts of Tagab and Alasay.

### 2.17.2 Conflict background and actors in Kapisa

According to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, Kapisa province has strategic importance, as ‘[...] it is a small province in the middle of almost everything: it is easy for insurgents to try and reach Kapisa’s capital and the neighbouring provinces.’ Foschini suggests Kapisa to be ‘sociologically divided’ between southern districts more sympathetic towards militant groups, and a northern part, ‘where allegiance to Jamiat-e Islami makes community support for the Taliban less likely’. Kapisa’s southern district of Tagab is connected to the Uzbin Valley in Surobi district of Kabul province and further to Bad Pakh district in Laghman province, through relatively easily traversable passes. According to Foschini, this broader region became ‘an important crossing point and sanctuary for insurgents moving deeper into Afghanistan from the border area [with Pakistan].’

According to a 2014 report by the New York Times, southern Kapisa ‘has always been difficult terrain’, adding that the battle between Taliban militants and government forces intensified after the French ISAF forces left the province in 2012. The New York Times traced the Taliban's success partially to a lack of capacity or ‘unwillingness’ by the Afghan security forces to overtake Taliban-controlled areas in Kapisa, leading to US Special Forces’ allegations of infiltration of the Afghan army by the militants or close cooperation between the ANA and AGEs. The Taliban in the area, on the other hand, were described as a disciplined force, ‘able to operate freely’.

AAN analyst Obaid Ali defined the political landscape in Kapisa in 2015 as characterised by ‘[...] the never-ending story of local warlords and Taliban competing with each other [...]’, in combination with ‘[...] the poor economic situation of many residents [which] contributes to the high rates of militancy and private feuds [...]’ in some districts of the province.

Remote districts such as Nejrab, Tagab and Alasay have been reported to be the most insecure areas of the province. An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 2 July 2020, indicated Tagab, Alasay and Nejrab districts as ‘contested’. A USDOD assessment of July 2019, reported by LWJ in the same map, designated Nejrab district as ‘government-influenced’. Kapisa’s remaining districts were categorised as ‘government-controlled’ or ‘undetermined’ in this assessment. In May 2020, the UN Security Council reported on a reorganisation of the Taliban shadow governance and military structure in several provinces, with key new appointments made in Kapisa province.

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1966 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url], pp. 17, 23
1967 Foschini, F., In Kabul’s Shadow: The Attacks in the Provinces on 15-16 April, AAN, 24 April 2012, [url]
1969 NYT, Hour’s Drive Outside Kabul, Taliban Reign, 22 November 2014, [url]
1970 Ali, O., Fire in the Pashai Hills: A Two-District Case Study from Kapisa, AAN, 6 April 2015, [url]
1972 LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url]; (LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.)
Media sources in 2019 and 2020 reported on a Taliban presence in Nejrab, Tagab and Alasay districts. In March 2019, the villages of Afghanistan, Pachaghan and Ghin Darra in Nejrab were reported to be captured by Taliban militants. In March 2020, a Taliban attack in Afghanistan village in Nejrab was reported, described as the first battle in the area after it had been cleared from the Taliban in December 1978. Mid-June 2020, Taliban militants reportedly advanced to the district centre of Tagab, after taking 12 checkpoints of local uprising forces. At the end of June 2020, the villages of Firoozkhi, Turkandian, Baiskhel, Sarginan, Khanan and Badakhil in Tagab were reportedly cleared from the Taliban during ANA operations. Several prominent Taliban figures were killed or arrested in the aforementioned three districts. In May 2019, a senior Taliban leader, reportedly involved in planning suicide attacks in Kapisa province, was killed in Nejrab. In August 2019, the Taliban's deputy shadow governor for Panjsher province, reportedly involved in activities of the militant group in Kapisa and neighbouring provinces, was killed in Nejrab. In the same month, a Taliban military commander, reportedly involved in various militant activities in the area, was arrested while planting an IED in Shinkai village in Tagab district. In November 2019, a Taliban military commission leader, described as an instrumental figure in AGE activities in Kapisa province, was killed in the Ashpi Valley of Alasay district.

Before Gulbuddin Hekmatyar signed a peace agreement with the Afghan government in September 2016, Kapisa was considered one of Hezb-e Islami's strongholds.

In November 2019 and February 2020, USDOD reported on small groups of ISKP supporters in Kapisa province. One security incident specifically attributed to ISKP has been recorded in Kapisa between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 by ACLED. In February 2020, a dozen ISKP militants were killed and a hideout of the group was destroyed in a ground operation by Afghan commandos with air support in Nejrab district. Additionally, ACLED recorded two incidents in August and September 2019 in which Afghan military forces responded to attacks by suspected Taliban and/or ISKP militants in Tagab district, as well as several incidents in which Taliban and/or ISKP militants were wounded and/or killed during military operations in Nejrab and Tagab districts. In a 2020 USIP report, analyst Borhan

1976 Tolones, Three Civilians Killed in Kapisa Blast, 23 November 2019, url
1977 Afghanistan Times, 65 Afghan Forces Dead in Helmand Attacks, 24 March 2019, url
1978 Tolones, 4 Security Force Members Killed in Kapisa, 21 March 2020, url
1979 UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 29 January 2020, url, p. 1
1982 See sources mentioned below.
1983 Khaama Press, Security Forces Kill Taliban's Suicide Attacks Planner in Kapisa Province, 23 May 2019, url
1984 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's Shadow Deputy Governor for Panjsher Killed: Mol, 4 August 2019, url; Ariana News, Taliban’s Shadow Deputy Governor for Panjshir Killed, 4 August 2019, url; Afghanistan Times, Afghan Forces Killed Taliban’s Designated Deputy Governor for Panjshir, 4 August 2019, url
1986 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s Military Commission Head Killed in Kapisa, 29 November 2019, url
1989 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kapisa; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
1991 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kapisa; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
Osman mentioned Tagab and Nejrab districts as areas where ISKP has been recruiting for its Kabul cell.\textsuperscript{1992}

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Kapisa is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps. Kapisa province is included in the Train, Advise and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), which is part of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-E is led by US and Polish forces and has its headquarters in Laghman province.\textsuperscript{1993}

\section*{2.17.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population}

\subsection*{2.17.3.1 General}

In 2019, UNAMA documented 124 civilian casualties (49 deaths and 75 injured) in Kapisa province. This represented a decrease of 11\% compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by non-suicide IEDs and air strikes.\textsuperscript{1994 Resolute Support,\textsuperscript{1995} recorded between 102 and 150 civilian casualties in Kapisa province in the first half of 2020, with no variation between the first and second quarter of the year.\textsuperscript{1996}

ACLED collected data on 265 violent events in Kapisa province from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, of which 206 were coded as ‘battles’, 49 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ and 10 as ‘violence against civilians’. Tagab and Nejrab stood out as districts where most incidents were reported, with more than 100 recorded incidents in each district - compared to 23 or less recorded incidents in Kapisa’s other districts. ACLED recorded the lowest numbers of incidents Hisa-i Awal-e Kohestan and Hisa-i Duwum-e Kohestan districts, followed by Kohband district. In the provincial capital Mahmud-e Raqi 23 incidents were recorded.\textsuperscript{1997}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure19.png}
\caption{Kapisa - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data\textsuperscript{1998}}
\end{figure}

ACLED coded around 78\% of the violent incidents in Kapisa province as ‘battles’, nearly all ‘armed clashes’. With the exception of Alasay district, this category represented the most prevalent incident type in all Kapisa’s districts, also in Mahmud-e Raqi district where the provincial capital is located. The majority of these armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police or NDS personnel and members of pro-government militias or so-called \textit{arbakis} (the term \textit{arbaki} is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan local police or other pro-

\textsuperscript{1992} Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join Islamic State, USIP, June 2020, \url{url}, pp. 4, 11-12
\textsuperscript{1993} USDO, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 13
\textsuperscript{1994} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 94
\textsuperscript{1995} Civilian casualty data for 2020 have not yet been published by UNAMA.
\textsuperscript{1996} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 72
\textsuperscript{1997} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kapisa; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1998} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Kapisa, \url{url}
government militias). Examples of such incidents included assaults on military or police checkpoints/outposts in Abad village near the provincial capital Mahmud-é Raqi in July 2019, in Nejrab district in October 2019, in February 2020, in March 2020 and in June 2020, and in Tagab district in March 2020 and in June 2020, as well as attacks/ambushes on the convoy/vehicle of an Afghan local police commander and an intelligence chief in Alasay district in December 2019 and January 2020; and an attack on the head of Kapisa’s police traffic department in Mahmud-é Raqi district in June 2020. No civilian casualties were reported in these incidents.

Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED. These incidents involved several operations in Nejrab district in April 2019, in May 2019, in August 2019 and in November 2019, killing several Taliban militants (see above). In Tagab district, various Taliban militants were killed in operations of the Afghan Special Forces in June 2019 and a Taliban military commander was arrested by the police while placing IEDs in Shinkai village in August 2019. In Alasay district, four Taliban militants were wounded during a security forces raid in July 2019. During an operation in Hisa-i Awal-e Kohestan district in June 2020, two NDS officers were reportedly killed by the gunman they aimed to arrest.

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeting the Afghan security forces, represented 8% of all reported security incidents in Kapisa. Some of these incidents resulted in casualties among civilians. This happened in May 2019, when a civilian motorcycle hit a roadside bomb in Nejrab district, 2009

1999 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kapisa; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
2000 Tolonews, Two Policemen Killed in Taliban Attack in Kapisa, 30 July 2019, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, url
2001 RFE/RL, Taliban Militants Kill Six Afghan Police at Remote Checkpoint Northeast of Kabul, 5 October 2019, url
2009 Tolonews, Head of Kapisa Traffic Dept. Killed by Unknown Gunmen, 1 June 2020, url
2010 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kapisa; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
2011 Khaama Press, Taliban Sniper Killed in Armed Forces Operation in Kapisa Province, 29 April 2019, url
2012 Khaama Press, Security Forces Kill Taliban’s Suicide Attacks Planner in Kapisa Province, 23 May 2019, url
2013 Ariana News, Taliban’s Shadow Deputy Governor for Panjshir Killed, 4 August 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s Shadow Deputy Governor for Panjshir: MoI, 4 August 2019, url
2017 Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Security Forces, 6 Rebels Killed in Fresh Offensives, 4 July 2019, url
2018 Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 NDS Agents Killed by Illegal Gunman in Kapisa, 21 June 2020, url
2020 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kapisa; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
killing four civilians.\textsuperscript{2021} In the same district in October 2019, six members of a family were killed in a roadside bomb explosion.\textsuperscript{2022} Another such incident happened in November 2019, when a roadside bomb was hit by a pick-up in the district market of Alasay, killing at least 10 civilians.\textsuperscript{2023}

Air/drone strikes represented 7\% of all reported violent incidents in Kapisa. Most air/drone strikes were carried out in Nejrab district (two out of three), followed by Alasay and Tagab districts. The majority of these air/drone strikes were carried out by Afghan military forces, some were attributed to US forces.\textsuperscript{2024} While air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs in the aforementioned districts\textsuperscript{2025}, some also caused civilian casualties such as air strikes carried out during security forces’ operations at the end of December 2019 in several villages in Nejrab district, during which at least six civilians were killed.\textsuperscript{2026}

Mortars and grenades fired by Taliban militants in Nejrab district in July 2019\textsuperscript{2027} and in Tagab district in March 2020\textsuperscript{2028} and April 2020\textsuperscript{2029}, landed on civilian homes and/or vehicles and caused civilian casualties.

ACLED categorised 4\% of all violent incidents recorded in Kapisa as ‘violence against civilians’.\textsuperscript{2030} These incidents involved for example: civilian houses being targeted by the Taliban with a grenade launcher in Nejrab district in July 2019\textsuperscript{2031}; civilians being killed in operations by Afghan and US security forces in Nejrab district in December 2019\textsuperscript{2032}; a civilian vehicle being attacked by Taliban militants in Tagab district in March 2020\textsuperscript{2033}; and the killing of an appellate court judge by unidentified gunmen in Afghanha village in the area of PD 1 in June 2020.\textsuperscript{2034}

Kapisa’s voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 remained just under 10\%. Along with Uruzgan province in the south and Farah province in the west, this represented one of the lowest scores in the whole country.\textsuperscript{2035} In the Asia Foundations 2019 Survey of the Afghan People, 51-75\% of respondents in Kapisa province reported to have experienced fear while voting.\textsuperscript{2036} Without providing further details, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on election related attacks on polling day in Kapisa province\textsuperscript{2037}, including the beating of an agent of the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA).\textsuperscript{2038}

### 2.17.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 924 persons displaced from Kapisa province, from whom the majority (833) found refuge within the province itself (in the

\textsuperscript{2021} Ariana News, Roadside Bomb Kills 4 Civilians in Kapisa, 21 May 2019, url

\textsuperscript{2022} Pajhwok Afghan News, Women Among 6 of a family Killed in Kapisa Blast, 2 October 2019, url

\textsuperscript{2023} Pajhwok Afghan News, ANA Soldier Killed, 12 Wounded in Kapisa Explosion, 6 November 2019, url

\textsuperscript{2024} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kapisa; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url

\textsuperscript{2025} Khaama Press, Up to 50 Militants Killed in Afghan Special Forces Operations, Airstrikes, 6 March 2019, url; Khaama Press, Afghan Air Force’s A-29s and MD-530s Target Taliban Hideouts in Kunar and Kapisa, 23 March 2020, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s Military Commission Head Killed in Kapasa, 29 November 2019, url

\textsuperscript{2026} Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Civilians Killed in Kapisa Operations, Says Rights Watchdog, 29 December 2019, url

\textsuperscript{2027} Khaama Press, Taliban Target Civilian Houses with Grenade Launcher in Kapisa: 201st Silab Corps, 18 July 2019, url

\textsuperscript{2028} Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians, Policeman Killed in Kapesa Mortar Shell Attack, 25 March 2020, url

\textsuperscript{2029} Khaama Press, Taliban Militants Kill 1 Civilian, Wound 3 Others in Kapisa Province, 20 April 2020, url

\textsuperscript{2030} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kapisa; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url

\textsuperscript{2031} Khaama Press, Taliban Target Civilian Houses with Grenade Launcher in Kapisa: 201st Silab Corps, 18 July 2019, url

\textsuperscript{2032} Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Civilians Killed in Kapisa Operations, Says Rights Watchdog, 29 December 2019, url

\textsuperscript{2033} Khaama Press, Taliban Target Civilian Houses with Grenade Launcher in Kapisa: 201st Silab Corps, 18 July 2019, url

\textsuperscript{2034} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020 (updated 26 March 2020), url

\textsuperscript{2035} Tolonews, Gunmen Shoot and Kill Judge in Kapisa, 23 June 2020, url

\textsuperscript{2036} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, url, p. 98

\textsuperscript{2037} Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, url, p. 62

\textsuperscript{2038} Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Observers Killed, Many Beaten on Polling Day, 17 October 2019, url
provincial capital Mahmud-e Raqi and in Nejrab, Hisa-i Awal-e Kohestan and Hisa-i Duwum-e Kohestan districts). The remaining 91 IDPs from Kapisa sought shelter in neighbouring provinces Parwan (Charikar district) and Kabul. The majority of IDPs in Kapisa province were displaced from Nejrab district, mostly in March and December 2019 and in the beginning of January 2020. A smaller number of IDPs was displaced from Tagab district in March, July and September 2019 and March 2020, as well as from Alasay district in September 2019 and March 2020.\textsuperscript{2039}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 193 persons displaced to Kapisa province coming from other provinces. In October 2019, a group of 70 IDPs from Chahab district in the northern province of Takhar found refuge in Kapisa’s Hisa-i Duwum-e Kohestan district. Mid-January 2020, a group of 126 IDPs coming from Tala Wa Barfak district in the northern province of Baghlan found refuge in the provincial capital Mahmud-e Raqi.\textsuperscript{2040}

In the beginning of April 2019, large displacement figures were reported in Nejrab district, due to changes in the security situation. Several areas of the district that were cleared by joined ANDSF operations in early December 2018 were recaptured by non-state armed forces. The displaced families found refuge in Nejrab district centre and in other secure districts within the province, such as Mahmud-e Raqi and Hisa-i Awal-e Kohestan.\textsuperscript{2041} In December 2019 and January 2020, ongoing ANDSF clearing operations in Nejrab district were reported to have caused large numbers of displaced families to seek shelter in the district centre and in the provincial capital Mahmud-e Raqi.\textsuperscript{2042}

According to IOM displacement data published in August and October 2019, most IDPs and returnees in Kapisa province resided in Mahmud-e Raqi and Tagab districts.\textsuperscript{2043} According to UNHCR, Kapisa is one of the four provinces with the highest percentage of returnees who originate there but choose to live somewhere else once they return.\textsuperscript{2044}

\textsuperscript{2039} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url
\textsuperscript{2040} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url
\textsuperscript{2041} UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 2 April 2019, \url, p. 1
\textsuperscript{2042} UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 29 January 2020, \url, p. 1
\textsuperscript{2043} IOM, Afghanistan - Kapisa Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results Round 7 (October - December 2018), 1 August 2019, \url, pp. 1, 2, 6; IOM, DTM Afghanistan Baseline Mobility Assessment I District Level I Total Inflow (Returnees+IDPs) | June 2019 | Province: Kapisa, 9 October 2019, \url
\textsuperscript{2044} UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report - Final Report, May 2018, \url, p. 19
2.18 Khost

2.18.1 General description of the province

A part of Loya Paktya (i.e. ‘Greater Paktya’), an area also encompassing the provinces of Paktya and Paktika, the province of Khost is situated in the eastern part of Afghanistan, bordering Pakistan to the east, Paktika to the south-west, and Paktya to the west and north-west. Khost is divided into the following administrative units: Ali Sher (Terezayi), Bak, Gurbuz, Jajimaydan, Khost (Matun), Mandozayi (Esmayel Khel), Muzakhel, Nadirshahkot, Qalandar, Sabari (Yaqubi), Shamal, Spera, and Tani. The provincial capital of Khost is the city of Khost.

According to the NSIA, the population of Khost is estimated at 636,522 for 2020/21. The rural population accounts for 98% of the total. As stated by AAN founder Thomas Ruttig, Khost is part of one of the three major Pashtun regions of Afghanistan. The province is primarily inhabited by Pashtuns, with approximately 1% Tajik. US-bad Tribal Analysis Center (TAC) also mentioned the presence of other minorities (Sikh, Hazara) in Khost City. The province is inhabited by a large number of Pashtun tribes, among them the Zadran tribe, namesake of the so-called Zadran Arc, which includes

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2045 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Khost Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)
2047 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: South Eastern Region - District Atlas, April 2014, [url]
2049 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url], p. 4
2051 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Khost Provincial Overview, n.d., [url]
2052 TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, [url], p. 8
stretches of western Khost, Paktya and Paktika. In 2013, TAC described the Zadran as historically strong but also ‘loose’, characterized by infighting and multiple political affiliations. Furthermore, Kuchi and Musalyan nomads are said to live in Khost seasonally. According to Afghanistan expert Antonio Giustozzi, there were over 50,000 nomad families in Khost as of May 2019. RFE/RL’s Gandhara also pointed out that, from 2014 onwards, military operations in North Waziristan forced 7,000 families to seek shelter in Khost and Paktika.

In 2013, TAC described Khost as a ‘[…] major transit hub for trade from Pakistan […]’. The key border crossing of Ghulam Khan was closed in 2014 due to military operations in Pakistan’s North Waziristan, reopened for trade activities in March 2018, and was fully reopened from August 2019. Since then, the residents of Paktya, Paktika and Khost are reportedly allowed to get into Pakistan with their tazkera, under the condition that they have relatives living on the other side of the Durand Line. There is also an unofficial motorable crossing point to Pakistan in Jajimaydan district, which has been temporarily closed in the past as well.

The so-called Khost-Gardez Pass connects Khost with neighbouring Paktya, Logar and ultimately Kabul. According to a 2017 report by the US-based news site ThinkProgress, the Khost-Logar road leads through areas with a strong Taliban presence and hence potential Taliban checkpoints in the provinces of Paktya and Logar. In March 2019, the Afghan authorities announced that they were now in full control of the 50 kilometre-road linking Paktya’s Dand Wa Patan district to Khost’s Jajimaydan district. For the previous five years, the highway had been under the influence of the Taliban and the Haqqani Network. In March 2019 as well, Tolonews reported that the Pakistani forces had closed the road connecting Khost City to Gurbuz district. Some villages of this district close to the border have been cut in two by the fencing of the border by the Pakistani military, which encroached on Afghan territory and deprived local population from access to public services.

According to the airport map produced by the Austrian COI department, an airport with scheduled passenger services does not exist in Khost.

The 2018 UNODC Opium Survey reported that Khost has been poppy-free at least since 2013.
2.18.2 Conflict background and actors in Khost

In 2009, Thomas Ruttig noted that Loya Paktya – encompassing Khost – has never been a Taliban stronghold. AAN stated in August 2018 that Khost ‘[…] features an active insurgency, but it remains somewhat curtailed by strong tribal affiliations and cohesive local communities’. It also noted that due to the geographical terrain of mountainous Khost, AGEs are largely dependent on the collaboration of locals, as ‘the sworn hostility of even a minor community can be a logistical nightmare for insurgents, as they have to rely on mountain routes or secrecy for the security of their movements and the success of their operations.’ AAN concluded that ‘this discourages acts that would antagonise whole communities.’

As of May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Mawlawi Abdullah Hussaini, originally affiliated to the Peshawar Shura network, as the Taliban shadow governor in Khost. He was appointed after the ‘reshuffle’ of the Taliban government structure during the 2019-2020 winter, ahead of the 2020 fighting season. Mawlawi Qasam Farid was listed as the head of the military commission in Loya Paktya. Moreover, Khost is one of the provinces where the UN Security Council observed ‘strong ties’ between the Taliban and organised criminal groups involved in heroin, hashish, pine nut traffics or local businesses extorsion.

The Haqqani Network has reportedly been most active in the ‘Zadran Arc’, with its late founder Jalaluddin Haqqani being a member of the Zadran tribe. The group is affiliated with the Taliban, though it declared itself independent from the Quetta Shura from 2007 to 2015. Declassified US cables quoted by Associated Press (AP) stated that, contrary to other Taliban factions, the Haqqani Network ‘[…] functions more in the military area, and is not a force in setting Taliban political or social issues’, a perception seemingly shared by Ruttig. The Haqqani Network reportedly maintains close ties to the Pakistani secret service ISI, as well as other Pakistani militant groups and Al Qaeda.

In June 2019, the UN Security Council stated that the Haqqani Network numbered between 1 800 and 2 000 fighters leading Taliban operations in Khost, Paktya and Paktika, with the help of Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants. The report added that in Loya Paktya, the network was holding all of the main shadow government positions (provincial governors and district governors). As of May 2020, the Haqqani Network was said to plan a joint unit of 2 000 fighters with Al Qaeda, headed by Hafiz Azizuddin Haqqani in the operational zone encompassing Loya Paktya. Over 2019 and 2020, the...
Afghan security forces led several operations against the Haqqani Network in Khost and notably killed twelve of its commanders in Sabari district.\textsuperscript{2080}

In a May 2020 report, the UN Security Council listed Khost among the 12 provinces where Al Qaeda was supposed to be ‘covertly active’.\textsuperscript{2081} UNAMA added that its main tasks consist in ‘training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring’.\textsuperscript{2082}

In terms of presence of government security forces, Khost province is under the responsibility of the 203\textsuperscript{th} ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces.\textsuperscript{2083} In a 2020 report focused on locally-rooted security forces, AAN observed that the robust and ‘relatively egalitarian’ tribal structures of Loya Paktya and its tradition of local defence groups (arbaki) had contributed to ‘more instances of effective, less abusive forces’.\textsuperscript{2084}

In 2015, the Washington Post listed the Khost Protection Force (KPF) as the most influential security actor in the province.\textsuperscript{2085} Foreign Policy described it as ‘the most prominent of several CIA-sponsored elite paramilitary forces along the porous border with Pakistan’, where it is charged with keeping the border secure and prevent the entry of terrorists in Khost but also in neighbouring provinces.\textsuperscript{2086} According to UNAMA, it operates outside of the regular military structure and without any legal basis in south-eastern Afghanistan since at least 2007, with frequent support from foreign military forces and the Afghan air force.\textsuperscript{2087} Headquartered at Camp Chapman, outside Khost City, the KFP manpower ranges between 3,000 and 10,000, plus a network of informants.\textsuperscript{2088} In its 2020 annual report, UNAMA expressed grave concern over the impunity that, despite occasional investigations led by the authorities, KPF members enjoy for abuses they commit (including executions, torture and arbitrary detentions), which contributes to ‘anti-government sentiment and spark protests among the civilian population’.\textsuperscript{2089}

According to information collected by LWJ and presented in a map, Gurbuz, Jajimaydan, Muzakhel, Nadirshahkot, Qalandar, Sabari, Spera, Tere Zayi districts are assessed as ’contested’, while Bak, Khost, Mandozay, Shamal and Tani are listed as government-controlled or undetermined.\textsuperscript{2090} However, in April 2020, French daily newspaper Libération stated that Sabari district was under Taliban control.\textsuperscript{2091} In a regional overview, ACLED reported that in July 2019, the Taliban had taken over areas of Jajimaydan district.\textsuperscript{2092} At last, a survey published in June 2019 by Tolonews noted that due to insecurity, the Afghan administration was not able to rule one of Khost districts (unspecified) and was working remotely.\textsuperscript{2093}

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2.18.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.18.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 197 civilian casualties (51 deaths and 146 injured) in Khost. This represents an increase of 13% compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were non-suicide IEDs, followed by targeted/deliberate killings and ground engagements. Resolute Support recorded between 76 and 125 civilian casualties in Khost in the first half of 2020, reporting a very marked increase during the second quarter compared to the first.

With regard to the severity of the conflict, over the full year 2019, Resolute Support recorded less than 150 enemy-initiated attacks in Khost province, as in 2018 – one of the five provinces with the lowest numbers. In March 2020, a resident of Spera district told AAN that since the eight-days ‘reduction in violence’ period in February 2020, the situation was calm, with only ‘minor conflicts’ not resulting in any casualty. Local dwellers were now free to travel, but the government agents and NGO personnel were still wary of the Taliban. In Khost City, the security situation was also said to be better than the usual at this time of year. However, in May 2020, RFE/RL’s Gandhara observed that ‘the security situation [had] been deteriorating’ in the previous weeks.

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED collected data on 342 violent events in Khost province from open sources: 196 coded as ‘battles’ (57%), 130 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ (38%) and 16 as ‘violence against civilians’ (5%).

Across these three categories, Sabari (66 incidents) and Khost (64) stood out as the districts where most violent events were reported between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020. In Bak, Mandozayi, Muzakhel, Nadirshahkot, Qalandar and Spera, the number of such incidents ranged between 17 and

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2094 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 94
2095 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, url, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, url, p. 72 At the time of writing, UNAMA provincial data for 2020 was not available.
2096 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 January 2020, url, p. 69
2097 AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended?, 21 March 2020, url
2098 Clark, K., Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (2): Assessing the conflict a month after the US-Taliban agreement, AAN, 8 April 2020, url
2099 RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Mosque Attacks Kill 13 Worshippers Breaking Fast, 20 May 2020, url
2100 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Khost ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url For more information on ACLED’s methodology, see: Introduction – Sources.
2101 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Khost ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
35. Based on ACLED data, the least affected districts were Gurbuz (3 events), Jajimaydan (4), Tani (4) and Shamal (7).\textsuperscript{2102}

Regarding events coded as ‘battles’ by ACLED, an overwhelming majority of them were ‘armed clashes’. Sabari, Muzakhel, Terezayi and Nadirshakot were the most affected districts by this type of violence. Conversely, Shamal, Mandozayi, Jajimaydan, Tani and Gurbuz recorded less than six armed clashes each. The remaining districts experienced levels of clashes ranging from 12 to 17. Of the 189 armed clashes that ACLED collected information about, 165 were said to have been initiated by the Taliban, and 2 others by them or an unidentified group. According to ACLED data, Taliban attacks mainly focused on Sabari, Muzakhel, Terezayi and Nadirshakot districts and only targeted ANDSF. As for the 22 armed clashes initiated by the Afghan security forces and allied militias, they were spread out across six districts, with a peak of nine attacks in Sabari in May - July 2019.\textsuperscript{2103}

Examples of such incidents include the killing by ANDSF of 16 Taliban militants in June 2019 and 21 others while repelling an attack in June 2020, both in Muzakhel district.\textsuperscript{2104} In May 2020, Pajhwok reported that the provincial chief of police had been killed by a Taliban-initiated blast in Nadirshakot district, while he was travelling to a local police checkpoint attacked by the Taliban.\textsuperscript{2105} Throughout 2019 and 2020, the Afghan security forces have led several operations against the Haqqani Network in Khost, resulting in the killing of twelve of its commanders in Sabari district, in June 2019, and the arrest of six fighters in May 2020.\textsuperscript{2106} UNAMA expressed concern over Pakistan-initiated cross-border incidents in Kunar, Zabul and Khost provinces, which caused 39 child casualties (8 killed, 31 injured).\textsuperscript{2107}

In terms of incidents coded by ACLED as ‘Explosions/Remote violence’, the most represented sub-category was clearly ‘Remote explosive/Landmine/IED’ (78 %). All these incidents were attributed to AGEs, particularly to the Taliban, although they have claimed none of the explosions reported to target civilians. Khost City district stood out as the most affected district by episodes of remote violence (43 events out of 130).\textsuperscript{2108} For instance, in July 2019, two civilians were killed, and thirty others were wounded when a motorcycle bomb targeted a KPF convoy in the eastern part of Khost City.\textsuperscript{2109} In other districts, several civilians were killed by explosives in Tani and Sabari, in November 2019.\textsuperscript{2110} On 17 December 2019, at least 10 civilians were killed (including 3 children), and at least 18 people were wounded in Ali Sher (Terezayi) district when explosives attached to a bicycle detonated near a police vehicle.\textsuperscript{2111} On 2 March 2020, three civilians were killed and eleven injured when a bomb exploded during a football match in Nadirshakot district. Although they denied it, the Taliban were suspected

\textsuperscript{2102} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Khost ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \textsuperscript{url}

\textsuperscript{2103} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Khost ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \textsuperscript{url}

\textsuperscript{2104} Khaama Press, Afghan forces killed, wound 34 Taliban militants in Khost, Paktiya: 203rd Thunder Corps, 13 July 2019, \textsuperscript{url}; Reporterly, Over 40 Taliban Killed By Afghan Forces, 30 June 2020, \textsuperscript{url}

\textsuperscript{2105} Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost police chief killed in roadside blast, 8 May 2020, \textsuperscript{url}

\textsuperscript{2106} Tolonews, 12 Haqqani Network Commanders Killed In Khost, 11 June 2019, \textsuperscript{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost: 20 crime suspects arrested in a week, 12 May 2020, \textsuperscript{url}

\textsuperscript{2107} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \textsuperscript{url}, pp. 21-22

\textsuperscript{2108} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Khost ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \textsuperscript{url}

\textsuperscript{2109} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25- Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, \textsuperscript{url}

\textsuperscript{2110} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 2 December 2019, \textsuperscript{url}

\textsuperscript{2111} AP, Roadside bombing kills 10 civilians in Afghanistan, 17 December 2019, \textsuperscript{url}; Khaama Press, Children among 10 killed as Taliban IED goes off in Khost province, 17 December 2019, \textsuperscript{url}; TRTWORLD, Roadside bombing kills 10 civilians in Afghanistan - official, 17 December 2019, \textsuperscript{url}
to have planned the attack. In April 2020, an unclaimed bomb exploded along the convoy of provincial governor Hamil Fidai, who survived.

Also coded as 'Explosions/Remote violence' by ACLED, ten air/drone strikes were recorded across six districts of the province, most of them in Khost, Nadirshahkot, Sabari and Terezayi (Ali Sher). In the latter, on 28 November 2019, five civilians were killed when a US drone targeted a car carrying a woman who had just given birth, prompting the US forces and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission to launch investigations.

As for episodes of violence against civilians, based on ACLED data, none of the districts registered more than four incidents, Khost and Sabari being relatively more affected. In Sabari, two unclaimed shootings against worshippers praying in mosques resulted in four deaths overall in May 2020. Other incidents included the shooting of a local TV journalist, in March 2019, for which 'an Islamic State affiliate' claimed responsibility. While expressing concern over reported cases of summary executions, unlawful and arbitrary detentions and of torture by the KPF, UNAMA noted that the 25 civilian deaths attributed to the KPF across Khost, Paktya and Paktika in 2019 represented a 'significant drop' from 2018 and that all of them had been reported during the first quarter of 2019 alone.

Incidentally, in June 2020, in Mandozayi district, invoking an ancient tribal custom, hundreds of members of the Mangal tribe burned several houses of a family accused of having killed seven members of another family two days earlier.

2.18.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 2 828 persons displaced from Khost – one of the lowest provincial figures recorded over the period. All of them found refuge in the provincial capital’s district. Overall, the main district of origin of IDPs was Sabari (1 750), accounting for 62 % of Khost total numbers. It is distantly followed by Bak (308) and Nadirshahkot (259). The highest displacement figures were recorded in April and October 2019, and January-February 2020. Since then, UNOCHA has not reported any displacement. According to UNOCHA reports, ongoing conflict appeared to be the main cause of displacement.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 3 619 persons displaced to Khost. Aside from the 2 828 people displaced within the province, 301 IDPs came from

2112 RFE/RL, Afghan Talibans End Partial Truce As Deadly Bombing Hits Near Soccer Ground, 2 March 2020, url ; Tolonews, Blast in Khost Kills Three Civilians: Mol, 2 March 2020, url ; NYT, U.S. Announces Troop Withdrawal in Afghanistan as Respite From Violence Ends, 2 March 2020, url
2119 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, [Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Khost ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020], url
2118 NYT, U.S. Drone Killed Afghan Civilians, Officials Say, 1 December 2019, url ; Pajhwok Afghan News, US forces, AIHRC probing Khost drone strike, 1 December 2019, url
2116 AP, Taliban kill 22 Afghan forces in attack on checkpoints, 17 March 2019, url
2115 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, pp. 9, 57-58, 64-65
2114 RFE/RL/Gandhara, Tribe Burns Down Houses Of Alleged Murderers In Southeast Afghanistan, 16 June 2020, url
Paktika, 231 from Logar, 189 from Paktya and 70 from Nangarhar. Khost City’s district turned out to be the only destination of these IDPs.\textsuperscript{2124}

2.19 Kunar

2.19.1 General description of the province

Kunar is located in eastern Afghanistan, along the Afghan-Pakistani border; it borders Nuristan to the north, Pakistan to the east, Nangarhar to the south, and Laghman to the west.\textsuperscript{2126} The province is divided into the following administrative units: Asadabad, Barkunar (also Asmar), Chapadara, Chawkay (also Sawkay), Dangam, Dara-e-Pech (also Manogi), Ghaziabad, Khashkunar, Marawara, Narang, Nari, Nurgal, Sarkani, Shigal, Watapur and Sheltan.\textsuperscript{2127} AAN defined the latter as a ‘temporary district’, meaning that it is considered to belong to Kunar province, but its status as such has not been approved by the Afghan parliament yet.\textsuperscript{2128} The provincial capital is Asadabad.\textsuperscript{2129}

\textsuperscript{2124} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \textsuperscript{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \textsuperscript{url}.

\textsuperscript{2126} US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., \textsuperscript{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, \textsuperscript{url}.


\textsuperscript{2128} Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, \textsuperscript{url}.

\textsuperscript{2129} US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., \textsuperscript{url}; Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunar, n. d., \textsuperscript{url}.

The national highway 'NH01' starts from Jalalabad, passes through the districts of Nurgal, Chawkay, Narang, Asadabad, Shigal and leads to Asmar.\footnote{Salaam Times, \textit{Afghan forces reopen key Kunar highway blocked by Taliban}, 9 August 2018, \textit{url}} From Asmar, the highway leads to Nuristan province through Ghaziabrad and Nari districts. Blocked in 2017 by insurgents, it was reopened by ANDSF in August 2018 after a series of operations.\footnote{UN Security Council, \textit{Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council}, 27 May 2020, \textit{url}, p. 4} According to an Afghan soldier interviewed by French newspaper Libération, the government also retook control of the road leading to Chapadara district through Dara-e Pech, formerly known as a ‘death trap’, in early 2019.\footnote{Sabawoon, A. M., \textit{Gandhara, Precious Stones Illegally Mined in Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunar, n. d., \textit{url}}} In September 2019, it was reported that after five years of closure, the Nawapas Highway, which is located in Sarkani district and crosses into Pakistan at the unofficial Nawapas border point, had been cleared from the Taliban.\footnote{UNOCHA, \textit{Afghanistan: Rehabilitation of Maidan Shar – Bamyan Road}, 2014, \textit{url}, p. 8; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, \textit{url}} However, in September 2019, UNOCHA reported that militant groups were blocking unspecified highways in Kunar.\footnote{The Gates of Friendship: How Afghans cross the Afghan-Pakistani border, AAN, 28 January 2020, \textit{url}}

The province shares a 175 kilometer-long border with Pakistan; through the Korengal valley, which lies west of the provincial capital; insurgents have been entering and leaving the province for years.\footnote{Salaam Times, \textit{Afghan forces reopen key Kunar highway blocked by Taliban}, 9 August 2018, \textit{url}} In June 2020, Pakistani forces have been accused of encroaching on Afghan territory while building a fence along the border in Kunar.\footnote{UNOCHA, \textit{Afghanistan: Kunar Provincial Overview}, n. d., \textit{url}} According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, opium-poppy cultivation levels in Kunar (1,723 hectares) remained similar to 2017 (1,634 hectares), representing a 6% increase in poppy cultivation.\footnote{Salaam Times, \textit{Afghan forces reopen key Kunar highway blocked by Taliban}, 9 August 2018, \textit{url}}

### 2.19.2 Conflict background and actors in Kunar

In February 2020, a security analyst interviewed by Sweden's Lifos described Kunar as ‘strongly controlled/influenced’ by the Taliban.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, \textit{Kunar’s Nawapas road reopens after 5-year closure}, 7 September 2019, \textit{url}; Sabawoon, A. M., The Gates of Friendship: How Afghans cross the Afghan-Pakistani border, AAN, 28 January 2020, \textit{url}} As of May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Mawalawi Hamdullah Uruzgani, originally affiliated to the Peshawar Shura network, as the Taliban shadow governor of Kunar. He was appointed after the ‘reshuffle’ of the Taliban government structure during the 2019-2020 winter, ahead of the 2020 fighting season.\footnote{UNOCHA, \textit{Afghanistan: Kunar Provincial Overview}, n. d., \textit{url}} By December 2019, according to the provincial vice-governor, about 1,000 militants, most of them former members of the Taliban, had...
reportedly enrolled in a NDS-sponsored ‘Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration’ program in Kunar.  

As of May 2020, Kunar was one of the 12 provinces where Al Qaeda was said to be ‘covertly active’. The UN Security Council mentioned in the same report that the group intended to form a joint unit with the Haqqani Network, headed by Shir Khan Manga in the operational zone composed of Kunar and Nuristan.  

UNAMA added that Al Qaeda’s main tasks consist in ‘training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring.’ Besides, in March 2020, Kunar officials expressed concern about the recruitment by Al Qaeda of former Taliban fighters hostile to the negotiations between the movement and the USA. Long War Journal also mentioned the presence in Kunar and Nuristan provinces of a commander affiliated to both the Taliban and Al Qaeda, Qari Zia Rahman.

As of July 2020, the Afghan branch of the Islamic State, ISKP, was said to be headed by Sheikh Matiullah Kamahwal, former leader of the Kunar chapter. During the first half of 2019, ISKP appeared to gain territory in the province, which had already been described as one of its strongholds in Afghanistan in February 2019. However, from the fall of 2019, military operations simultaneously led by ANDSF, coalition forces and the Taliban pressured ISKP into leaving the areas under its control in southern Nangarhar and in Kunar. Although the group endured further losses in Kunar in early 2020, the UN Secretary General stated that the province had ‘effectively become the group’s new Afghan core areas’. Between January and May 2020, sources reported the presence of ISKP fighters or bases in western parts of the province: in remote areas of Chawkay district, where the dense forests provide quality hideouts, in Narang, Nurgal and Chapadara, as well as in Watapur and Dara-e Pech districts. Estimates of the total number of ISKP fighters in Kunar oscillated between 400 (half of them in Chapadara), as reported by the Diplomat in August 2019, and 2 100, according to the provincial governor in January 2020, and 2 100, as stated by the UN Secretary General in February 2020.

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2142 Le Figaro, Afghanistan: un programme gouvernemental pour réintégrer des talibans repentis [Afghanistan : a government program to reinstate repentant Taliban], 26 December 2019, url;
2147 Tolonews, Al-Qaeda Recruiting Disaffected Taliban: Kunar Officials, 12 March 2020, url;
2147 LWJ, Female Pakistani Taliban suicide bomber hits hospital, 21 July 2019, url;
2148 UN Security Council, Letter dated 16 July 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, 23 July 2020, url, p. 15;
2149 RFE/RL/Gandhara, Islamic State In Afghanistan Growing Bigger, More Dangerous, 22 May 2019, url;
2150 UN Secretary-General, Eighth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 1 February 2019, url, p. 7;
2151 UNSG, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, url, p. 3;
2152 UN Secretary-General, Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 4 February 2020, url, p. 7;
2153 UNSG, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, url, p. 18;
2155 Tolonews, More Than 1,000 Daesh Fighters Active In Kunar: Governor, 8 January 2020, url;
2156 Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangrahar, AAN, 1 March 2020, url;
2157 Diplomat (The), The Peculiar Presence of the Islamic State in Kunar, 14 May 2019, url;
2158 Tolonews, More Than 1,000 Daesh Fighters Active In Kunar: Governor, 8 January 2020, url;
2159 UNSG, Tenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 4 February 2020, url, p. 7.
Local ISKP ranks were bolstered by the arrival of about 350 fighters — including foreign nationals — pushed out of neighbouring Nangarhar by ANDSF and Taliban operations.2160

In an article published by the magazine The Diplomat, Afghanistan-based journalist Franz J. Marty noted that, according to ‘anecdotal evidence’, ‘some alleged Islamic State fighters in Kunar have simply adopted a vague, locally-colored version of the Islamic State’, sometimes for opportunist reasons or ideological compatibility, since many Kunar residents are Salafists.2161 In this regard, in January 2020, Foreign Policy reported that in both Nangarhar and Kunar provinces, some Salafist madrasas, funded by Gulf states-based NGOs, were supporting ISKP activities.2162

In 2017, sources mentioned the presence of a group of Hezb-e Islami militants based in Shigal district. At that time, they were reportedly communicating with other insurgent groups but had neither joined the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, nor ISKP.2163

In a June 2019 report, the UN Security Council listed Kunar as one of the border areas where ‘many foreign terrorist fighter groups operate and have established safe havens’. Of these groups, Lashkar-e Tayyiba (LeT) was said to be ‘one of more prominent’ and ‘a key facilitator in recruitment and financial support activities’. It reportedly numbers about 500 active members in Kunar and Nangarhar, and is thought to have adopted a ‘more neutral role’ towards the Taliban and ISKP, from which it distanced itself.2164 As of May 2020, LeT fighters were ‘dispersed within Taliban forces’.2165 Another active group is Jaish-e Mohammed (JeM). As LeT, it is said to help terrorist fighters to enter Afghanistan and to carry out targeted assassinations, notably against government officials.2166 Up to 2018 at least, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) ran a military base, called Ghazi Camp, in Kunar.2167 It reportedly numbered 500 fighters in the province as of May 2020.2168 Finally, as of July 2020, the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) was supposedly present in Afghanistan, mainly in three provinces, among which Kunar.2169

In terms of presence of government security forces, Kunar province is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps, which falls under the Train, Advise, and Assist Command – East (TAAC-E), led by US and Polish forces.2170 According to AAN, Kunar is often listed as one of the provinces where the ALP is working well. Indeed, whereas it was one of the most violent provinces, the ALP and other ANDSF corps were able to stabilise the situation after the withdrawal of international forces.2171

The NDS-04, a unit of the NDS paramilitary strike forces, operates in Nuristan, Kunar and other provinces in the North-East. In a 2019 report, Human Rights Watch explained that, although they are technically subordinated to the NDS, these forces are trained, equipped and overseen by the CIA. They conduct brutal night raids, targeting alleged insurgents and often injuring or killing civilians. These

2160 UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, url, p. 17
2161 Diplomat (The), The Peculiar Presence of the Islamic State in Kunar, 14 May 2019, url
2162 FP, In Afghanistan, Religious Schools Are a Breeding Ground for Islamic State Influence, 24 January 2020, url
2163 Diplomat (The), Afghan Jihad Frozen in Time?, 25 April 2017, url, The Political Deal with Hezb-e Islami, 6 July 2018, url
2164 UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, url, pp. 17-18
2165 UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, url, p. 20
2166 UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, url, p. 20
2167 LWJ, US hits Pakistani Taliban training camp in eastern Afghanistan, 8 March 2018, url
2168 UNSG, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, url, p. 20
2169 UNSG, Letter dated 16 July 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaeda and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, 23 July 2020, url, p. 16
2170 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, url, p. 13
2171 Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN & Global Public Policy Institute, July 2020, url, pp. 46, 93
operations have grown increasingly frequent since late 2017.\textsuperscript{2172} According to AAN’s Kate Clark, in 2017, the NDS-04 unit numbered 250 men.\textsuperscript{2173} However, another AAN report stated that Kunar was actually the operation field of the NDS-02 Special forces unit.\textsuperscript{2174}

In April 2020, RFE/RL’s Gandhara reported that the Taliban and other AGEs controlled ‘large swathes of rural territories’ in Kunar province.\textsuperscript{2175} According to information LWJ collected and presented in a map, all of Kunar districts are assessed as contested by the Afghan government and the Taliban, except for Asadabad district (presented as undetermined or government-controlled) and Chapadara (presented as Taliban-controlled, based on 2017 information).\textsuperscript{2176} Regarding Chapadara, in May 2019, the Diplomat described the situation as ‘calm’. Its main valley was then controlled by the government, while ISKP had ousted the Taliban from two others valleys, Lindalam and Digal, in March 2019.\textsuperscript{2177} As of August 2019, government forces were said to be ‘in full control’ of the Pech valley area, encompassing districts of Watapur, Dara-e Pech and Chapadara, despite sporadic AGEs attacks.\textsuperscript{2178} In September 2019, on the eve of the presidential election, the Taliban retook parts of Manroo (equated with Marawara by AAN\textsuperscript{2179}) district that they had lost to ISKP six months earlier.\textsuperscript{2180}

\section*{2.19.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population}

\subsection*{2.19.3.1 General}

In 2019, UNAMA documented 256 civilian casualties (77 deaths and 179 injured) in Kunar. This represents a decrease of 36\% compared to 2018. Indeed, while UNAMA noticed an increase in the number of incidents attributed to ISKP (such as IED discoveries, detonations and armed clashes) in Kunar and two other provinces, there were fewer civilian casualties connected to ground engagements initiated by ISKP, resulting in a ‘significant decrease’ in this type of casualties in Nangarhar and Kunar over 2019. However, ground engagements remained the leading cause of casualties, followed by explosive remnants of war and targeted/deliberate killings.\textsuperscript{2182} Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 75 civilian casualties in Kunar in the first half of 2020, reporting a decrease during the second quarter compared to the first.\textsuperscript{2182}

In terms of severity of the conflict, Resolute Support recorded between 501 and 1000 enemy-initiated attacks in Kunar province over the full year 2019, in line with 2018.\textsuperscript{2183} In March 2020, AAN reported that after the end of the ‘reduction in violence’ period, in the build-up to the US/Taliban agreement, provincial capital Asadabad had remained secure, while fighting had resumed in the districts — for instance, between the Taliban and ISKP in Watapur district.\textsuperscript{2184}

\textsuperscript{2172} HRW, “They’ve Shot Many Like This” Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, \url{hrw.org}
\textsuperscript{2173} Clark, K., CIA-proxy militias, CIA-drones in Afghanistan: “Hunt and kill” déjà vu, AAN, 26 October 2017, \url{aan.org}
\textsuperscript{2174} Ruttig, T., “Murder Is Always”: The Kulalgo night raid killings, AAN, 17 August 2019, \url{aan.org}
\textsuperscript{2175} RFE/RL/Gandhara, Precious Stones Illegally Mined In Afghan Province, 24 April 2020, \url{gandhara.org}
\textsuperscript{2176} LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n. d., \url{lwj.org} However the source does not systematically specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.
\textsuperscript{2177} Diplomat (The), The Peculiar Presence of the Islamic State in Kunar, 14 May 2019, \url{diplomat.com}
\textsuperscript{2178} RFE/RL/Gandhara, Peace Returns To Afghanistan’s ‘Valley Of Death’, 22 August 2019, \url{gandhara.org}
\textsuperscript{2179} Ruttig, T., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (19): An ambiguous picture of E-day civilian casualties, AAN, 17 October 2019, \url{aan.org}
\textsuperscript{2180} VoA, In One Afghan Province, the Taliban Safe-Guarded the Elections, 8 October 2019, \url{voa.gov} At the time of writing, UNAMA provincial data for 2020 was not available.
\textsuperscript{2181} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{unama.org}, pp. 36, 69, 94
\textsuperscript{2182} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{sigar.mil}, p. 69 ; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, \url{sigar.mil}, p. 72 At the time of writing, UNAMA provincial data for 2020 was not available.
\textsuperscript{2183} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 January 2020, \url{sigar.mil}, p. 69
\textsuperscript{2184} AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended?, 21 March 2020, \url{aan.org}
In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED collected data on 271 violent events in Kunar province from open sources: 164 coded as ‘battles’ (61 %), 100 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ (37 %) and 7 as ‘violence against civilians’ (2 %).\footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url} For more information on ACLED’s methodology, see: Introduction – Sources.}

Across these three categories, Sarkani (55 incidents), Dara-e Pech (41) and Chawkay (33) stood out as the districts where most violent incidents were reported between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020, accounting for half of the total number. ACLED also recorded between 10 and 21 violent events in Barkunar, Chapadara, Dangam, Ghaziabad, Marawara and Nurgal districts, and less than 10 for the remaining districts (including in Asadabad, home to the provincial capital – 7 incidents).\footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}}

Regarding events coded as ‘battles’ by ACLED, about 80 % were ‘armed clashes’. They mainly took place in Sarkani district (42 out of 124), with Ghaziabad being a distant second (15). Out of all of the documented clashes, 82 were assessed by ACLED as initiated by the Taliban, almost entirely against ANDSF and, throughout the reporting period, mainly in Sarkani district.\footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}}

Taliban-ISKP clashes were also reported in late March and June 2019 in Chapadara and Dare-e Pech districts, forcing two health centres to close in the former.\footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}} In March 2020, the Taliban claimed to have cleared the whole province of ISKP, although US military sources stated that ANDSF and coalition forces had also contributed to ISKP defeat.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Kunar Conflict – Update (as of 3 April 2019), 4 April 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Heavy clashes underway between Taliban, ISIS militants in two districts of Kunar, 22 June 2019, \url{url}} According to French newspaper Le Figaro, Afghan official sources denied that ANDSF and the Taliban had led joint military operations against ISKP. However, the ANDSF are thought to have toned down their attacks on the Taliban, allowing both of them to focus on the fighting against their common enemy.\footnote{VoA, US Admits Taliban Offensive Is Whittling IS’s Grip on Afghanistan, 20 March 2020, \url{url}; Le Figaro, Afghanistan: à Taranak, l’alliance secrète des talibans et de l’armée contre l’État islamique [In Taranak, the Taliban and the army’s secret alliance against the Islamic State], 31 January 2020, \url{url}}
The 38 ANDSF-initiated clashes were spread out across 12 districts, with a peak of 5 in Nurgal\textsuperscript{2192}, where 11 Taliban were killed in May 2019.\textsuperscript{2193} In early 2020, several raids were conducted against ISKP in Chawkay and Nurgal districts.\textsuperscript{2194} ACLED data also highlight the territorial gains made throughout December 2019 in Dara-e Pech district by Afghan military forces, with numerous attacks launched against the Taliban and ISKP.\textsuperscript{2195}

In terms of incidents coded by ACLED as ‘Explosions/Remote violence’, the most represented subcategory was ANDSF-initiated ‘Air/drone strikes’ (about two thirds of the 88 reported incidents).\textsuperscript{2196} Most of them targeted AGEs in Chawkay district, where, for instance, five ISKP fighters were killed in November 2019.\textsuperscript{2197}

ACLED also listed 21 ‘Shelling/artillery/missile attacks’, which included several cross-border incidents initiated by the Pakistani military forces.\textsuperscript{2198} In August 2019, local officials quoted by Khaama Press stated that during the previous months, Pakistani forces had fired over 700 shells and mortar rounds on Kunar, most of them landing in Shetlan district.\textsuperscript{2199} On 26 September 2019, three children were killed when a mosque collapsed in Dangam district after the Pakistani army allegedly fired more than 180 rockets into Kunar.\textsuperscript{2200} In October 2019, another Pakistani shelling killed three women in Nari district.\textsuperscript{2201} Overall, in 2019, UNAMA recorded 65 civilian casualties due to cross-border incidents, as well as damages to property and livestock. Out of the 29 recorded incidents involving civilian casualties, a majority took place in Kunar.\textsuperscript{2202}

Most of the seven violent events against civilians documented by ACLED were disruptions caused by the Taliban to the presidential election across the province\textsuperscript{2203}, notably in Dangam and Barkunar districts, where they attacked polling centres. Overall, seven civilians were wounded in these attacks.\textsuperscript{2204} However, in Manroo district (equated with Marawara by AAN\textsuperscript{2205}), where ISKP had threatened civilians who would take part to the voting process, the Taliban actually ensured the safety of the voters.\textsuperscript{2206}

\textsuperscript{2192} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
\textsuperscript{2193} Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces kill 11 Taliban fighters in Kunar province, 22 May 2019, url
\textsuperscript{2194} Khaama Press, 19 ISIS militants killed in Afghan Special Forces raid, airstrikes in Kapisa and Kunar, 21 February 2020, url; Khaama Press, Airstrikes, Special Forces raid kill 6 ISIS militants in East of Afghanistan, 18 February 2020, url ; Khaama Press, U.S. airstrike kills 7 ISIS militants in Kunar province of Afghanistan, 5 March 2020, url
\textsuperscript{2195} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
\textsuperscript{2196} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
\textsuperscript{2197} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
\textsuperscript{2198} Khaama Press, Airstrikes kill 13 ISIS militants in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces of Afghanistan, 9 November 2019, url
\textsuperscript{2199} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
\textsuperscript{2200} Khaama Press, Shelling by Pakistani military kill, wound 9 Afghan children in Kunar, 28 August 2019, url
\textsuperscript{2201} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, url
\textsuperscript{2202} Tolonews, 3 Afghan Women Killed In Pakistani Shelling: Officials, 28 October 2019, url
\textsuperscript{2203} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, pp. 72, 119
\textsuperscript{2204} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020), url
\textsuperscript{2205} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – Special Report: 2019 Election-Related Violence, October 2019, url, pp. 4-5
\textsuperscript{2206} Ruttig, T., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (19): An ambiguous picture of E-day civilian casualties, AAN, 17 October 2019, url
\textsuperscript{2207} VoA, In One Afghan Province, the Taliban Safe-Guarded the Elections, 8 October 2019, url
UNAMA documented cases of abduction of children by the Taliban, in Marawara (March 2019) and Watapur (October 2019) districts. They were held captive for up to two weeks.\textsuperscript{2207}

Although, in April 2019, Kunar was listed among the provinces where the Taliban most disrupted the polio vaccination campaigns\textsuperscript{2208}, in August 2019, a four-years long ban on immunization services was lifted in Nurgal district\textsuperscript{2209}, while UNOCHA mentioned the reopening of several health centres that had been kept closed for an undefined period in Ghaziabad and Digal districts.\textsuperscript{2210} In March and April 2020, the Taliban abducted and held captive seven health workers overall, in Chapadara and Marawara districts, reportedly accusing them of failing to provide adequate services to the local population.\textsuperscript{2211}

In March 2020, the security forces reportedly arrested – then released – a journalist for having questioned the management of funds allocated to the COVID-19 response.\textsuperscript{2212}

### 2.19.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 58,043 persons displaced from Kunar – the second highest provincial numbers recorded over the period. While over 45,000 IDPs found refuge within the province, more than 11,000 were headed to neighbouring Nangarhar and Nuristan, and 680 to Kabul province.\textsuperscript{2213} Chapadara district alone accounted for 28,898 of Kunar’s IDPs. Of them, over 25,000 were displaced in March 2019\textsuperscript{2214}, due to clashes between ISKP and the Taliban.\textsuperscript{2215} In early April 2019, UNOCHA noted that overall, half of the population of Chapadara had been forced to flee the area and relocated in nearby Taliban-controlled areas, in Dara-e Pech district or in Asadabad.\textsuperscript{2216}

Other districts of origin of IDPs included Chawkay (10,545, most of them in February 2020), Nurgal (8,603, for the most part displaced in September 2019 and March 2020) and Watapur (6,101, with significant numbers recorded in June 2019).\textsuperscript{2217} These displacement waves are linked to inter-AGEs clashes in Nurgal’s case\textsuperscript{2218}, and to ANDSF operations against ISKP in Chawkay and Nurgal.\textsuperscript{2219} Cross-border shelling was another cause of displacement, such as in Nari district in October 2019.\textsuperscript{2220} In October 2019, clashes between Afghan and Pakistani forces resulted in 3,500 – 4,200 people being displaced in the Kunar border areas.\textsuperscript{2221}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 45,798 persons displaced to Kunar province, all of them being intra-provincial movements. The IDPs mainly headed to Chapadara (18,340), provincial capital Asadabad (7,700) and Chawkay (7,647).\textsuperscript{2222}

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\textsuperscript{2208} VoA, Official: Taliban, IS Deprive Afghan Kids of Polio Vaccine, 18 April 2019, \url{https://www.voanews.com/a/official-taliban-is-deprive-afghan-kids-polio-vaccine/4335296.html}


\textsuperscript{2217} BBC News, حملات بين داعش وطالبان تذهب ألفاتين عائلات إلى مواقع النزوح [Clashes between ISIS and the Taliban in eastern Afghanistan have displaced 2,000 families], 27 March 2019, \url{https://www.bbc.com/arabic/world-50718601}


\textsuperscript{2220} AP, Afghan, Pakistani forces clash on border, 3 civilians killed, 28 October 2019, \url{https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-violence-idUSKBN24P2MD}


\textsuperscript{2222} AP, Afghan, Pakistani forces clash on border, 3 civilians killed, 28 October 2019, \url{https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-violence-idUSKBN24P2MD}
2.20 Kunduz

2.20.1 General description of the province

Kunduz province is located in the north-eastern part of Afghanistan and has borders with Takhar province to the east, Baghlan province to the south, Balkh province to the west and an international border with Tajikistan to the north. Kunduz province is divided into the following administrative units: Aliabad, Chardarah, Dasht-e-Archi, Emamsaheb, Khanabad, Kunduz and Qala-e-Zal. Gulbad, Gultopa and Aqtash are more recently established districts. The provincial capital is Kunduz City.

According to estimates for 2020-2021 by NSIA, the province has a population of 1,136,677, 365,529 of whom live in the provincial capital, Kunduz. The main ethnic group in the province are Pashtuns. Other ethnic groups present include Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazara, Turkmen and Pashai as well as Qazak, Aymaq, Arab, Gujar, Baluch and Nuritani.

A section of Asian Highway AH7 from Kabul passes through the provinces of Parwan and Baghlan and connects the national capital with Kunduz province and the border crossing to Tajikistan at the port of Sher Khan (also Sher Khan Bandar). The Kunduz-Takhar Highway passes through the district of

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2223 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunduz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
2224 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunduz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
2225 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, url, p. 29
2227 Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunduz, 1 February 2017, url; Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, url, p. 29
2228 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, url, p. 29
2229 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunduz Provincial Overview, n.d., url
2230 Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunduz, 1 February 2017, url
2231 Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, url; p.5; RFE/RL, Tajikistan/Afghanistan: Road Bridge Opens With Aim Of Strengthening Trade, 26 August 2007, url
Khanabad and connects the province with Takhar and Badakhshan.\(^{2232}\) In an assessment report published by the German NGO The Johanniter International Assistance (JUH) in November 2019, no movement was possible from dusk until dawn on Khanabad road connecting Kunduz and Takhar provincial capital Taloqan.\(^{2233}\) After having been controlled by the Taliban for about a month, Kunduz-Khanabad road was reopened by Afghan security forces at the end of December 2019.\(^{2234}\)

The province has always been a strategic crossing-point. Being close to Tajikistan, it hosted the Tajikistan Islamic opposition during the Tajik civil war in the 1990s and it provided access to the main smuggling routes to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Moreover, located near a main road to Kabul, it connects the rest of Afghanistan with its northern region.\(^{2235}\)

The inauguration of a new terminal with a capacity of 1,300 passengers at Kunduz airport was announced in February 2017.\(^{2236}\) While officials announced in March 2018 that civil flights would resume soon at Kunduz airport\(^{2237}\), there was no information available on scheduled flights as of July 2020.\(^{2238}\)

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Kunduz maintained its poppy-free status, which it has held since 2007, as poppy cultivation in Kunduz remained under the threshold of 100 hectares, the UNODC threshold for obtaining ‘poppy-free status’.\(^{2239}\)

### 2.20.2 Conflict background and actors in Kunduz

The security situation of Kunduz province has purportedly been deteriorating over recent years\(^{2240}\), including in 2019.\(^{2241}\) Kunduz was the last Taliban stronghold before the Taliban’s fall in 2001, when it was freed by US-led security forces.\(^{2242}\) Kunduz City temporarily fell to the Taliban in September 2015\(^{2243}\) and they almost recaptured it in October 2016 by encircling the city and cutting off the main supply and reinforcement routes.\(^{2244}\) After these attempts by the Taliban to capture Kunduz City, the Afghan security forces tried to regain control over the districts of Dasht-e-Archi, Qala-e-Zal, Emam Sahab and parts of Khanabad, which served as strategic strongholds for the Taliban offensive. The operations took long and control over the districts changed hands a few times, purportedly contributing to instability in the province.\(^{2245}\) In 2017, renewed attempts by the Taliban to get closer to the provincial capital through attacking nearby Dasht-e-Archi took place, but these were repelled by Afghan security forces.\(^{2246}\)

According to a report by AAN in 2017, AGEs had been weakened by night raids and air strikes carried out by coalition forces, which killed key figures of the Taliban movement, like the Taliban shadow governor of the province, Mullah Salam. The appointment of his successor created tensions among the Taliban in Chardarah and Dasht-e-Archi, which weakened the coordination of the movement in the province.\(^{2247}\) However according to an Afghanistan analyst contacted by the Swedish Migration

\(^{2232}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunduz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](url)

\(^{2233}\) JUH/JACK, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Kunduz Province, November 2019, [url](url), p. 20

\(^{2234}\) Ariana News, Kunduz Khan Abad Highway Cleared of Taliban, 26 December 2019, [url](url)

\(^{2235}\) DW, Kunduz violence could destabilize neighbors, 30 September 2015, [url](url)

\(^{2236}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz airport gets new terminal worth $1.4m, 22 February 2017, [url](url)

\(^{2237}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Corruption alleged in Kunduz City airport project, 7 March 2018, [url](url)

\(^{2238}\) Flightradar24, UND/OAUZ Kunduz Afghanistan – Routes, n.d., [url](url); KamAir, Route Map, n.d., [url](url)

\(^{2239}\) UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](url), pp. 21, 27

\(^{2240}\) Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, [url](url); Al Jazeera, Taliban launch deadly attacks as they attend Afghan peace talks, 5 February 2019, [url](url)

\(^{2241}\) Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, [url](url), p. 47

\(^{2242}\) RFE/RL, Afghanistan’s New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](url)

\(^{2243}\) RFE/RL, Afghanistan’s New Northern Flash Points, n.d., [url](url)

\(^{2244}\) Ali, O., The Taleban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 12 October 2016, [url](url)

\(^{2245}\) Ali, O., The Taleban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 10 November 2016, [url](url)

\(^{2246}\) Ali, O., New Taleban Attacks in Kunduz: Less coordination, still well placed to threaten the city, AAN, 9 July 2017, [url](url); Tolonews, Dozens of Afghan Forces Killed In North, 10 September 2018, [url](url)

\(^{2247}\) Ali, O., New Taleban Attacks in Kunduz: Less coordination, still well placed to threaten the city, AAN, 9 July 2017, [url](url)
Agency (Migrationsverket) in January 2020, Kunduz is, together with Baghlan, considered to be the most Taliban-controlled or influenced province in the north-eastern region.\textsuperscript{2248}

In late 2018 the government’s presence reached almost half of the districts Aliabad, Emamsaheb and Khanabad, whilst the remaining parts were contested. Aqtash, Gulbad and Gultepa were largely or entirely under Taliban control.\textsuperscript{2249} Based on research, AAN considered the Taliban to be almost entirely in control of Dasht-e-Aarchi district in May 2019, having established parallel shadow governance structures in absence of most Afghan government officials.\textsuperscript{2250} In September 2019, no presidential elections took place in Dasht-e-Aarchi, Qala-e-Zal, Aqtash, Gulbad, and Gultepa districts, due to the Taliban controlling those districts.\textsuperscript{2251} In a conversation with Landinfo in October 2019, Afghanistan analyst Obaid Ali said that districts in Kunduz province changing hands between government forces and the Taliban was common.\textsuperscript{2252} According to Obaid Ali the Taliban controlled more or less most districts in Kunduz province.\textsuperscript{2253} According to an assessment published by the German NGO The Johanniter International Assistance in November 2019, 80\% of Kunduz province, in particular the rural areas, was under Taliban control, while most district administrative centres were under control of the security forces.\textsuperscript{2254} At the end of 2019 Emamsaheb district was described as ‘largely controlled by the Taliban’.\textsuperscript{2255} As of 2 July 2020 an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Dasht-e-Aarchi, Khanabad and Qala-e-Zal districts as ‘Taliban-controlled’ and the remaining districts in Kunduz province as ‘contested’.\textsuperscript{2256}

According to an April 2018 report by the Jamestown Foundation, a US-based institute for research and analysis, the Islamic State (ISK) set up bases in the northern provinces of Afghanistan, including in Kunduz.\textsuperscript{2257} A June 2019 New York Times article noted that ISKP cells had recently appeared in Kunduz province.\textsuperscript{2258} The Afghan Ministry of Interior claimed to have arrested an ISKP leader in Emamsaheb district in July 2019, accusing him of recruiting in Kunduz.\textsuperscript{2259} The presence of active ISKP cells in Kunduz was also mentioned on Twitter in August and October 2019 by an anonymous account, drawing information from a seemingly large network of local (Twitter) sources.\textsuperscript{2260} An attack on a checkpoint on the border between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in November 2019 was attributed to ISKP by Tajik officials,\textsuperscript{2261} although not claimed by the movement itself. The attackers were said to have entered Tajikistan from Kunduz province, through Qala-e-Zal district, which is said to be almost under complete Taliban control. According to the Qala-e-Zal district governor an ISKP commander had been recruiting fighters in the district.\textsuperscript{2262}

In the past, Kunduz province has been hosting foreign fighters from Central Asia, such as members of the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which were purportedly active along the ‘porous’ Afghan-Tajik border.\textsuperscript{2263} Besides Uzbek and Tajik militants, fighters coming from

\textsuperscript{2248} Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan, 2020, 7 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 48
\textsuperscript{2249} Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN, 7 November 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2250} Bjelica J., One Land, Two Rules (5): The polio vaccination gap, AAN, 9 May 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2251} Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2252} Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkertethetsituation og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22 January 2019, \url{url}, p. 28
\textsuperscript{2253} Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2254} JIH/JACK, Health and Integrated Protection Needs in Kunduz Province, November 2019, \url{url}, pp. 14-15; 20
\textsuperscript{2255} NYT, Roadside Bomb Kills 13 People on Their Way to Afghan Wedding, 28 November 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2256} LWI, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., \url{url}. The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated. Also the map does not indicate the assessment for the newly created Gulbad, Gultepa and Aqtash districts.
\textsuperscript{2257} Jamestown Foundation (The), Islamic State a Deadly Force in Kabul, 6 April 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2258} NYT, U.S. Special Forces Battle Against ISIS Turns to Containment, and Concern, 14 June 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2259} Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces arrest top ISIS leader in Kunduz province, 7 July 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2260} Dr. Drexluddin Khan Spiveyzai (@RisboLensky), [Twitter], posted on: 19 October 2019, \url{url}; Dr. Drexluddin Khan Spiveyzai (@RisboLensky), [Twitter], posted on: 6 August 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2261} Asia Plus, Tajik security forces launch operation to hunt alleged terrorists who turn out to be … ordinary hunters, 11 November 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2262} NYT, ISIS Fighters Attack Outpost in Tajikistan, 6 November 2019, \url{url}; RFE/RL, Reported Attack In Tajikistan Could Have Broad Implications For Central Asia, 6 November 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2263} DW, Kunduz violence could destabilize neighbors, 30 September 2015, \url{url}
Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Chechnya were also reported to have been active in the province. Moreover, an insurgent group called Jabha-ye Qariha (‘the front of those who have memorised the Quran by heart’, the qaris), which is known as the military wing of Jundullah, is purportedly active in Dasht-e-Archi district. Although Jundullah is an independent group, it is allied with the Taliban even if the two insurgent groups have different beliefs.

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Kunduz province is under the responsibility of the 217th ANA corps after ANA’s 20th Division, previously under the ANA 209th Corps, was reassigned in April 2019 to become a new corps, the 217th Corps. As of 30 April 2020, Kunduz province was still included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North is led by German forces and has its headquarters in Mazar-e-Sharif, Balkh province.

2.20.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.20.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 492 civilian casualties (141 deaths and 351 injured) in Kunduz. This represents an increase of 46 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements followed by non-suicide IEDs and air strikes. In the first half of 2020, UNAMA ranked Kunduz province fifth in terms of civilians most affected by the conflict, documenting 205 civilian casualties in the province. Resolute Support recorded between 127 and 175 civilian casualties in Kunduz in the first half of 2020, reporting a 22 % decrease in the number of civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020, compared to the first.

ACLED collected data on 629 violent events in Kunduz province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020; 446 of which were coded as battles, 153 as explosions/remote violence and 30 as violence against civilians. With 170 incidents Kunduz stood out as the district where ACLED registered most violent events, followed by Khanabad and Emamsaheb, with 100 or more incidents each and then followed by Chardarah and Dasht-e-Archi with over 60 incidents each.
ACLED coded 71% of the violent incidents in Kunduz province as battles, nearly all armed clashes, representing the most prevalent incident type in all of Kunduz' districts. 2275 The majority of those armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including police, military or NDS personnel and members of pro-government militias or so-called Arbakis (the term ‘Arbaki’ is often used locally and by the Taliban in reference to members of the Afghan Local Police or other pro-government militias)2276, or government officials. 2277 These also included attacks on military or police facilities such as checkpoints2278, bases2279 and headquarters2280 and on convoys2281 and vehicles. 2282 These attacks inflicted losses among security forces causing concern in December 2019 about a rise in casualties. 2283 At times these incidents also resulted in civilian casualties, as for example in Kunduz City, when a police officer was killed and his two friends, civilians, who were taking a walk with him were wounded on 19 July 2019. 2284 Civilian casualties were also reported during clashes in Chardarah district in March 20192285 or in Dasht-e- Archi district in September 2019. 2286 Civilians were killed in crossfire...
following Taliban attacks on checkpoints in Dasht-e Archi on 9 February 2020 or in Aqtash and Khanabad districts in March 2020.\textsuperscript{2287}

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes. With the approval of the Ministry of Defence’s Operation Khalid on 2 April 2019, Kunduz was one of the provinces in the north-east that security forces’ operations focused on.\textsuperscript{2288} Afghan forces also stepped up operations against the Taliban in Kunduz towards the end of 2019.\textsuperscript{2289} Several of the security operations in Kunduz province were backed by air strikes.\textsuperscript{2290} While operations led to arrests\textsuperscript{2291} and inflicted losses among AGEs,\textsuperscript{2292} some also caused civilian casualties, for example on 23 March 2019 when at least 13 civilians, mostly children from the same family, were killed in joint US - Afghan air strikes near Kunduz City\textsuperscript{2293}, in Gultepa district.\textsuperscript{2294}

The Taliban temporarily overtook district administrative centres in Dasht-e-Archi\textsuperscript{2295}, Qala-e-Zal\textsuperscript{2296} and Khanabad districts in the last quarter of 2019.\textsuperscript{2297} In March 2019, areas in Emamsaheb district were temporarily captured by the Taliban.\textsuperscript{2298}

More than half of the 153 reported incidents of explosions/remote violence registered by ACLED in Kunduz province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020, were air/drone strikes.\textsuperscript{2299} Air strikes represent 13 % of all violent incidents in Kunduz province and were mainly carried out in Khanabad and Emamsaheb districts, followed by Dasht-e-Archi, Chardarah and Kunduz districts.\textsuperscript{2300} While those air strikes destroyed Taliban facilities, such as hideouts, weapon caches and prisons, and inflicted

\textsuperscript{2287} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2289} Tolonews, Afghan Forces Launch Large-Scale Operation In Kunduz: MoD, 21 November 2019, \url{url}; Xinhua, Afghan army kicks off operation to trace militants in restive province, 21 November 2019, \url{url}; Reuters, Taliban kill U.S. force member in northern Afghanistan, 22 December 2019, \url{url}; EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunduz; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2290} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunduz; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2291} Khaama Press, 2 senior Taliban commanders arrested, 2 others killed in the outskirts of Kunduz city, 26 March 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, 3 Taliban militants killed, 2 detained in Balkh and Kunduz provinces, 20 June 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2292} Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 Taliban killed in Kunduz operation, 9 March 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, More than 30 Taliban, ISIS-K militants killed, wounded in latest security operations, 16 March 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 58 rebels, 4 security forces killed in Kunduz operation, 23 March 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, 10 Taliban militants killed, 9 arrested in Kunduz and Badghis operations, 15 April 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces inflict heavy casualties on Taliban militants in Badghis, Kunduz, 2 August 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Airstrike in Kunduz kills top Taliban commander and his comrades, 3 September 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2293} France24, Air strike kills 10 children in Afghanistan, UN says, 25 March 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Women, children among 12 killed in Kunduz blast, 23 March 2019, \url{url}; UNAMA, Kunduz Airstrike Kills 13 Civilians, Mostly Children – Un Initial Findings, 25 March 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2294} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 22-28, 29 March 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2295} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban overrun district; police in denial, 8 September 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Security forces regain Dasht-i-Archi control, 12 October 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2296} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2297} UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/582–S/2019/935, 10 December 2019, \url{url}, p. 6 ; Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2298} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill 10 security forces, capture 7 in Kunduz, 4 March 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Taliban suffer heavy in Afghan Special Forces operation in Kunduz province, 6 March 2019 \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2299} These do not include air strikes carried out during operations categorised by ACLED under ‘battles’. For more information on ACLED’s methodology, please consult the introduction.
\textsuperscript{2300} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunduz; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}
losses among AGEs\textsuperscript{2301}, some also caused civilian casualties, for example in Dasht-e-Archi district in late January 2020, when a US drone hit a family on their way from a funeral\textsuperscript{2302} or in Emamsaheb district on 21 March 2020.\textsuperscript{2303} Four civilians were killed and six others were injured in Dasht-e Archi in March 2020 when their house, located near a military base, was hit by a bomb in response to a Taliban attack on the base.\textsuperscript{2304} Three civilians were killed when a rocket fired by Afghan forces hit a house in Khanabad district (Aqtash district, according to the New York Times)\textsuperscript{2305} in May 2020.\textsuperscript{2306} In the first half of 2020, UNAMA documented more than half of all civilian casualties as a result of Afghan Air Force air strikes in Kunduz and Balkh provinces.\textsuperscript{2307}

Incidents where the Taliban or unidentified armed groups used roadside bombs and IEDs to target Afghan and international security forces or government officials\textsuperscript{2308}, represented 7% of all violent incidents registered by ACLED in Kunduz province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.\textsuperscript{2309} Some of these incidents caused civilian casualties as for example in Khanabad district on 27 November 2019, when at least 13 civilians, mostly members of a family on their way to a wedding were killed when their car hit a roadside bomb.\textsuperscript{2310} Also in Khanabad district, at least six labourers were killed after their car was hit by a roadside bomb on 1 June 2020.\textsuperscript{2311} Five children were killed and three others wounded when a bomb inside or near a madrasa exploded on 14 February 2020 in Dasht-e-Archi district.\textsuperscript{2312}

Incidents of shelling in Kunduz province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 were attributed to both the Taliban and Afghan security forces.\textsuperscript{2313} Some resulted in civilian casualties, for example when a mortar shell fired at Taliban positions hit a house in Qala-e-Zal district on 18 August 2019\textsuperscript{2314}, when a mortar fired by the Taliban hit a house on 17 February 2020, killing a child and injuring eight other members of the same family\textsuperscript{2315}, or when artillery rounds shot by the Afghan military targeting Taliban positions killed eight civilians and injured two in Khanabad district on 16 March 2020.\textsuperscript{2316}


\textsuperscript{2303} NYT, Taliban’s Continued Attacks Show Limits of U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan, 31 January 2020, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilian deaths in Kunduz strike trigger protest, 31 January 2020, url

\textsuperscript{2304} UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict First Quarter Report: 1 January - 31 March 2020, 27 April 2020, url, p. 6; NYT, Pompeo Cuts $1 Billion in Afghan Aid as 2 Leaders Reject Push for Unity, 23 March 2020, url

\textsuperscript{2305} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, url

\textsuperscript{2306} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 7 May 2020, url

\textsuperscript{2307} UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict. midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, url, p. 16

\textsuperscript{2308} UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict. midyear Report: 1 January – 30 June 2020, 27 July 2020, url, p. 16

\textsuperscript{2309} NYT, American Special Forces Soldier Is Killed in Afghanistan, 22 December 2019, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, url

\textsuperscript{2310} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunduz; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url

\textsuperscript{2311} NYT, Roadside Bomb Kills 13 People On Their Way to Afghan Wedding, 28 November 2019, url; Tolonews, 13 Dead in Kunduz Blast All Belonged to Two Families, 28 November 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz: 15 civilians killed in roadside blast, 28 November 2019, url

\textsuperscript{2312} Afghanistan Times, Roadside bomb kills 7 workers in Kunduz, 2 June 2020, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 labourers killed, 6 wounded in Kunduz blast, 2 June 2020, url; NYT,Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, url; UNOCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (1 – 7 June 2020), 10 June 2020, url

\textsuperscript{2313} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, url; Pajhwok afghan news, 5 children injured in Kunduz roadside blast, 14 February 2020, url

\textsuperscript{2314} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunduz; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url

\textsuperscript{2315} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 16-22, 22 August 2019, url

\textsuperscript{2316} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, url

\textsuperscript{2317} UNAMA, Afghanistan. Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict First Quarter Report: 1 January - 31 March 2020, 27 April 2020, url, p. 6
Thirty incidents categorised by ACLED as violence against civilians represented 5% of all violent events registered by ACLED in Kunduz province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020. These included attacks by Afghan or international military forces or by pro-government forces, during which civilians were killed; the killing of civilians in a wedding convoy for refusing to pay money to soldiers; the ISKP-claimed killing of a Shi’ite cleric, another killing of a Shi’ite religious scholar attributed to the Taliban; the Taliban firing at wedding party guests in Kunduz City; the killing of a bodybuilder; the killing of government employees and officials; the killing of off-duty ANDSF personnel; the killing of the brother of a special forces commander; the killing of a tribal elder accused of having relations with the intelligence service; and the killing of a human rights activist by the Taliban or unidentified anti-government armed groups.

While armed clashes were the prevalent type of violent event, as they were in all of Kunduz province’s districts, Kunduz district showed a somewhat different conflict pattern with 13% of all violent incidents in the district involving the use of IEDs and 8% involving shelling or artillery. Over half of the incidents involving the use of IEDs and/or shelling in all of Kunduz province occurred in Kunduz district alone. As elsewhere in the province, some of these incidents also caused civilian casualties in Kunduz City, as did the detonation of bombs attached to a bicycle on 17 July 2019 and on 19 May 2020.

In March 2020 Pajhwok reported on a rise in crime, in particular kidnappings, in Kunduz City. According to the deputy head of the Kunduz Provincial Council, this raised concerns among residents, prompting them to keep their children home from school.

Following reports of the Taliban gathering on the outskirts of the city in March 2019, Kunduz was the focus of Taliban attacks just after the announcement of the spring fighting season. Again following reports of high levels of Taliban activity near the provincial capital, on 31 August 2019, Kunduz was the first of three provincial centres, the others being Pul-e Khumri and Farah, to come

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2317 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunduz; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]

2318 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url]

2319 NYT, Where Violence Can Strike Anywhere, Even at a Wedding Party on the Move, 1 April 2019, [url]

2320 Dr. Drexluddin Khan Spiveyvazii (@Risololensky), [Twitter], posted on: 4 August 2019, [url]; Melisa (@cmellaniac), [Twitter], posted on: 4 August 2019, [url]

2321 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url]

2322 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, [url]

2323 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url]


2325 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url]

2326 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, [url]

2327 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 12-18, 18 April 2019, [url]

2328 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunduz; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]

2329 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Kunduz; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]

2330 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 12-18, 18 July 2019, [url]

2331 TV, Bicycle bomb kills two, injures 18 in Kunduz city, 19 May 2020, [url]

2332 Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz residents in fear as kidnapping incidents spike, 9 March 2020, [url]

2333 NYT, After Deadly Insider Attack, U.S. Airstrikes Kill 14 Civilians, Afghans Say, 23 March 2019, [url]

2334 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 12-18, 18 April 2019, [url]; Tolonews, Clashes Ongoing Near Kunduz City: Officials, 13 April 2019, [url]; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s attempt at capturing Kunduz City thwarted, 15 April 2019, [url]

2335 UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/73/990/–S/2019/703, 3 September 2019, [url], p. 6
under Taliban attack from different directions. This was the third time Kunduz came under Taliban attack since 2015 and it happened at a time when talks between the Taliban and the United States were finalizing. The Taliban attacked Kunduz from PD1, PD2 and PD3 to the north and north-west, areas that are part of the city but rural in character, where they have maintained a strong presence and where they enjoy the support of the mainly Pashtun population. They were able to enter deep into the city and briefly occupy the health department and a hospital. According to initial reports, civilians stayed in their homes on 31 August 2019. Exit routes were contested, phone lines were disrupted and electricity interrupted, affecting water supply. Markets, bazaars and shops were closed. In the evening a suicide bombing was carried out on Kunduz’s main square, wounding the provincial police chief. By the next day the fighting had ended and phone and power lines were partly restored, according to UNOCHA. Initial reports mentioned at least 61 civilian casualties. In the following days sporadic clashes occurred in some parts of the city, but the situation was described as having returned to normal and under control. However the main routes to and from the city remained closed in the beginning of September 2019. This also affected food prices.

According to verifications by UNAMA, the fighting in Kunduz between 31 August and 11 September 2019 caused 99 civilian casualties, more than the number of civilian casualties in the other two provincial capitals that had also come under attack. Civilian homes were damaged by the fighting. Following the 31 August attack on Kunduz, a suicide attack was carried out in the city on 2 September 2019, killing more than ten people and wounding dozens, including civilians. The suicide attack took place in the outskirts of the city, near the highway connecting Kunduz with other provinces. On 19 May 2020 the Taliban again attacked different parts and several checkpoints of

2337 Tolonews, Afghan Forces Responding Taliban Attack In Kunduz, 31 August 2019, url
2338 Ali, O., Ruttit, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pule-e-Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, url
2339 Ali, O., Ruttit, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pule-e-Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, url
2340 NYT, Taliban Attack Second Afghan City in 2 Days as Peace Deal Near, 1 September 2019, url
2341 UNOCHA, Flash Update 1 – Armed clashes in Kunduz city (31 Aug 2019), 31 August 2019, url; NYT, Afghan City Survives Third Taliban Assault, but Loses a Top Defender, 31 August 2019, url
2342 UNOCHA, Flash Update 1 – Armed clashes in Kunduz city (31 Aug 2019), 31 August 2019, url
2343 Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, url; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) Meeting 04 Sep 2019 at 09:00 AM in ACTED Kunduz Office 4 September 2019, url, p. 1
2344 Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz City comes under multi-pronged rebel attack, 31 August 2019, url; BBC, Afghanistan conflict: Taliban storm key northern city, 31 August 2019, url
2345 Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz police chief wounded in blast amid clashes, 31 August 2019, url
2346 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Flash Update 2 – Lull in armed clashes in Kunduz city and new clashes in Pule-e-Khumri (1 September 2019), 1 September 2019, url
2347 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Flash Update 2 – Lull in armed clashes in Kunduz city and new clashes in Pule-e-Khumri (1 September 2019), 1 September 2019, url
2349 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Update on the situation in Kunduz city and Pule-e-Khumri Flash Update No.4 (09 September 2019), 9 September 2019, url
2350 UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) Meeting 04 Sep 2019 at 09:00 AM in ACTED Kunduz Office 4 September 2019, url, p. 1; Salaam Times, Kunduz residents describe miserable living conditions after Taliban offensive, 9 September 2019, url
2351 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 35
2352 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Update on the situation in Kunduz city and Pule-e-Khumri Flash Update No.4, 9 September 2019, url
2353 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, url; Khaama Press, Update: Suicide attack in Kunduz leaves at least 17 dead, wounded, 2 September 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 policemen killed, 7 injured in Kunduz suicide blast, 2 September 2019, url
2354 Tolonews, Suicide Bombing Targets Afghan Forces In Kunduz, 2 September 2019, url
Kunduz City.\textsuperscript{2355} One civilian was killed in this attack. The attacks were repelled and the situation reportedly returned to normal after a few hours of clashes.\textsuperscript{2356} Some fighting reportedly continued in one on the city’s suburbs.\textsuperscript{2357}

There were reports from the north-eastern region, including from Kunduz province, about electricity and mobile phone networks being interrupted before and during the presidential election in September 2019.\textsuperscript{2358} UNAMA documented at least 25 telecommunications towers across Kunduz province being damaged by the Taliban.\textsuperscript{2359} According to AAN telecommunication networks’ service in Kunduz remained cut until 1 October.\textsuperscript{2360} Kunduz province saw the lowest turnout for the presidential election of 28 September 2019 in Afghanistan. This was attributed to bad security.\textsuperscript{2361} In an attempt to disrupt the elections, the Taliban fired rockets on Kunduz City, causing civilian casualties.\textsuperscript{2362} Together with Kabul City, Kunduz was where most incidents were recorded on election day.\textsuperscript{2363} Markets, shops were closed and supply of goods into and from Kunduz province was cut due to threats and insecurity before and during the elections.\textsuperscript{2364}

Security incidents, including attacks on checkpoints and closures as a result of clashes were reported on both the Kunduz-Baghlan and Kunduz-Takhar Highways during the reporting period.\textsuperscript{2365} The Taliban at times were able to block access and prevent movement on those highways.\textsuperscript{2366} Sources told AAN that in the aftermath of the 31 August 2019 attack on Kunduz the Taliban continued to set up mobile checkpoints on both Kunduz-Baghlan and the Kunduz-Takhar Highways.\textsuperscript{2367} Taliban checkpoints on both highways were still operational in 2020.\textsuperscript{2368} UNOCHA noted that fighting between AGEs and security forces impacted humanitarian partners’ access to people in need in Dasht-e Archi and other districts in Kunduz province in February 2020.\textsuperscript{2369}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2355} NYT, Clinic Bombed as Afghan Forces Fend Off Taliban Attack on Kunduz, 19 May 2020, \url{url}; Guardian (The), Despite the ‘peace process’, Afghanistan’s anguish endures, 20 May 2020, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 24 Talibban killed, 60 wounded in Kunduz battle, 19 May 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2356} Tolonews, Taliban Attack Kunduz City, Clash With Security Forces, 19 May 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2357} NYT, Clinic Bombed as Afghan Forces Fend Off Taliban Attack on Kunduz, 19 May 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2358} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, \url{url}; Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjon og konfliktmønster i 2019, 22 January 2020, \url{url}. 10; NYT, To Disrupt Elections, Taliban Turn to an Old Tactic: Destroying Cell Towers, 2 October 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2359} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}. p. 35
\item \textsuperscript{2360} Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2361} Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2362} Pajhwok Afghan News, Would-be suicide bomber killed in Kunduz, 28 September 2019, \url{url}; Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2363} UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, A/74/582–S/2019/935, 10 December 2019, \url{url}. p. 5; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2364} Ali, O., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, AAN, 30 October 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2367} Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taliban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2368} Ariana News, Taliban set up checkpoint – Baghlan-Kunduz Highway, 16 February 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (13 April – 20 April 2020), 22 April 2020, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz: Taliban take tax on imported goods, 22 June 2020, \url{url}
\item \textsuperscript{2369} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (17 February – 23 February 2020), 26 February 2020, \url{url}
\end{itemize}
In its report covering 2019 UNAMA noted that in certain parts of Afghanistan, including Kunduz and Dash-e-Archi, several private telecommunications companies, with the exception of Salaam Telecommunications, shut down their services in the evening following up on threats and orders issued by the Taliban in order to prevent being tracked down or targeted during operations.\(^{2370}\)

Local officials accused to Taliban of setting fire to a girls’ school in Qala-e-Zal district in October 2019.\(^{2371}\) While in the framework of its attacks on health care initiative, the World Health Organisation (WHO) did not register such attacks in Kunduz province in 2019\(^{2372}\). On 2 February 2020, an air strike by the Afghan Air Force inflicted damage to a health clinic and a school building in Gultepa district.\(^{2373}\) In an effort to push back Taliban attacks on Kunduz City on 19 May 2020, but also on other districts\(^{2374}\), joint US–Afghan forces bombed a hospital in Chardarah district.\(^{2375}\) At least two civilians standing outside the hospital were killed. Health services there only resumed on 2 June 2020.\(^{2376}\)

### 2.20.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 31 274 persons displaced by conflict from Kunduz province, 97\% of whom were displaced within the province itself, while others sought refuge in Kabul, Takhar and to a lesser extent in Balkh, Herat and Faryab provinces. Over 60\% were displaced from Kunduz district, in particular in August, September, November and December 2019.\(^{2377}\) While initially no significant displacement was observed when the Taliban launched their attack on Kunduz City on 31 August 2019, thousands were displaced within the city in early September 2019, with many returning home in the following days.\(^{2378}\) UNOCHA recorded a few thousand people displaced due to conflict within Kunduz district in September 2019.\(^{2379}\) Large groups were also displaced from Dasht-e-Archi district in September and October 2019 and from Emamsaheb district in July and September 2019. All IDPs from Emamsaheb were displaced within the district. The majority of the IDPs from Dasht-e-Archi were also displaced within the district, while a few hundred sought refuge in Kunduz.\(^{2380}\)

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 33 866 persons displaced by conflict to Kunduz province. In addition to the 30 289 people displaced within the province, Kunduz also hosted IDPs from Takhar province and in 2020 some from Faryab province. Kunduz district hosted the majority of the people displaced to Kunduz province in the reporting period, most from within the district, but also from other districts in Kunduz province as well as from Takhar province. Both Dasht-e-Archi and Emamsaheb district hosted only IDPs from within the district.\(^{2381}\)

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2.21 Laghman

2.21.1 General description of the province

Map 21: Afghanistan – Laghman province, source: UNOCHA

UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Laghman Province – District Atlas, April 2014,
Laghman is located in eastern Afghanistan and it borders on the provinces of Panjshir and Nuristan to the north, Kunar to the east, Nangarhar to the south, and Kabul and Kapisa to the west.\(^{2383}\) Laghman province is divided into the following administrative units: Alingar, Alishang, Dawlatshah, Mehtarlam, Qarghayi\(^{2384}\), and Bad Pash (also Bad Pakh); the latter became a district of its own in 2011. The provincial capital of Laghman is Mehtarlam.\(^{2385}\)

According to Afghanistan NSIA, the population of Laghman is estimated at 493,488 in 2020/21\(^{2386}\) and is composed of majority Pashtuns, followed by Tajik and Pashai tribes.\(^{2387}\) The province is mostly mountainous, a fact that has favoured the insurgents in the past, who used to ‘flee into remote mountain ranges’, according to a report from 2014.\(^{2388}\)

The Kabul-Jalalabad Highway passes through Qarghayi district\(^{2389}\), where a secondary road branches off to connect to Nurgeram in Nuristan via the provincial capital Mehtarlam.\(^{2390}\) Bad Pash district has been a strategic crossing-point for Afghan and foreign insurgents coming from the border area and moving deeper into Afghanistan.\(^{2391}\)

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, opium-poppy cultivation levels in Laghman (2,092 hectares) remained similar to 2017 (2,257 hectares) with insignificant changes at district level.\(^{2392}\) According to AAN, in 2019, opium poppy cultivation in the eastern provinces including in Laghman has decreased by 76% compared to 2018.\(^{2393}\)

\subsection*{2.21.2 Conflict background and actors in Laghman}

According to Khaama Press reporting in October 2018, Laghman, which was described as one of the ‘relatively calm’ provinces of Afghanistan, has seen a rise in activities by Taliban and ISKP militants in some remote districts of the province.\(^{2394}\)

Purportedly, Alingar district, which was mainly under the influence of the Taliban in the past, reportedly saw an increased presence of IS fighters, as reported in February 2018.\(^{2395}\) As of February 2019, the UN Secretary General described Laghman as one of the ISKP ‘strongholds’ in Afghanistan\(^{2396}\) operating in the mountainous Alingar and Chapa Dara districts.\(^{2397}\)

In December 2019, ANSF killed 20 Taliban militants, including the shadow governor of Taliban for Laghman province, Zainulabedin.\(^{2398}\) The MoD published the names of some the Taliban militants who

\begin{footnotes}
\footnoteref{2387} BMC, The midwife helped me ... otherwise I could have died': women’s experience of professional midwifery services in rural Afghanistan - a qualitative study in the provinces Kunar and Laghman, 6 March 2020, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Laghman province, n.d., \url{https://pajhwokafghan.com/franchnews/background-profile-of-laghman-province/}.  
\footnoteref{2389} INS, Country profile for Afghanistan, alerts, 7 February 2020, \url{https://www.ins.org.uk/assets/docs/afghanistan-country-profile.pdf}.  
\footnoteref{2394} Khaama Press, Four key Taliban group leaders ambushed in Laghman province, 1 October 2018, \url{https://khaama.com/a/news/126790/four-key-taliban-group-leaders-ambushed-in-laghman-province}.  
\footnoteref{2396} UN Secretary-General, Eighth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat, 1 February 2019, \url{https://www.un.org/development/desa/diax/ps诠files/UN,-DPA-and-IEC,-2019.-Presidential-Elections.pdf}.  
\end{footnotes}
were killed during the strike including the aforementioned shadow governor, and Qari Saboor, the head of the Taliban red unit for Laghman province, Qari Saqib, a local Taliban group leader, Janatgul, a Taliban fighter, Qari Miraj, former shadow governor of Taliban for Ailingar district, Ahmadshah, Taliban shadow district governor for Ailingar district, Qari Anzargul, a Taliban group leader, Qari Mirab, a Taliban platoon leader, Haji Ahmadshah, a Taliban group leader, Qari Ebrahim, a Taliban fighter, Fazal Rab, a local Taliban fighter, Toheed, a Taliban fighter, Muheet, a Taliban fighter, Gulab, a Taliban fighter, Malang, a Taliban fighter.

In March 2020, ISKP shadow governor for Laghman province and 30 fighters of the group surrendered to ANSF. During the same period, several media sources cited Noorullah Shirzada, from Agence France Press (AFP), showing in a photo the presence of Taliban fighters in Ailingar district. In May 2020, Etilaatroz indicated that Taliban fighters had a widespread presence and carried out their activities in Mehtarlam district and in a number of other districts of Laghman province including Alishang district. During this same period, the Taliban shadow governor for Laghman province was Mawlawi Abdul Hadi Pashayee, and the head of the Taliban military commission for the mentioned province was Mawlawi Qais. Taliban based in Ailingar district were reportedly recruiting new fighters via mosques, Quranic and school, and amongst friends and relatives. On 10 May 2020, ANSF killed Omar Khater, the Taliban intelligence chief for Laghman province.

According to information by the LWJ collected and presented in a map released on 6 July 2020, Alishang, Ailingar and Dawlatshah districts of Laghman province were contested.

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Laghman province is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps, which falls under Train, Advise, and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), led by US and Polish forces.

### 2.21.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.21.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 282 civilian casualties, including 80 killed and 202 injured in Laghman province, which represents 4% increase compared to 2018. The leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, Non-Suicide IEDs, and suicide IEDs. According to SIGAR, RS (Resolute Support) recorded between 51 and 75 civilian casualties in Laghman province during the first quarter.
of 2020, and the mentioned source recorded between 76 and 100 civilian casualties during the second quarter of 2020.

According to ACLED data, between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 there were 292 security incidents recorded in Laghman province, of whom 198 were coded as battles, 77 remote violence and 17 incidents of violence against civilians.

In May 2020, clashes between ANSF and the Taliban took place in Alishang district. On 7 July 2020, Khaama Press cited 21st Corps stating that the Afghan security forces killed 16 Taliban fighters and wounded 6 others in Sarkund Baba area of Laghman province, situated on the highway between Kabul and Jalalabad.

Recent incidents that caused civilian casualties in Laghman province in 2019 and 2020 include: in September 2019, seven members of a family were killed, and six others were wounded when a Taliban mortar hit their house in Alishang district; in the same district in the area of Qalatak, in October 2019, three civilians were killed, and three others were wounded in an operation conducted by a Special Forces unit of NDS; on 16 October 2019, two security forces and two civilians were killed, and six others were wounded when a car bomb exploded near the police headquarters of Alishang district. On 23 December 2019, three civilians were killed, and at least seven others were wounded in an explosion at a funeral ceremony of tribal leader in Laghman province; on 2 May 2020, three civilians were killed in Mehtarlam after a bomb set in a motorcycle went off in front of the prison; on 23 May 2020, four children below the age of six were killed after a mortar shell hit a residential house in Gerdi Saleb area of Alishang district.

### 2.21.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 4,816 persons displaced from Laghman province, with 98% displaced within the province itself (mainly in the provincial capital

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2410 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, p. 69
2411 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, p. 72
2412 Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Laghman; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, url
2413 NYT, Afghan war casualty report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 soldiers, as many Taliban killed in Laghman firefight, 11 May 2020, url
2414 Khaama Press, 22 Taliban militants killed, wounded on Kabul-Jalalabad highway, 7 July 2020, url
2415 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, url
2416 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, url
2417 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, url
2418 1TV, Three children killed in blast at funeral in Laghman, 23 December 2019, url; Tolonews, Three civilians killed in explosion at funeral in Laghman, 23 December 2019, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 30 December 2019, url
2419 NYT, Afghan war casualty report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, url; Khaama Press, Explosion close to a prison leaves 3 dead in Laghman province of Afghanistan, 2 May 2020, url
2420 NYT, Afghan war casualty report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, url
district of Mehtarlam and Bad Pash district), and the remaining 2% were displaced into Panjshir and Parwan provinces.\textsuperscript{2421}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 4,809 persons displaced to Laghman province, with almost 98% coming from within the province itself and 2% from Kabul and Nangarhar provinces.\textsuperscript{2422}

In December 2019, fighting and military operations continued in several eastern provinces including Laghman province.\textsuperscript{2423} During the first week of March 2020, around 2,296 people were displaced due to continued fighting in Alishang, Alingar and Mehterlam districts.\textsuperscript{2424} During the entire month of March clashes between ANSF and AGEs in Laghman province were reported.\textsuperscript{2425} During the period of 15 – 21 June 2020, at least 1,000 nomad families (7,000 people) were blocked in Laghman province due to the COVID-19 restrictions.\textsuperscript{2426}

### 2.22 Logar

#### 2.22.1 General description of the province

[Map 22: Afghanistan – Logar province, source: UNOCHA\textsuperscript{2427}]

Logar province is located in the central region of Afghanistan, about 65 kilometres south of Kabul\textsuperscript{2428}, and has borders with the provinces of Kabul to the north, Nangarhar to the north-east, Paktya to the

\textsuperscript{2421} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2422} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2423} UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian update, 23 December – 29 December 2019, \url{url}, p. 1

\textsuperscript{2424} UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian update, 9 March – 15 March 2020, \url{url}, p. 1

\textsuperscript{2425} UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian update, 16 March – 22 March 2020, \url{url}, p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian update, 23 March – 29 March 2020, \url{url}, p. 1

\textsuperscript{2426} UNOCHA, Afghanistan weekly humanitarian update, 15 – 21 June 2020, \url{url}, p. 2

\textsuperscript{2427} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Logar Province - District Atlas, April 2014, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2428} Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2019: Logar Province Background Profile, n.d., \url{url}
south and south-east, Ghazni to the south-west and Wardak to the west. Logar province is divided into the following administrative units: Azra, Baraki Barak, Charkh, Kharwar, Khoshi, Mohammad Agha and Pul-e Alam. The provincial capital of Logar is Pul-e Alam. Azra district, in the eastern part of the province has an international border of a few kilometres with Pakistan’s province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Logar province has a population of 434,374. Most of the province’s population lives in the fertile plains of the Logar Valley. The main ethnic groups in Logar are Pashtun, Tajik and Hazara. Kharwar and Azra districts are entirely Pashtun-inhabited. Charkh district has a Tajik majority. In the remaining districts, Tajiks constitute between 20 and 40 % of the population. Hazara reportedly reside in Khoshi and Pul-e Alam districts. Kuchi nomads can be found in Kharwar and Pul-e Alam districts. The majority of the population of Logar province are Sunni Muslim, but there are also Shia. In January 2020, the detention of ethnic Pashtun activist Manzoor Pashteen reportedly caused protests in Logar province.

Logar connects Kabul to Afghanistan’s south-eastern region, Greater (Loya) Paktya, through the Kabul-Gardez Highway that runs east from the main national ring road and over the Tera Pass, traversing the districts of Mohammad Agha and Pul-e Alam. Logar province has no functioning airstrip and air traffic is regularly interrupted by bad weather conditions.

UNODC’s Opium Survey from 2018 listed Logar province as poppy-free since 2013. UNODC data obtained by AAN in June 2020 indicated a 52 % reduction in opium poppy cultivation in the provinces of the central region (including Logar province) and the central highlands.

Logar province is rich in chromite ore, with deposits extracted illegally and smuggled to Pakistan. The province also houses the country’s largest copper deposit, the mine of Mes Aynak in Mohammad Agha district. Logar’s natural resources have caused local rivalries over revenues coming from mineral deposits. Due to shrinking resources, population growth and sedentarisation processes, the

2429 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Logar Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
2431 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Logar Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url; Tolonews, Insecurity Hardens Access to Logar’s Azra District, 30 June 2019, url
2432 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, url, p. 4
2433 Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul’s Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, url
2435 Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul’s Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, url
2436 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Logar Provincial Overview, n.d., url
2437 RFE/RL, Detention of Ethnic Pashtun Activist Triggers Protests in Pakistan, Afghanistan, 28 January 2020, url
2438 Ali, O., The Empty Streets of Mohammad Agha: Logar’s Struggle Against the Taleban, AAN, 15 December 2014, url; Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul’s Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, url
2439 UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Afghanistan 2020, 17 December 2019, url, p. 11
2440 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 19
2443 Tolonews, Logar Security ‘Improves’ after More Forces Deployed, 4 May 2019, url
province has witnessed conflicts between nomads and settlers, for example in Azra and Baraki Barak districts.

### 2.22.2 Conflict background and actors in Logar

Logar province has served as a strategic crossing-point for Taliban fighters, not only due to its proximity to Kabul, but also because it provided easy access to AGEs’ fronts in the nearby provinces of Nangarhar, Paktya, Paktika, Khost, Wardak and Ghazni, as well as in Pakistan. Kharwar, a mountainous district in the south of the province, was among the first ones in the central region where Taliban groups started to reorganise in 2005. According to a 2014 report by AAN’s analyst Obaid Ali, the security situation in Logar province started to deteriorate in 2011. The districts of Azra, Baraki Barak, Charkh, Kharwar and Mohammad Agha were described as the areas worst hit by the Taliban.

In 2017, the situation in Logar was reported to have worsened, with the Taliban’s Miran Shah Shura, based in the region of North Waziristan in Pakistan and composed exclusively of Haqqani Network members, reportedly holding authority in the province. In 2019-2020, Logar is described as among the relatively volatile and insecure provinces in the central region of the country, ‘where the Taliban have influence and control, regularly attacking government forces in both the provincial capital and the districts’. In May 2020, the UN Security Council reported on a reorganisation of the Taliban shadow governance and military structure in several provinces, with key new appointments made in Logar province.

According to AAN analysts Ruttig and Sabawoon, Logar province, together with neighbouring provinces such as Wardak, western Nangarhar and Surobi district of Kabul province, are ‘part of a belt that could cut off the capital from southern and eastern Afghanistan’ if the security situation would escalate. Various causes for the continued insecurity throughout Logar are cited by local sources, such as the Taliban’s resilient local structures in the province and a widespread regional sympathy for the Taliban, incompetent high government officials and a lack of proper coordination among security forces, government forces’ harassment that pushes local people into the insurgency, as well as the hashish and chromite smuggling and the fight over its control. Security analysts describe Logar province as an example of ‘statically disputed territory’, without much change in territory and population control, but

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2445 Giustozzi, A., Nomad-Settler Conflict in Afghanistan Today, AREU, October 2019, url, p. 27
2446 Giustozzi, A., Nomad Sedentarisation Processes in Afghanistan and Their Impact on Conflict, AREU, September 2019, url, p. 10
2450 Pajhwok Afghan News, More than 50pc of Logar Being Controlled by Taliban, 26 June 2017, url
2451 Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Organization and Structure, Landinfo, 23 August 2017, url, p. 6
2452 Khaama Press, Coalition Airstrike Kills Taliban Leader Mullah Amin Gul and His 3 Comrades in Logar, 7 April 2019, url
2453 Warden, S., Past as Prologue? What the Parliamentary Election Results Tell Us About the September Presidential Election, AAN, 23 August 2019, url; Mashal, M., [Twitter], posted on: 1 July 2020, url; Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul’s Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar Province, AAN, 18 July 2020, url
2454 An Afghan analyst Lifos spoke to in January 2020. Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, url, p. 52
2455 Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul’s Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, url
with intensive fighting indicating that increasing efforts are needed from the actors in the conflict to hold their terrain.2458

Out of the six rural districts and the one surrounding Logar’s capital Pul-e Alam, the government officially claims to control three: the provincial capital, Khoshi and Mohammad Agha. Security analysts and local sources, however, give a different picture.2459 An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 2 July 2020, indicated Kharwar, Charkh and Azra districts as ‘Taliban-controlled’ and Pul-e Alam, Mohammad Agha and Baraki Barak districts as ‘contested’. A USDOD assessment of July 2019, reported by LWJ in the same map, designated Kharwar and Charkh districts as ‘contested’ and Azra district as ‘government-influenced’. Khoshi district was categorised as ‘government-controlled’ or ‘undetermined’ in this assessment.2460 According to local sources, cited by AAN mid-July 2020, the Taliban are present in several villages just a few kilometres from the provincial capital, several areas in Mohammad Agha district are under Taliban control, heavy Taliban activity is reported in Baraki Barak, Charkh and Kharwar districts with the government only holding the district centres or small areas around them, Khoshi district is reportedly contested and the situation in Azra district is reported as volatile with the district centre besieged by the Taliban for the past 15 years.2461

Media sources in 2019 and 2020 reported on a Taliban presence in the districts of Charkh,2462 Azra2463, Baraki Barak2464, Mohammad Agha2465, Kharwar2466 and Khoshi.2467 The area of Charkh district has long been largely Taliban controlled2468 and is described as one of Logar’s most insecure districts.2469 According to a May 2019 USIP report, the Afghan government had a limited presence in Charkh district, retaining compounds in the district centre and controlling the main road, but its control remaining confined to its bases and checkpoints. District residents stated Taliban militants have returned soon whenever the government’s military operations were concluded; adding that Taliban influence in the region has grown with relatives joining the militant group for the purpose of revenge.2470 The Taliban are reported to have established training centres in the district.2471 Arab, Chechen, Uzbek and Pakistani militants (some of them affiliated with Al Qaeda2472 - see below) have reportedly been seen in the Taliban’s ranks in Charkh.2473 However, according to Charkh’s district’s governor, cited by Tolonews in April 2020, the centre of the district is under government control.2474 In June - July 2019, a Taliban

2458 Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul’s Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, url
2459 Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul’s Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, url
2460 LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., url (LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.)
2461 Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul’s Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, url
2464 Pajhwok Afghan News, Gov’t Unable to Collect Taxes in 5 Logar Districts, 9 October 2019, url; AAN, The ‘Reduction in Violence’ Week: What Did [Some of the] People Think?, 28 February 2020, url; Reportedly, Taliban Launch Awareness Campaign on Coronavirus, 30 March 2020, url; Clark, K., Voices from the Districts, The Violence Mapped (2): Assessing the Conflict a Month after the US-Taliban Agreement, AAN, 8 April 2020, url
2465 Tolonews, Logar Security ‘Improves’ after More Forces Deployed, 4 May 2019, url
2466 Pajhwok Afghan News, Gov’t Unable to Collect Taxes in 5 Logar Districts, 9 October 2019, url
2467 Pajhwok Afghan News, Gov’t Unable to Collect Taxes in 5 Logar Districts, 9 October 2019, url
2469 Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign Militants Swell Taliban Ranks in Charkh District: Official, 30 April 2019, url
2470 Jackson, A., Perspectives on Peace from Taliban Areas of Afghanistan, USIP, May 2019, url, pp. 6, 12
2471 Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign Militants Swell Taliban Ranks in Charkh District: Official, 30 April 2019, url
2472 Khaama Press, Chechen and Chinese Militants Among Dozens Killed, Wounded in Logar Operation, 2 August 2019, url
2473 Pajhwok Afghan News, Foreign Militants Swell Taliban Ranks in Charkh District: Official, 30 April 2019, url
2474 Tolonews, Afghan Forces Launch Operation in Taliban-Held District in Logar, 22 April 2020, url
sieve on the eastern district of Azra was reported. Taliban militants reportedly seized all roads connecting the district with the rest of the province and closed several of them, hindering trade routes as well as residents’ free movement. Azra is described as ‘a strategic district’, from where the Taliban could threaten Kabul and other neighbouring provinces. In Mohammad Agha district, the village of Surkhab is reported to be the most embattled area. An important base for Taliban decision-making is located in Zurmat district of neighbouring Paktya province, bordering Logar’s southern district of Kharwar, where Taliban militants from Logar province are reportedly active.

The Taliban are reportedly involved in disturbing security on the Kabul-Gardez Highway, running through the districts of Mohammad Agha and Pul-e Alam, regularly blocking the highway and pulling people from vehicles whom they suspect are government or NGO employees.

Several prominent Taliban figures were reported to have been killed or arrested in various districts. In March 2019, two key Taliban commanders, known as Shafiullah and Abu Zar, reportedly involved in planning high-profile attacks, were killed in Mohammad Agha district. In the same month, notorious Taliban commander Qari Waqar, purportedly involved in the killing of several police officers, was detained in Logar’s capital Pul-e Alam. In April 2019, three prominent Taliban figures, including Qari Mohammad Yusuf and Mohammad Wali, were arrested and Taliban group leader Mullah Amin Gul was killed in the area of the provincial capital. In June 2019, the Afghan Ministry of Defence reported the killing of the Taliban’s shadow governor for Logar province, known as Haji Lala, and his two deputies in Charkh district. However, in August 2019, local officials in Logar claimed Haji Lala was killed in that month. In July 2019, a group of senior Taliban leaders, including Red Unit commander Qudrat, the Taliban shadow district chief for Mohammad Agha district and the Taliban military commission chief for Khushi district, were reportedly killed in the outskirts of the provincial capital Pul-e Alam. In August 2019, the Taliban’s shadow district chief for Azra district, known as Maulvi Mohammadullah or Farooqi and reportedly leading a 45-member Taliban group, was killed in Pul-e Alam. In November 2019, a prominent Taliban commander known as Waisuddin was killed in Mohammad Agha district.

2479 Bleuer, Ch. et al., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Insurgent-Controlled Zurmat District, AAN, 4 September 2019, url.
2482 See sources mentioned below.
2484 Khaama Press, Taliban’s High-Profile Attack Planner Killed in Logar Airstrike, 21 March 2019, url.
2486 Khaama Press, 3 Prominent Taliban Leaders Arrested by Afghan Forces in Logar Province, 26 April 2019, url.
2487 Khaama Press, Coalition Airstrike Kills Taliban Leader Mullah Amin Gul and His 3 Comrades in Logar, 7 April 2019, url.
According to the UN Security Council, ISKP has tried to expand its influence in the provinces of Logar and Paktya in the past, however without success.\(^{2493}\) Former Logar Taliban commander Abdul Hasib was reported to have taken over ISKP leadership for Afghanistan after leader Hafiz Saeed Khan was killed in July 2016. Abdul Hasib was killed in a joint Afghan and US operation in April 2017.\(^{2494}\) No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP have been recorded in Logar between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 by ACLED. ACLED did record more than 30 incidents in which Taliban and/or ISKP militants were wounded and/or killed during military operations in all seven districts of Logar.\(^{2495}\) In June 2019, ANDSF forces arrested an ISKP commander, known as Shafi Gul and reportedly intending to recruit ISKP militants from Pul-e Alam City.\(^{2496}\)

According to the UN Security Council, Al Qaeda is covertly active in 12 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces, including in Logar.\(^{2497}\) In August 2019, a dozen Chechen and Chinese fighters, reportedly part of an Al Qaeda network, were killed alongside Taliban militants in Charkh district.\(^{2498}\) In October 2019, a prominent Haqqani commander, reportedly maintaining links with Al Qaeda, was killed in Mohammad Agha district, together with several Arab and Pakistani militants.\(^{2499}\) In May 2020, information reported to the UN Security Council suggested ‘that discussions were held among senior Haqqani Network figures to form a new joint unit of 2 000 armed fighters in cooperation with and funded by Al Qaeda’. This newly established unit would be split into two operational zones with the forces in the Loya Paktya area (including Khost, Logar, Paktika and Paktya provinces) under Hafiz Azizuddin Haqqani’s command.\(^{2500}\)

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Logar is under the responsibility of the 203\(^{rd}\) ANA Corps. Logar province is included in the Task Force Southeast (TF-Southeast), which is part of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TF-Southeast is led by US forces and has its headquarters in Paktya province.\(^{2501}\) NDS unit 01, a paramilitary CIA-backed militia accused of human rights abuses, is reported to operate in the central region, including in Logar province.\(^{2502}\) In May 2019, the deployment of additional ANDSF forces in the insecure parts of Logar province was reported.\(^{2503}\)

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\(^{2494}\) USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, October 2019, [url](https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-terrorism/), p. 294

\(^{2495}\) EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Logar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](https://www.acled.org/na/)
2.22.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.22.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 218 civilian casualties (95 deaths and 123 injured) in Logar province. This represents an increase of 52% compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were air strikes, followed by ground engagements and targeted/deliberate killings. Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Logar province in the first quarter of 2020 and between 101 and 125 civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020. Logar is mentioned as one out of four provinces (alongside Faryab, Laghman and Kunar) with a relatively high number of civilian casualties regarding to its population number. Security analysts have registered an increased conflict activity in Logar, with peaks and intensified fighting recorded in 2019 and 2020. The number of security incidents in Logar in March 2020 was reportedly three and a half times higher than in March 2019.

ACLED collected data on 468 violent events in Logar province from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, of which 295 were coded as ‘battles’, 148 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ and 25 as ‘violence against civilians’. Pul-e Alam, where Logar’s provincial capital is located, stood out as the district where most incidents were reported, with 184 incidents recorded, followed by the districts of Mohammad Agha, Baraki Barak and Charkh. In Logar’s remaining districts, 16 or less incidents were reported. Most violent incidents in Logar province were recorded in the third quarter of 2019.

ACLED coded around 63% of the violent incidents in Logar as ‘battles’, all ‘armed clashes’. This category represented the most prevalent incident type in nearly all of Logar’s districts -with the exception of Azra district, where most incidents were registered under the category of ‘explosions/remote violence’. The majority of the armed clashes in Logar were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police and NDS personnel as well as members of pro-government militias or so-called arbakis (the term arbaki is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan local police or other pro-government militias). Examples of such incidents included assaults on security checkpoints/outposts and headquarters in different areas near the provincial

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2504 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 94
2505 Civilian casualty data for 2020 have not yet been published by UNAMA.
2506 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, url, p. 69
2507 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, url, p. 72
2508 Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, url, p. 19
2509 Ruttig, T., Sabawoon, A.M., A Threat at Kabul’s Southern Gate: a Security Overview of Logar, AAN, 18 July 2020, url
2510 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Logar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
2511 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Logar, url
2512 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Logar, url
capital Pul-e Alam in May 2019, in August 2019 and in April 2020, in Azra district in July 2019, in different areas (such as near the Mes Aynak copper mine) in Mohammad Agha district in August 2019, in March 2020 and in April 2020, also in April 2020 in Charkh district and in Baraki Barak district, as well as attacks/ambushes on police convoys/vehicles in several areas around the provincial capital Pul-e Alam in July 2019 and in April 2020. No civilian casualties were reported in these incidents.

Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED. These incidents involved several operations in Mohammad Agha district, such as the killing of a prominent Taliban commander and several other militants in March, the killing of dozens of Taliban militants (according to the Taliban, the people killed were civilians) in June and the killing and wounding of more than a dozen Taliban militants in a Special Forces’ raid in May. In the area of the provincial capital Pul-e Alam, several Taliban leaders and militants were arrested and killed in operations in March, April, June and September 2019. In Charkh district, dozens of AGEs were killed and wounded in several ANDSF operations in March and August 2019 and in January and April 2020. In operations in Azra district in July 2019 and in Baraki Barak district in August 2019 a militant’s training centre was destroyed and dozens of members from the Taliban’s Red Unit were killed. Some operations resulted in civilian casualties,

2513 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 9 May 2019, url
2514 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, url
2515 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020 (updated 30 April 2020), url
2516 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, url
2519 Reuters, Clashes Across Afghanistan Kill Dozens of Security Force Members, Militants, 22 April 2020, url; Al Jazeera, Trump, Qatar’s Emir Talk Amid Taliban Attacks Across Afghanistan, 23 April 2020, url
2522 Pajhwok Afghan News, ALP Commander for Logar Killed in Taliban Attack, 7 July 2019, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, url
2523 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020 (updated 30 April 2020), url
2524 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Logar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
2525 Khaama Press, Prominent Taliban Commander Identified as Shaifiullah Killed in Logar Province, 11 March 2019, url
2527 Khaama Press, 11 Taliban Militants Killed, 4 Wounded in Special Forces Raid in Logar, 10 May 2020, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Nearly a Dozen Taliban Killed in Logar Raid, 11 May 2020, url
2528 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Commander Who Killed 10 Police Detained in Logar, 27 March 2019, url
2529 Khaama Press, 3 Prominent Taliban Leaders Arrested by Afghan Forces in Logar Province, 26 April 2019, url
2530 Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Militants Killed, 7 Captured in Logar Operation, 19 June 2019, url
2531 Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill 11 Taliban Militants, Destroy Weapons Cache in Logar, 21 September 2019, url
2532 Khaama Press, Taliban Commander Among Dozens Killed in Latest Military Operations, 8 March 2019, url
2533 Khaama Press, Chechen and Chinese Militants Among Dozens Killed, Wounded in Logar Operation, 2 August 2019, url; Tolonews, 12 Chechen Fighters Affiliated to Al-Qaeda Killed in Afghanistan, 2 August 2019, url
2534 Khaama Press, Afghan Military Operations Kill 8 Taliban Militants, 17 January 2020, url
2535 Tolonews, Afghan Forces Launch Operation in Taliban-Held District in Logar, 22 April 2020, url
2536 Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces Destroy Suicide Bombers Training Centre in Logar, 13 August 2019, url
2537 Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar: 56 Militants Eliminated in Azra Offensive, 13 July 2019, url
such as a CIA-backed operation in the Padkhab area of the provincial capital in May 2019 and an NDS operation in Daudkhel village in the outskirts of Pul-e Alam City in August 2019.

Air/drone strikes represented 16% of all reported violent incidents in Logar. Most air/drone strikes were carried out in Pul-e Alam district (one out of three), followed by Baraki Barak and Charkh districts. The majority of these air/drone strikes were carried out by Afghan military forces, some were attributed to NATO forces. While these air/drone strikes mostly inflicted losses among AGEs in the aforementioned districts, some also caused civilian casualties -such as an American drone strike targeting a gathering of tribal elders in the Padkhab-e Shana area of Pul-e Alam City, in April 2019, an American drone strike targeting a Taliban gathering in the Kamalkhel neighbourhood of Pul-e Alam City killing two children, in July 2019, and an American air strike targeting a tent of Kuchi nomads in the Khaki Dag area of Baraki Barak district, in July 2019. In November 2019, four ANA soldiers were reportedly killed in ‘friendly fire’ from an American air strike in the Bazar-e Zekher area of Pul-e Alam City.

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeting the Afghan security forces, represented 10% of all reported security incidents in Logar. The majority of IED incidents were registered in the districts of Pul-e Alam and Mohammad Agha, followed by Baraki Barak and Charkh. For example in March 2019, the police chief of Baraki Barak was killed and several other police officers were wounded when a bomb attached to their vehicle exploded in the Sherwazi area of the district. In August 2019, a police vehicle on patrol was hit by a roadside bomb in the Mes Aynak area of Mohammad Agha district, resulting in several ANP casualties. Some of these incidents resulted in casualties among civilians. This happened in June 2019 in Charkh district, when a roadside bomb planted by the Taliban hit a civilian vehicle. In September 2019, several civilians were killed by Taliban−claimed car bombs and by a bomb detonating near a mosque after Friday prayer in Pul-e Alam district.

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2538 Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 Civilians Killed in Logar Raid, NATO Denies, 5 May 2019, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 3-9, 5 May 2019, url
2539 Tolonews, Investigative Report Confirms Civilian Casualties in Logar, 29 August 2019, url
2540 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Logar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
2542 Pajhwok Afghan News, Tribal Elders Among 4 Killed in Logar Airstrike, 7 April 2019, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 5-11, 11 April 2019, url
2543 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 12-18, 18 July 2019, url
2544 RFE/RL, At Least Seven Civilians Killed in Air Strike in Eastern Afghanistan, 22 July 2019, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 19-25, 25 July 2019, url
2545 VoA, Officials: US Airstrike Mistakenly Kills 4 Afghan Soldiers, 12 November 2019, url
2546 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Logar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
2549 Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Civilians Killed in Landmine Blast in Logar, 6 June 2019, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 31-June 6, 6 June 2019, url
ACLED coded 6% of the violent incidents in Logar as ‘shelling, artillery and missile attacks’. Some of these incidents resulted in civilian casualties - for example in December 2019, when a mortar fired by the American forces hit a civilian house in Baraki Barak district, in February and March 2020, when mortar shell leftovers exploded in Charkh and Azra districts, killing two children; and in May 2020, when a Taliban-fired mortar landed on a civilian house in Azra district. In June 2020, a rocket fired by the Taliban impacted the provincial hospital in Pul-e Alam district. In July 2020, several mortars were fired at Ashraf Ghani and his delegation when the President visited his home province; no casualties were reported.

ACLED categorised 5% of all reported violent incidents in Logar as ‘violence against civilians’. These incidents involved shootings by unidentified gunmen of a well-known religious scholar in the main mosque of Pul-e Alam in May 2019, of the executive head of Mohammad Agha district also in May 2019, of an appellate court judge for Paktya province in his home in Mohammad Agha district in September 2019 and of a civil society activist in Pul-e Alam in March 2020; Taliban ambushes and killings of two engineers working for the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in Pul-e Alam City in June 2019 and of several judges and a court staff member in Mohammad Agha district in November 2019; a night raid carried out by Afghan and foreign forces in the Babos area of Pul-e Alam City in August 2019, killing one civilian and wounding four others; the execution of two sisters by the Taliban in Mohammad Agha district in June 2020; the kidnapping and killing of a former senator for Logar province by the Taliban also in June 2020, and the shooting of a female provincial council member in Pul-e Alam in July 2020.

Logar’s voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 reached around 15%, AAN related Logar’s below average voter registration to the ‘high insecurity’ in the province. At the end of polling day, Minister of Defence Asadullah Khalid mentioned Logar as one of the seven ‘most threatened provinces’ on 28 September. In the Asia Foundations 2019 Survey of the Afghan People, 51-75% of respondents in Logar province reported to

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2552 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Logar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
2554 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020 (updated 27 February 2020), url
2556 Afghanistan Times, Child killed in Taliban Mortar Attack in Logar, 9 May 2020, url
2558 Tolonews, Ghani, Fired at During Logar Visit, Pledges Increased Security, 1 July 2020, url
2559 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Logar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
2560 Pajhwok Afghan News, Deputy Head of Logar Ulema Council Shot Dead, 8 May 2019, url; NYT, Seeking Revenge, Taliban Target Afghan Soldiers’ Families, 10 July 2019, url
2561 Pajhwok Afghan News, Mohammad Agha District Official Gunned Down, 4 May 2019, url
2563 Pajhwok Afghan News, Civilians, Civil Society Activists gunned down in Pul-i-Alam, 29 March 2020, url
2564 Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar: 2 Engineers Killed in Taliban Attack, 26 June 2019, url
2565 Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 Appellant Court Judges Killed in Taliban Ambush, 7 November 2019, url
2566 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, url
2567 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Execute 2 Young Sisters in Logar, 7 June 2020, url
2568 Ariana News, Taliban Kill Former Afghan Senator in Logar: Local Officials, 9 June 2020, url
2569 Tolonews, Logar Provincial Council Member Shot, Wounded, 6 July 2020, url
2570 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, url, p. 98
2571 Warden, S., Past as Prologue? What the Parliamentary Election Results Tell Us About the September Presidential Election, AAN, 23 August 2019, url
have experienced fear while voting.\footnote{2573}{Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, \url{url}, p. 62} According to the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA), Logar was one out of seven provinces where most polling stations remained closed on voting day.\footnote{2574}{NYT, 3 Afghan Schools, 165 Accounts of Students Being Raped, 25 November 2019, \url{url}} Without providing further details, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on the killing of an unspecified number of Taliban militants on polling day in Logar province.\footnote{2575}{NYT, 3 Afghan Schools, 165 Accounts of Students Being Raped, 25 November 2019, \url{url}}

In September and October 2019, dozens of schools were reportedly closed down by the Taliban in Logar province. According to government officials, the forced closures were a response from the militants to newly established government checkpoints in the area.\footnote{2576}{AIHRC, Human Rights Research & Investigation Unit, Political Rights Monitoring Report Presidential Elections 2019, 28 September 2019, \url{url}, p. 11} Logar’s Director of Education related the closures to the presidential elections, confirming that the Taliban had warned school authorities to close their facilities.\footnote{2577}{AIHRC, Human Rights Research & Investigation Unit, Political Rights Monitoring Report Presidential Elections 2019, 28 September 2019, \url{url}, p. 11} A member of Logar’s provincial council suggested a punitive reason, resulting from a possible reduced Taliban recruitment in the region or from the militant group’s unacceptance of government influence over the schools in the areas under their control. A Taliban spokesperson stated the religious educational centres and madrasas were closed down because they were not in line with the group’s doctrine.\footnote{2578}{AIHRC, Human Rights Research & Investigation Unit, Political Rights Monitoring Report Presidential Elections 2019, 28 September 2019, \url{url}, p. 11} In its January 2020 Monthly Humanitarian Update, UNOCHA listed Logar as third in the top three provinces with the highest number of schools closed or damaged by conflict.\footnote{2579}{AIHRC, Human Rights Research & Investigation Unit, Political Rights Monitoring Report Presidential Elections 2019, 28 September 2019, \url{url}, p. 11}

In November 2019, the alleged sexual abuse of hundreds of boys from several schools in rural areas of Logar province by teachers, older students, authority figures and extended family members was reported by an Afghan civil society organisation.\footnote{2580}{AIHRC, Human Rights Research & Investigation Unit, Political Rights Monitoring Report Presidential Elections 2019, 28 September 2019, \url{url}, p. 11} According to an administrator of one of the schools cited by the New York Times, ‘three boys who had reported rapes were later killed by the Taliban, who condemn the sexual abuse as anti-Islamic.’\footnote{2581}{AIHRC, Human Rights Research & Investigation Unit, Political Rights Monitoring Report Presidential Elections 2019, 28 September 2019, \url{url}, p. 11} After the allegations were made public, two activists in Logar were detained by the Afghan intelligence service\footnote{2582}{AIHRC, Human Rights Research & Investigation Unit, Political Rights Monitoring Report Presidential Elections 2019, 28 September 2019, \url{url}, p. 11} and forced to confess their accusations were untrue.\footnote{2583}{AIHRC, Human Rights Research & Investigation Unit, Political Rights Monitoring Report Presidential Elections 2019, 28 September 2019, \url{url}, p. 11} After pressure from the US and international human rights groups, the activists were released\footnote{2584}{AIHRC, Human Rights Research & Investigation Unit, Political Rights Monitoring Report Presidential Elections 2019, 28 September 2019, \url{url}, p. 11} and reportedly left the country short after.\footnote{2585}{AIHRC, Human Rights Research & Investigation Unit, Political Rights Monitoring Report Presidential Elections 2019, 28 September 2019, \url{url}, p. 11} At the end of January 2020, Afghanistan’s Attorney General’s Office (AOG) opened an investigation.\footnote{2586}{AIHRC, Human Rights Research & Investigation Unit, Political Rights Monitoring Report Presidential Elections 2019, 28 September 2019, \url{url}, p. 11} According to UNAMA, it is unclear whether this case has a conflict-nexus, however the UN mission continues to follow up on the allegations and investigation.\footnote{2587}{AIHRC, Human Rights Research & Investigation Unit, Political Rights Monitoring Report Presidential Elections 2019, 28 September 2019, \url{url}, p. 11}

### 2.22.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 1 925 persons displaced from Logar, from whom the majority (1 155) found refuge within the province itself (in Pul-e Alam district). The remaining 770 IDPs from Logar sought shelter in the neighbouring provinces of Kabul (Kabul district), Khost (Khost Matun district) and Paktya (Gardez district). The majority of IDPs in Logar province were displaced from Baraki Barak district (1 176 individuals), followed by the districts of Mohammad Agha, Charkh, Kharwar and Khoshi. In the first three days of January 2020, UNOCHA
registered a peak of 490 IDP’s coming from Baraki Barak, Mohammad Agha and Kharwar districts, all finding refuge in Pul-e Alam district.\textsuperscript{2588}

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Logar province from other provinces was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020.\textsuperscript{2589}

In the last week of October 2019, local authorities in Logar reported to UNOCHA about the arrival of around 130 IDP families in Pul-e Alam district, coming from insecure areas in Khoshi, Charkh and Baraki Barak districts.\textsuperscript{2590} During the last two weeks of March 2020, UNOCHA reported on the displacement of approximately 350 families due to conflict in Logar province.\textsuperscript{2591}

IOM ranked Pul-e Alam district 20\textsuperscript{th} out of the countrywide top 25 districts hosting the most returnees and IDPs, adding that over 85 % of IDPs from Logar have not returned home.\textsuperscript{2592} A 2019 study from the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) related the prolonged displacement of IDPs from Logar province to insecurity, lack of employment opportunities and inadequate access to public services such as education.\textsuperscript{2593} According to IOM displacement data published in August and October 2019, most IDPs and returnees in Logar province resided in Pul-e Alam district, followed by Khoshi and Mohammad Agha districts.\textsuperscript{2594}

\textsuperscript{2588} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url.


\textsuperscript{2590} UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October - 3 November), 3 November 2019, url, p. 2

\textsuperscript{2591} UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (30 March - 5 April 2020), 5 April 2020, url, p. 2

\textsuperscript{2592} IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results March - June 2019, 1 July 2019, url, pp. 6-7

\textsuperscript{2593} NRC and IDMC, Stuck in the Mud: Urban Displacement and Tenure Security in Kabul’s Informal Settlements, 2019, url, p. 6

\textsuperscript{2594} IOM, Afghanistan - Logar Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results Round 7 (October - December 2018), 1 August 2019, url, pp. 1, 2, 6; IOM, DTM Afghanistan Baseline Mobility Assessment I District Level I Total Inflow (Returnees+IDPs) I June 2019 I Province: Logar, 9 October 2019, url.
2.23 Nangarhar

2.23.1 General description of the province

Nangarhar is located in eastern Afghanistan, along the Afghan-Pakistani border. It borders Laghman and Kunar to the north, Pakistan to the east and south, and Logar and Kabul to the west. The provincial capital of Nangarhar is Jalalabad. The province is divided into the following administrative units: Achin, Batikot, Behsud, Chaparhar, Dara-i Nur, Dehbala (also known as Haska Mena), Durbaba, Goshta, Hesarak, Jalalabad, Kama, Khogyani, Kot, Kuzkunar, Lalpur, Muhmand Dara, Nazyan, Pachieragam (sometimes spelled ‘Pachir Wa Agam’), Rodat, Sherzad, Shinwar (also known as Ghanikhel) and Surkhrod. The NSIA also mentions a district named Spinghar but defines it as ‘temporary’.

According to the NSIA, the population of Nangarhar is estimated at 1,701,698 for 2020/21. The rural population accounts for about 80% of the total. The population is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Pashai, Arabs and Tajiks. As for the local Sikh and Hindu community, which used to be particularly present in and nearby Jalalabad, many of its members have been leaving Afghanistan due...
to insecurity and government’s indifference. In late September 2018, only 60 families of the community still lived in Nangarhar.\textsuperscript{2603} According to Afghanistan’s expert Antonio Giustozzi, as of May 2019, there were also about 100 000 nomad families in Nangarhar.\textsuperscript{2604}

The Regional Highway 05 (RH05) starts from Kabul\textsuperscript{2605} and passes through the districts of Surkhrod, Jalalabad, Behsud, Rodat, Batikot, Shinwar, Muhmand Dara, before reaching the Afghan-Pakistani border at Torkham.\textsuperscript{2606} An improvement project of the Kabul-Jalalabad Highway, conducted by a Chinese company, has fallen behind for years, reportedly due to corruption and negligence.\textsuperscript{2607} In August 2019, Turkish news site TRTWORLD reported that the road going through Surkhrod, Khogyani and Sherzad districts was mostly paved but remained ‘one of the most dangerous’ in the country due to the presence of several militant groups and numerous IEDs.\textsuperscript{2608}

The province, which borders the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan\textsuperscript{2609} (now merged with Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province)\textsuperscript{2610}, has served as an unofficial crossing-point for local and foreign militants.\textsuperscript{2611} As of 2020, London School of Economics’ expert David Mansfield listed Garo, Dawtakhel, Ghwaraky, Kama Dakah, Sasobai and Tabai as unofficial crossings, some of them being hubs for all types of illicit traffics, such as cooking products or car parts.\textsuperscript{2612}

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Nangarhar was the leading poppy-cultivating province in the eastern region, even though the cultivation rate had decreased by 9%, compared to 2017.\textsuperscript{2613} Based on updated data supplied by UNODC, AAN mentioned that during 2019, the area under poppy cultivation had dropped by 82% in Nangarhar. This ‘unprecedented’ decrease was attributed to both falling prices and ongoing conflict.\textsuperscript{2614} Nevertheless, a May 2020 UN Security Council report mentioned that narcotic networks were still active in Nangarhar and smuggled drug into Pakistan ‘with the reported acquiescence of security officials’.\textsuperscript{2615} Tolonews also reported about the illegal mining of precious and semi-precious stones in Goshta district.\textsuperscript{2616}

### 2.23.2 Conflict background and actors in Nangarhar

Several sources stated between 2016 and 2018 that Nangarhar had been observing a deterioration of its political and security situation since 2011.\textsuperscript{2617}

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\textsuperscript{2606} UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url](https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/).

\textsuperscript{2607} Tolonews, Report Shows Illegal Mining in Nangarhar, 28 March 2020, [url](https://www.tolonews.com/).

\textsuperscript{2608} Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url](https://aan.com/article/165584).
ISKP has been active in Nangarhar since 2015, when it formally announced its foundation. It was originally composed of Pakistani militants who had settled in the south-eastern districts of the province after the Pakistani army had ousted them from the tribal areas. In several reports focused on the rise of ISKP, AAN underscored the impact of the corruption of the provincial elite (especially under governor Gul Agha Sherzai’s rule between 2005 and 2013), and of the concentration of development projects and aid funds in Jalalabad area. It undermined the people’s trust in the Afghan government and left the population unprotected against insurgents. Moreover, the decrease in international combat forces in the province, starting from 2013, led to a considerable loss of territorial control by the Afghan government, mainly in the districts along the Spin Ghar mountain range in the south and the east of the province. Meanwhile, the local Taliban were ‘fractured as well and lacked control over their forces’, with fighters engaging in criminal activities and violence against civilians. Consequently, the Taliban could never take advantage of the political and military vacuum in the province, many of their fighters eventually defecting to ISKP. ISKP also benefitted from the breakdown of rural society and the erosion of tribal social structures in Nangarhar (particularly in the traditional area of the Shinwari tribe). Local communities were indeed left vulnerable to pressure from local and foreign insurgents.

Resorting to extreme violence, ISKP was able to stay in control of remote areas of Nangarhar – notably in Achin – for several years, despite intense air strike campaigns which targeted its local commanders. It also transformed villages into training and logistical centres, Nangarhar University, in Jalalabad, was among the three universities which provided ISKP with the most recruits. In this regard, Foreign Policy reported in January 2020 that in both Nangarhar and Kunar provinces, some Salafist madrasas, funded by Gulf states-based NGOs, were supporting ISKP activities. Although Nangarhar was still described as one of the ISKP ‘strongholds’ in Afghanistan by February 2019, from the fall of 2019, military operations simultaneously led by ANDSF, coalition forces and the Taliban pressured the group into leaving the areas under its control in southern Nangarhar and in Kunar. Meanwhile, ANDSF made ‘hundreds of arrests’ during operations against ISKP sleeper cells in Jalalabad and Kabul. According to the UN Security Council, between September and November 2019, ISKP fighters were reduced from 1,750 across seven districts of Nangarhar to less than 200, concentrated in the Takhto area of Achin district. By November 2019, ISKP had been ‘nearly eradicated from its main Afghan base in Nangarhar’. In this regard, Obaid Ali stressed the importance of ISKP’s unpopularity in Nangarhar in its defeat, since it could not rely on locals’ support.

The UN Security Council added that by the end of February 2020, over 1,400 ISKP members – mainly families – had surrendered after the group had been driven out of Nangarhar. However, Obaid Ali noted that in early 2020, ‘small groups of 15-20 ISKP fighters [were still operating] in some remote

2618 Osman, B., The Islamic State in ‘Khorasan’: How it began and where it stands now in Nangarhar, AAN, 27 July 2016, [url]
2620 ‘Washington Post (The), Afghanistan claims the Islamic State was ‘obliterated.’ But fighters who got away could stage a resurgence, 9 February 2020, [url]
2621 Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join the Islamic State, USIP, 1 June 2020, [url], p. 11
2622 FP, In Afghanistan, Religious Schools Are a Breeding Ground for Islamic State Influence, 24 January 2020, [url]
2623 UN Secretary-General, Eighth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da’esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in counteracting the threat, 1 February 2019, [url], p. 7
2624 USDOD, Enhancing Security & Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url], p. 28
2626 UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url], pp. 3-4; Diplomat (The), Islamic State’s Lingering Legacy in Afghanistan, 5 February 2020, [url]
2627 Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, AAN, 1 March 2020, [url]
2628 UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url], p. 17
areas of Deh Bala, Pachir wa Agam and Khogyani districts, while their presence was also reported in the mountainous areas of Achin district. In April 2020, an NDS official quoted by the Diplomat stated that ISKP fighters still hiding in Nangarhar had been left without command centre.

Regarding the Taliban, as of May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Mullah Mohammad Essa, originally affiliated to the Peshawar Shura network, as the shadow governor of Nangarhar. He was appointed after the ‘reshuffle’ of the Taliban government structure during the 2019-2020 winter, ahead of the 2020 fighting season. According to an Afghanistan analyst interviewed in January 2020 by Lifos, Sweden’s Country of Origin Information Centre, the Taliban were able to consolidate their presence in areas that they cleared from ISKP and thus were the strongest armed group in Nangarhar. However, in March 2020, AAN’s expert Obaid Ali assessed the movement as ‘weak’ in Nangarhar — as it had to mobilize troops from other provinces to expel ISKP — and expressed doubts about its ability to gain more territory. The Taliban reportedly set up a system of taxation of smuggling goods across eight of Nangarhar’s southern districts, Hesarak and Sherzad districts being the local centre of their narcotics activity. The UN Security Council indeed suggested that behind the Taliban’s determination to dislodge ISKP from Nangarhar was their will to retake control of local smuggling routes and poppy-cultivating areas. According to a USIP survey conducted in eight Afghan provinces throughout 2018, Nangarhar was the province with the highest number of IDPs respondents indicating that the Taliban had approached them for recruitment (one third out of 20). Over 2019, UNAMA documented one case of child recruitment by the Taliban in Nangarhar.

In March 2019, the Afghan Ministry of Interior reported the arrest of a commander of the Haqqani Network, who purportedly headed a group of 40 fighters in Nangarhar.

As listed by AAN in a 2016 report, other Afghan militant groups operating in the province were then: the Tora Bora Jihadi Front, mostly active in Khogyani, Sherzad and Pachiragam, which was integrated into the mainstream Taliban movement in October 2015; Hezb-e Islami, mainly operating in Chaparhar, Kot and Sherzad; several Salafi groups, whose influence within the eastern provinces was significant and who were mainly operating in Chaparhar, Kot and Batikot; Fedaiy Karwan, a semi-autonomous group within the Taliban movement, mostly operating in Khogiani and Sherzad districts; and the Siahpushan (plural, ‘black-clad and masked’), whose alliance was not clear and who were active in Khogyani, Pachiragam and Sherzad.

In May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Nangarhar as one of the twelve provinces where Al Qaeda was ‘covertly active’. UNAMA added that its main tasks consist in ‘training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring’. The Diplomat observed that in April 2020, Al Qaeda claimed to have supported the Taliban in their fight against ISKP in Nangarhar in late 2019.

2629 Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, AAN, 1 March 2020, url
2630 AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended?, 21 March 2020, url
2631 Diplomat (The), The Islamic State Remains Alive in Afghanistan, 27 April 2020, url
2632 UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, url, pp. 8-9, 27
2633 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, pp. 16-17
2634 OSIP, Displacement and the Vulnerability to Mobilize for Violence: Evidence from Afghanistan, 8 January 2020, url, pp. 20
2636 Khaama Press, Prominent Haqqani Network commander arrested in Jalalabad city, 7 March 2019, url
2638 Diplomat (The), The Taliban and al-Qaeda: Enduring Partnership or Liability?, 16 June 2020, url
As of May 2020, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Jaish-e Mohammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) were listed among the foreign groups mostly present in eastern Afghanistan, notably in Nangarhar, under the leadership of the Afghan Taliban. TTP’s forces were then estimated at 180 fighters situated in Lalpur district, while JeM and LeT respectively numbered 200 and 800 fighters, ‘colocated with Taliban forces’ in Muhmand Dara, Durbanda and Sherzad districts. These groups reportedly ‘act as advisers, trainers and specialists in IEDs’, while ‘carrying out targeted assassinations against government officials and others’.2644 In April 2020, the Afghan security forces claimed to have destroyed JeM bases in Nangarhar and added that the group had been active over the past fifteen years in the Ghoraki area of Muhmand Dara district, along the border.2645 Other foreign groups primarily active in Nangarhar include two split factions of Pakistani Jamaat ul-Ahrar (which is itself a splinter group of TTP).2646 One of them, Hizbul Ahrar, was attacked by ANDSF in February 2020.2647 In 2016, AAN reported the presence of Lashkar-e-Islam (cooperating with ISKP); the Salafi-oriented group Amr bil ma’ruf Wa Nahi An Al-Munkar; and Ansar ul-Islam, a Pakistani pro-government group. All of them were said to operate in Nazyan and Achin districts.2648

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Nangarhar province is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps, which falls under Train, Advise, and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), led by US and Polish forces.2649 In 2017, Nangarhar reportedly numbered 18 ALP units – more than any other province –, although in 2019, AAN could not verify that all of them were actually active.2650 In a 2020 report, AAN also noted the presence of eight newly established ANA-TF units, along with NDS-backed ‘uprising forces’, in ten districts of Nangarhar (among which Nazyan, Khogyani, Sherzad, Pachieragam and Achin), where ‘they appeared to be much more visible and active than the ALP’.2651 In June 2020, the US Department of Defence stressed the ‘most notable contribution’ of the ANA-TF to the anti-ISKP campaign in the south of Nangarhar, where it has been tasked to keep the liberated districts secure.2652 Besides, the Q2 unit of NDS Special Forces (‘NDS-Q2’) is said to operate in Nangarhar and to conduct counter-terrorism operations under the supervision of the CIA. It has been accused of killing civilians in several raids across the province.2653 Finally, in June 2019, the New York Times reported that the US Special Forces held several outposts in Nangarhar.2654

On their previous attempts to dislodge ISKP, ANDSF had not been able to keep the liberated areas under their control.2655 However, AAN’s Obaid Ali noted that, after their respective operations against ISKP in late 2019, both the Taliban and the Afghan government had expanded their control in Nangarhar – the former in the ‘remote, mountainous parts where ISKP had most of its remaining bases’, the latter in lower-altitude areas. According to Ali, as of March 2020, the government controlled almost entirely 10 out of Nangarhar’s 22 districts (Achin, Batikot, Behsud, Dara-i Nur, Durbanda, Kama, Kot, Muhmand

2644 UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url], p. 20
2647 BBC News, Crackdown on militants as US and Afghan Taliban seek deal, 15 February 2020, [url]
2648 Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, [url]
2649 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url], p. 13
2650 Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN & Global Public Policy Institute, July 2020, [url], pp. 37, 89
2651 Le Monde, A Nangarhar, au sein d’une milice coincee entre l’EI et les talibans [In Nangarhar, inside a militia wedged between IS and the Taliban], 27 August 2019, [url]
2652 Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN & Global Public Policy Institute, July 2020, [url], pp. 40, 75
2653 USDOD, Enhancing Security & Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url], p. 60
2654 HRW, “They’ve Shot Many Like This” Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, [url]
2655 NYT, U.S. Special Forces Battle Against ISIS Turns to Containment, and Concern, 14 June 2019, [url]
2656 UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url], p. 17
Dara, Pachieragam and Shinwar) and ruled about 70-80% of 8 other districts (Chaparhar, Dehbala, Goshka, Kuzkunar, Lalpur, Nazyan, Rodat and Spinghar). The remaining districts were said to be under the Taliban or Pakistani AGE's control, with the Taliban being the dominant force in Hesarak, Khogyani, Sherzad and Surkhrod, where ANDSF were only present in the district centres and their surroundings. Indeed, according to Tolonews information quoted by AAN, as of 2019, the civilian administration of Sherzad and Hesarak had to operate from Jalalabad.

According to information collected by LWJ and presented in a map, the Taliban shut down health clinics in Hesarak, Khogyani, Lalpur, Sherzad and Surkhrod in January 2020, indicating that they control these districts. LWJ also relied on undated Resolute Support information to assess Achin, Batikot, Chaparhar, Dehbala, Nazyan, Pachieragam and Rodat as contested. The remaining districts are presented as undetermined or government-controlled.

### 2.23.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.23.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 1,070 civilian casualties (356 deaths and 714 injured) in Nangarhar. Although this represents a decrease of 41% compared to 2018, the province ranked second only to Kabul in this regard. UNAMA explained this ‘significant decrease’ by a drop in ground engagements initiated by ISKP in Nangarhar over 2019, even though the number of incidents attributed to ISKP (such as IED discoveries, detonations and armed clashes) has been increasing. In 2019, leading causes of casualties were non-suicide IEDs, followed by ground engagements and suicide IEDs. In its midyear report, UNAMA provided civilian casualties numbers for the five most affected provinces between 1 January and 30 June 2020, Nangarhar ranking third with 281 casualties. As for Resolute Support, it recorded between 101 and 125 civilian casualties in Nangarhar in the first quarter of 2020. In the second quarter of 2020, RS indicated Nangarhar as the province that experienced the highest number of civilian casualties countrywide, with 259 civilian casualties recorded. This represents a 236% increase compared to the previous quarter.

Regarding the severity of the conflict, Nangarhar was listed as one of the most active areas of conflict by the UN Secretary General in September 2019 and March 2020 reports. Resolute Support recorded between 501 and 1,000 enemy-initiated attacks in Nangarhar province over the full year 2019, in line with 2018. While both the Afghan government and the Taliban have taken credit for having ousted ISKP from Nangarhar in late 2019, UNAMA indicated that ‘from available evidence, the record of the Taliban in pressuring ISIL-KP is mixed and considerably less than that of operations by
international military forces and Afghan national security forces. The US military suspended air strikes against Taliban involved in fighting with ISKP but denied any further coordination with them.

In May 2020, Afghan security officials interviewed by Tolonews reported that over the previous two months, the Taliban, Al Qaeda and JeM had increased their military activities in eastern Afghanistan especially in the border areas in Nangarhar, Kunar and Nuristan. However, according to local residents interviewed by AAN in April 2020, Surkhrod and Achin had remained calm since ISKP was driven out of the region. In May and June 2020, UNOCHA described the situation as ‘volatile’, with ongoing fighting between the ANDSF and AGEs, causing civilian casualties.

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED collected data on 705 violent events in Nangarhar province from open sources: 387 coded as ‘battles’ (55 %), 293 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ (41 %) and 25 as ‘violence against civilians’ (4 %).

Figure 25. Nangarhar - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data

Across these three categories, Khogyani (with the highest ‘Battles’ and ‘Explosions/remote violence’ numbers), Sherzad, Achin and Jalalabad stood as the most as the most violence-affected districts. Between 25 and 50 incidents were recorded in Batikot, Dehbala, Muhmand Dara, Pachieragam, Shinwar and Surkhrod districts, and less than 20 in the remaining ones.

Regarding events coded as ‘battles’ by ACLED, an overwhelming majority of them were ‘armed clashes’, initiated in equal proportions by ANDSF and the Taliban. The highest numbers were recorded in March-April 2019, September-October 2019 and February 2020, with a very sharp drop from April 2020 until the end of the reporting period. Khogyani, Sherzad, Achin, Surkhrod (which neighbours the provincial capital, Jalalabad) and Muhmand Dara were the most affected districts by this type of
violence. ISKP accounted for 12 initiated armed clashes, mostly against the Taliban in Sherzad and Dehbala districts during the summer of 2019, as reported by media sources. Overall, many armed clashes are connected to aforementioned anti-ISKP operations led by ANDSF and the Taliban. Conversely, a maximum of five armed clashes were recorded in Behsud, Durbaba, Goshta, Kama, Kot, Kuzkunar and Rodat.

Also coded as an ‘armed clash’ was an attack by AGEs against the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan office in Jalalabad City in September 2019, in the run-up to the presidential election. Two civilians and two police officers were killed, and twelve others were wounded.

In terms of incidents coded by ACLED as ‘Explosions/Remote violence’, the most represented subcategories were clearly ‘Air/drone strikes’ (48 %) and ‘Remote explosive/Landmine/IED’ (43 %). Five districts accounted for 120 of the 142 strikes carried out by ANDSF and their allies against ISKP and the Taliban: Khogyani, Achin, Dehbala, Pachieragam and Sherzad. Conversely, based on ACLED data, other Nangarhar’s districts were hardly affected by this type of violence, if at all. Consistently with the US airforce-backed ANDSF operations, half of the documented strikes took place between September and November 2019. Among such incidents, Reuters reported that on 19 September 2019, in the Wazir Tangi area of Khogyani district, a US drone fired at 150 civilians who had gathered to harvest pine nuts and were reportedly mistaken for ISKP fighters. The strike caused at least 30 deaths (of which UNAMA verified at least 20) and wounded another 40 people. UNAMA expressed concerns about ‘the measures that were taken to verify the targets’.

As for ‘Remote explosive/Landmine/IED’, Jalalabad district recorded the highest numbers (34), followed by Batikot (17) and Khogyani (16). For instance, on 13 May 2019, the provincial capital was struck by a round of quasi simultaneous explosions (3 deaths, 20 wounded). Their perpetrators have remained unidentified. On 13 June 2019, a suicide attacker killed 5 civilians and 4 local police officers, while wounding at least 12 people, as he targeted a police vehicle in Jalalabad City. On 19 August 2019, as people were celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the national independence, ten blasts across Jalalabad injured over 50 persons. On 23 August 2019, a roadside bomb explosion killed one civilian and wounded 14 others in a bazar of Khogyani district.

2673 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nangarhar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
2674 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nangarhar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
2675 Khaama Press, Taliban’s Red Unit militants clash with ISIS fighters in Nangarhar province, 22 September 2019, [url]
2676 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nangarhar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
2677 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 26 September 2019, [url]
2678 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nangarhar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
2679 Pajhwok Afghan News, Anti-Daesh operation to follow uplift projects in Achin, 7 October 2019, [url]; Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangrahar, AAN, 1 March 2020, [url]
2681 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 7-13, 13 June 2019, [url]
2682 RFE/RL, Dozens Wounded In Blasts As Afghanistan Marks Independence Day, 19 August 2019, [url]
2683 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, [url]
people (2 civilians) were killed and 32 injured (20 civilians) when a vehicle-borne IED hit a bus carrying ANDSF members. UNOCHA added that the attacked had been claimed by ISKP.⁶²⁸⁶

ACLED coded six other events as ‘Suicide bomb’ attacks across five districts (two in Jalalabad)⁶²⁸⁷ In October 2019, ISKP was thought to have carried out a suicide attack in a Jowdara village’s mosque, Dehbla district, during Friday prayers. It caused 119 civilian casualties (73 killed).⁶²⁸⁸ On 12 July 2019, nine people were killed, and twelve others wounded after a child was used to carry out a suicide attack during a wedding party in Pachieragam district. The attack was claimed by ISKP and reportedly targeted a pro-government militia commander.⁶²⁸⁹ On 12 May 2020, in another suicide attack carried out by ISKP during the funerals of a pro-government militia commander, 32 civilians were killed and 133 others wounded.⁶²⁹⁰

Finally, Jalalabad was the most affected district by violent events against civilians (7), followed by Khogyani (4). ACLED attributed almost half of these 25 incidents to ANDSF and their NATO allies.⁶²⁹¹ These included the killing of 13 civilians in Hesarak, in March 2019⁶²⁹² and of 8 others in Surkhrod, in February 2020, both by US air strikes.⁶²⁹³ Moreover, in September 2019, during an operation in Jalalabad, the NDS-02 Special Forces unit shot at close range four brothers from a single family suspected to be ISKP members. About 800 people gathered in Jalalabad to deny any connection between the victims and ISKP and demand justice. It eventually led to the resignation of the head of NDS.⁶²⁹⁴

Among the AGEs-attributed attacks against civilians, in December 2019, unidentified gunmen shot Dr Tetsu Nakamura, Director of Peace Japan Medical Services, and six other civilians in December 2019 in Jalalabad City. Dr Nakamura’s murder prompted public outcry, as he had been working in Afghanistan for decades and greatly improved the irrigation infrastructures in Nangarhar.⁶²⁹⁵ In the first half of 2019, a dozen of civilians, religious and tribal elders and government officials were the victims of a wave of targeted killings in Jalalabad, attributed to mafia networks by activists, or to AGEs by provincial authorities.⁶²⁹⁶ According to a Western senior analyst interviewed in 2017 by Belgium’s CEDOCA, the criminality in Jalalabad has been increasing since at least 2016.⁶²⁹⁷

In its annual report, UNAMA expressed concern over ‘Taliban attacks and actions targeting health facilities and protected personnel’.⁶²⁹⁸ By August 2019, Nangarhar was indeed one of the three provinces having witnessed the most events of direct and indirect violence against humanitarian personnel or facilities.⁶²⁹⁹ The World Health Organization reported that three health care workers were killed and four were injured in Nangarhar between January and November 2019, but recorded no

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⁶²⁸⁶ UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (7 October – 13 October 2019), 16 October 2019, [url](url)
⁶²⁸⁷ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nangarhar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](url)
⁶²⁸⁸ NYT, Afghan Village of 70 Families Faces Ruin With Mosque Massacre, 19 October 2019, [url](url); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](url), p. 47
⁶²⁸⁹ BBC News, Afghanistan war: child used in suicide attack, 12 July 2019, [url](url)
⁶²⁹⁰ NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report : May 2020, 28 May 2020, [url](url)
⁶²⁹¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nangarhar ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](url)
⁶²⁹² NYT, 13 Civilians Reported Killed in U.S. Airstrikes in Afghanistan, 10 March 2019, [url](url)
⁶²⁹³ RFE/RL, Eight Afghan Civilians Killed In Air Strike [Source: AFP and Reuters], 15 February 2020, [url](url); NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 27 February 2020, [url](url)
⁶²⁹⁵ NYT, ‘He Showed Us Life’: Japanese Doctor Who Brought Water to Afghans Is Killed, 4 December 2019, [url](url)
⁶²⁹⁶ Pajhwok Afghan News, Nangarharis say targeted killings continue unabated, 6 May 2019, [url](url)
⁶²⁹⁷ Belgium, CEDOCA, COI Focus – Afghanistan - Veiligheidssituatie in Jalalabad, Behsud en Surkhrod [Security Situation in Jalalabad, Behsud and Surkhrod], 12 March 2020, [url](url), p. 16
⁶²⁹⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url](url), p. 29
similar incident between January and May 2020. In January 2020, it was reported that the Taliban had closed all health centres in Sherzad, Hesarak, Khogyani, Surkhrod and Lalpur districts. The group argued that it was a retaliatory measure against the closure of health centres by the authorities in their areas. Fifteen health centres were reopened a month later in Khogyani, Surkhrod, Lalpur, Muhmand Dara and Achin districts, but several others remained closed. In August 2019, during an immunisation campaign in eastern Afghanistan, access to AGE-controlled areas proved to be ‘a key challenge’ in Nangarhar, among other provinces. UNAMA also documented a case of ANDSF members threatening the medical personnel of the Khogyani public hospital in April 2020. UNAMA mentioned educational facilities impacted by the conflict as well: in July 2019, during a search operation, the NDS-02 strike force destroyed a high school in Sherzad district, depriving over 1 300 students of education.

2.23.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 38 640 persons displaced from Nangarhar – the fourth highest provincial numbers recorded over the period. Except for a couple of hundreds IDPs who were headed to Kabul, Khost and Laghman provinces, all of them found refuge within the province. Overall, the main districts of origin of IDPs were Sherzad (20 623) and Surkhrod (9 856), distantly followed by Muhmand Dara (3 556) and Khogyani (3 271). The four of them accounted for 97 % of Nangarhar’s IDPs. Massive waves of displacements in Khogyani and Sherzad districts are linked to ongoing fighting during March–April 2019 (between the Taliban and ISKP) in May–June 2019, and in early 2020 (between ANDSF and AGEs). Conflict forced over 6 000 people to flee within Surkhrod district in August 2019, and displaced several other thousands of people in Muhmand Dara in early January 2020. UNOCHA also reported a peak of displacements in November 2019 from Achin to Jalalabad (844), coinciding with the military operations against ISKP that took place in the district. Other noted factors of displacement were threats, intimidation and shelling.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 48 339 persons displaced to Nangarhar province. Most of them went to Surkhrod (16 801), Jalalabad (8 316), Khogyani (7 035) and Behsud (6 700) districts. Outside of the aforementioned 38 000 people displaced within Nangarhar, 10 155 came from Kunar and mainly settled in Nangarhar’s neighbouring districts, such as Behsud, Dara-i Nur and Kuzkunar. 

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2700 World Health Organization, Afghanistan – Attacks on Health Care in 2019 as of 17 November, 18 November 2019, [url]
2701 Tolonews, Taliban Closes Health Centers In Nangarhar Districts, 21 January 2020, [url]
2705 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url], p. 28
2706 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url], UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url]
2707 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url], UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url]
2708 UNOCHA, Kunar Conflict - Update (as of 3 April 2019), 4 April 2019, [url], Reuters, Heavy fighting flares between Taliban, Islamic State in Afghanistan, 24 April 2019, [url]
2709 Tolonews, Taliban-Daesh Clashes Displace Over 13,000 Families In Nangarhar, 11 June 2019, [url]
2714 Ali, O., Hit from Many Sides 1: Unpicking the recent victory against the ISKP in Nangarhar, AAN, 1 Marc 2020, [url]
2716 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url], UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url]
2.24 Nimroz

2.24.1 General description of the province
Nimroz province is located in the south-west of Afghanistan, alongside the border with Iran and Pakistan.\textsuperscript{2718} The province borders Farah to the north, Helmand to the east, Pakistan to the south and Iran to the west.\textsuperscript{2719} Nimroz is divided into the following districts: provincial capital Zaranj, Kang, Asle-e Chakhansur, Char Burjak, Khashrod and Dularam.\textsuperscript{2720} According to NSIA, the population of Nimroz is estimated at 183 554 for 2020/21. Urban population, living in provincial capital Zaranj, constitutes 16\% of all inhabitants.\textsuperscript{2721} The population is composed mainly of Balochs, followed by Pashtuns, Tajiks\textsuperscript{2722}, Brahui and Uzbeks.\textsuperscript{2723} Balochs living in Afghanistan are primary nomadic.\textsuperscript{2724}

The province’s topography consists of flat and mostly desert terrain.\textsuperscript{2725} In 2019 Pajhwok Afghan News reported about the negative impact of ‘the worst drought in living memory’ in Nimroz province, as many farmers lost significant amounts of livestock\textsuperscript{2726} and suffered from shortages of food and high levels of malnutrition, especially among women and children.\textsuperscript{2727} The Afghan government started the construction of water dams on Helmand River. Kamal Khan dam in Charburjak is nearly completed and is expected to irrigate 175 000 hectares of Nimroz’s farmland. It should also generate electricity which would replace the power imported from Iran. Iran was accused of sabotaging the project allegedly by supporting the local Taliban and bribing some officials in order to delay the opening of the dam. Iran reportedly is afraid that the dam would reduce its own water supplies. The construction site is currently protected by hundreds of security officers.\textsuperscript{2728}

A national highway, starting from Delaram and intersecting Highway One, passes through the districts of Khashrod, Chakhansur and Zaranj; it leads to Zaranj City, at the Afghan-Iranian border.\textsuperscript{2729} The city of Zaranj hosts an airport, which was served by domestic scheduled passenger flights as of March 2019.\textsuperscript{2730}

The province is of strategic position for smuggling because of its proximity to Iran, Pakistan and Helmand. The Zaranj – Dularam road and the south-western highways have been used as transit routes for drugs trafficking.\textsuperscript{2731} According to Foreign Policy, Nimroz province, which was considered ‘Afghanistan’s drug-smuggling hub’, served as a ‘financial artery’ for the Taliban. Zaranj City was described as ‘Afghanistan’s smuggling capital’.\textsuperscript{2732} Moreover, Taliban militants purportedly set up checkpoints along the Zaranj-Dularam Highway and charged taxes on vehicles carrying goods.\textsuperscript{2733}

In 2018, local media reported that Nimroz was also considered a key route for human trafficking and migrant smugglers. People fleeing the country are directed to Zaranj City where they usually spend a few days in very harsh conditions with little food or other basic facilities, waiting for the possibility to

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\textsuperscript{2717} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nimroz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
\textsuperscript{2718} Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nimroz, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{2719} US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{2720} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nimroz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url; Afghanistan NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, p. 44
\textsuperscript{2721} Afghanistan NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, p. 44
\textsuperscript{2722} Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nimroz, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{2723} US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{2724} US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{2725} US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{2726} Pajhwok Afghan News, Nimroz farmers in despair as drought kills livestock, 2 January 2019, url
\textsuperscript{2727} Relief International, Saving Lives and Securing Futures in Drought-Stricken Afghanistan, 26 August 2019, url
\textsuperscript{2728} Los Angeles Times, God, gas and heroin. Now, the fight’s over water, 6 February 2020, url
\textsuperscript{2729} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nimroz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
\textsuperscript{2730} Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019
\textsuperscript{2731} IWPR, Drugs Trade Thrives in Afghan Province, 19 February 2018, url
\textsuperscript{2732} Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, url
\textsuperscript{2733} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban running ‘customs check-point’ on Nimroz road, 20 January 2018, url
cross the border to Iran, and further to Europe. People who illegally cross were deported from Iran on a daily basis through the border crossing in Nimroz.2734

The province was facing a significant drug problem due to a growing local rate of addiction. The high addiction rate was attributed to the large numbers of returnees from Iran, who started using drugs while working there.2735 It is reported that drug addiction also affects increasingly women.2736

According to UNODC data obtained by AAN, poppy cultivation in Nimroz province decreased by 38 % in 2019, compared to 2018.2737 All villages in Nimroz producing poppy are paying taxes to Taliban or other anti-governmental elements.2738

Since 25 March 2020, a lockdown has been introduced in Nimroz due to an increase of COVID-19 cases, mostly imported from neighbouring Iran.2739 A curfew has been imposed and the border crossing point has been closed. Food import from Iran has been stopped.2740

2.24.2 Conflict background and actors in Nimroz

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Nimroz province is under the responsibility of the 215th ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southwest (TF Southwest), led by US forces.2741

Certain districts of the province remain an area of substantial Taliban activity. According to Taliban sources, their troops have been present along natural and administrative boundaries and infrastructure over past two years.2742 According to the Long War Journal, most areas in the province are controlled by Taliban, apart from the district centres and the province capital, Zaranj which are under governmental control.2743 According to sources quoted by Le Figaro, in 2018 Iran supported the Taliban financially, militarily and also by providing them with training units organised by the Quds Force, a branch of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards. In return, Taliban fighters had to intensify their operations against ISKP and US troops.2744

Taliban fighters loyal to Mullah Rasul, the leader of a Taliban splinter group active in western Afghanistan, have been operating in Nimroz province; they were reported to fight against the main Taliban faction for control of drug-trafficking route.2745

2.24.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.24.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 62 civilian casualties (30 deaths and 32 injured) in Nimroz province. This represents a decrease of 24 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were air strikes, followed

2734 Tolonews, Nimroz Identified As Key Human Trafficking Route, 13 September 2018, url
2735 IWPR, Drugs Trade Thrives in Afghan Province, 19 February 2018, url; BD News, More Afghan women find solace in drugs as coronavirus, migration upends life, 03 April 2020, url
2736 BD News, More Afghan women find solace in drugs as coronavirus, migration upends life, 03 April 2020, url
2737 Bjelica J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, url
2738 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018 – socio-economic report, July 2019, url, p. 63-64
2740 The National, Afghanistan’s doctors brace for impact as first positive coronavirus case detected, 25 February 2020, url
2741 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, url, p. 13
2743 LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., url. The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.
2744 Le Figaro, En Afghanistan, l’Iran accroît son aide aux talibans, 19 September 2018, url, p. 31
2745 RFE/RL, Taliban Infighting Leaves Dozens Of Militants Dead In Afghanistan, 30 November 2018, url
by ground engagements and explosive remnants of war. Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 25 civilian casualties in Nimroz during both the first and second quarters of 2020.

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED reported a total 142 incidents related to security in Nimroz province, of which 109 were coded as battles, 30 as remote violence, 3 as violence against civilians.

During the reported period, US forces in Afghanistan tried to hit drug labs and other infrastructure belonging to Taliban in the province. The campaign was called Operation Iron Tempest. In 2019, US forces carried out some 200 strikes against heroin labs.

In March 2019, NDS forces stormed and destroyed a hideout, prison, and drug lab of Taliban in Delaram and Khashrod districts. Drugs and weapons and military equipment were confiscated. On 5 May 2019, US forces hit more than 60 alleged drug production sites in Farah province and neighbouring Nimroz province. According to UN investigation, at least 39 civilians were killed, among them 14 children and one woman. The multiple air strikes took place in the Bakwa district of Farah province and in the Delaram district of Nimroz province. Reports of at least 37 additional civilian casualties were not confirmed but UN tried to verify them. The US denied the civilian casualties, claiming that USFOR-A had targeted the 'Taliban-run methamphetamine labs' which helped to fund the militant activities of AGEs. However, according to the UN, 'drug labs and associated workers cannot lawfully be designated as targets because the personnel working inside the drug production facilities were not performing combat functions'. UNAMA and OHCHR established through independent investigation that 'both the sites and individuals targeted in the USFOR-A air strikes on 5 May 2019 in Bakwa district of Farah province and Delaram district of Nimroz province were civilian and, as such, should have been protected from attack.'

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2746 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 94
2747 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, url, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, url, p. 72
2748 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Nimroz; Event types: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, url
2749 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Nimroz; Event types: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, url
2750 BBC, US meth lab strikes in Afghanistan killed at least 30 civilians, says UN, 9 October 2019, url
2751 SATP, Nimroz: Timeline – March 2019, url
2752 BBC, US meth lab strikes in Afghanistan killed at least 30 civilians, says UN, 9 October 2019, url
2753 UNHR, UN Report find alleged drug facilities were not lawful targets - air strikes caused significant civilian casualties, 9 October 2019, url
2754 BBC, US meth lab strikes in Afghanistan killed at least 30 civilians, says UN, 9 October 2019, url
2755 UNAMA, Special Report on Airstrikes on Alleged Drug-Processing Facilities, October 2019, url, p. 15
According to ACLED data, three civilians were killed in Kashrod district by NATO and Afghan military forces on 22 August and 8 December 2019.2756

Two civilians died in a mine explosion allegedly planted by the Taliban in Khashrod district on 4 January 2020. The bomb exploded when victims were travelling the road from Shahrak district to Khashrod district.2757

On 22 July 2019, a prosecutor was killed by unknown militants in Zaranj City and on 25 September 2019, deputy police chief of Kang district was killed by a Taliban-planted bomb.2758

There were also reports on clashes between Afghan forces and Taliban, mainly in Kashrod and Delaram districts during the year, usually not causing any civilian victims. The Taliban often attacked military and police checkpoints in the province.2759 On 19 January 2020, five Taliban insurgents were killed by NATO drone raids in Khashrod.2760 On 17 February 2020 Taliban spokesman insisted that an Afghan military helicopter had been shot down in Nimroz province. However, Afghan government claimed that the helicopter was not attacked and had made an emergency landing.2761 On 15 and 18 April 2020 Taliban conducted two attacks: on security outposts in Khashrod and on armoured personnel carrier next to market place in Delaram, killing two soldiers.2762 Local officials claimed that in Khashrod seven Taliban fighters were also killed.2763

2.24.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 2,557 persons displaced within Nimroz province. All of them were displaced within Zaranj City in 2019. Additionally, 597 persons were displaced to Nimroz’s provincial capital, Zaranj from Farah province.2764 Displacement in the province in the reporting period was induced by conflict and droughts.2765
2.25 Nuristan

2.25.1 General description of the province

Nuristan is located in eastern Afghanistan, on the Afghan-Pakistani border. It borders Badakhshan to the north, Pakistan to the east, Kunar and Laghman to the south and Panjshir to the west. RFE/RL's Gandhara noted that it was 'more closely joined' with its southern neighbours. The provincial capital of Nuristan is Parun. The province is divided into the following administrative units: Barg-e-Matal, Duab, Kamdesh, Mandol, Nurgeram, Parun, Wama and Waygal. According to local residents interviewed by the magazine The Diplomat, Waygal district’s actual name is Want.

Nuristan is mostly mountainous and one of the most remote, under-served and unknown provinces of Afghanistan. It is divided into three isolated valleys: the Alingar River valley in the west, the Pech River valley in the centre and the Landay Sin River valley in the east. Because its inhabitants were non-Muslim, the province was called Kafiristan ('Land of the infidels') until the mid-1890s, when its population converted to Islam and it was renamed Nuristan ('Land of light').

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2766 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nuristan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
2767 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nuristan Provincial Overview, n.d., url
2768 RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Province Looks To Islamic Schools To Prevent Youth From Joining Militants, 8 November 2019, url
2770 Diplomat (The), Waigal, Afghanistan: ‘This War Will Never End Here’, 13 June 2019, url
2771 Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, url
According to the NSIA, the population of Nuristan is estimated at 163,814 for 2020/21. It is composed mainly of Nuristani, with smaller Pashai, Pashtuns, Gujars, Tajiks, Pashtuns and Pashai communities. Although the Nuristani people are mostly considered as a single ethnic group, de facto they comprise numerous ethnic and sub-ethnic communities that speak different Indo-European languages, sometimes subsumed under the Dardic languages branch. Before the communist regime, religious leaders were respected and influenced politics. However, in areas of the province such as the Landay Sin valley, power was shared through community democracy, with a body of elders and a body of policemen appointed annually in order to define policies and enforce community law. An international NGO interviewed by LIFOS stated that it was difficult for outsiders – both militants and civilians – to settle in Nuristan.

Most of the province’s roads are only served by pack animals and, despite construction work in several districts during the early 2000s, remain in poor conditions to this day. Some of them may be completely inaccessible in winter due to floods or snowfalls. Even so, Nuristan became a key supply route from Pakistan for mujahideen groups in the past and remains so for the numerous insurgents active in the area today. Moreover, it connects Kabul and the Panjshir valley in the central region through the provinces of Kapisa and Laghman. Given its strategic position, road building projects were already carried out during mujahideen-times and continued by the international coalition and the Afghan government after 2001 to fight the insurgency.

Shortly after the NATO coalition withdrew from Kunar’s Dara-i Pech area, in 2014, local tribal leaders managed to reopen the road connecting Asadabad, Kunar’s capital, to Nuristan.

Although the Diplomat described Nuristan as ‘mostly neglected’ by the Afghan government since 2001, several rehabilitation and expansion works have been launched on the local road network in 2019. Among them, the rehabilitation of 15 kilometres of the Parun-Kunar road started in May and, according to a former executive of the National Security Council, was still underway in November 2019. In June, the local authorities began to expand a paved road from Parun to the remote districts of Kamdesh and Barg-e-Matal.

There is no functioning airstrip in Nuristan. According to the most recent UNODC Opium Survey (2018), Nuristan has maintained poppy-free status since 2013, with the exception of 2017, when 121 hectares were cultivated. A 2017 report by the German think tank Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) mentioned the involvement of various AGES in the illegal exploitation of mineral resources, such as precious stones, and in the taxation of timber, in both Kunar and Nuristan provinces.

2772 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, url, p. 4
2773 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nuristan Provincial Overview, n.d., url
2774 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Nuristan, n.d., url
2775 Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, url
2776 MEI, Social Change in Eastern Nuristan, 23 December 2012, url
2777 Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (version 2.0), 07/04/2020, url, p. 42
2778 Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, url
2779 DLCA, Afghanistan Road Network, 4 July 2018, url
2780 Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 2 June 2012, url
2781 RFE/RL/Gandhara, Peace Returns To Afghanistan’s ‘Valley Of Death’, 22 August 2019, url
2782 Diplomat (The), Waigal, Afghanistan: ‘This War Will Never End Here’, 13 June 2019, url
2783 Pajhwok Afghan News, Rehabilitation work on Nuristan-Kunar road kicks off, 20 May 2019, url
2784 Ghorzang, T. [Twitter], posted on: 25 November 2019, url
2785 Pajhwok Afghan News, Road connecting 2 districts with Paroon being built, 24 June 2019, url
2787 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 23
2788 Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, BICC, June 2017, url, pp. 38 ; 42
2.25.2 Conflict background and actors in Nuristan

Conservative religious groups, such as Wahabis and Salafis, have been active in the province for decades. The Islamic clergy started to mobilize in the province after 1978, when the pro-Soviet People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) failed to establish its rule. In this regard, the Daulat-e Inqilabi-yeye Islam-ye Nuristan (Islamic Revolutionary State of Nuristan) emerged in northern Nuristan under the leadership of the religious scholar Mawlawi Muhammad Afzal, who also supported the Taliban movement and was therefore given the freedom to rule over the province. The escalation of hostilities with Hezb-e Islami and Jamiat-e Islami in 1997 forced him to flee the province, where the Hezb-e Islami eventually became more influential. After 2001, various counter-insurgency operations were carried out throughout the province by the US military and coalition forces, until the US withdrew their troops in 2009, following some defeats. Subsequently, the Taliban expanded their control over large areas of the province. By 2018, governmental presence had often been defined as ‘token’ in a mountainous and remote province where villages are isolated from each other, as well as from the district centres. The community elders still play an important role, as they are said to take most of the decisions.

As of May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Mawlawi Esmaullah, originally affiliated to the Peshawar Shura network, as the Taliban shadow governor in Nuristan. He was appointed after the ‘reshuffle’ of the Taliban government structure during the 2019-2020 winter, ahead of the 2020 fighting season. Quoting an AGE source, the Diplomat observed that the Nuristani Taliban had ‘an Al Qaeda mindset’, meaning that they shared more extreme positions regarding jihad than the bulk of the Islamic Emirate fighters. The Diplomat also reported that almost all of Taliban fighters operating in Waygal were locals. Poverty, lack of job opportunities or personal reasons (such as hostility towards someone linked to the government) were presented as the main motivations of locals joining the insurgency. Nonetheless, the magazine expressed some doubts about the actual number of Taliban fighters in the district, deeming the 1 000 – 1 500 estimates exaggerated.

In June 2020, AAN’s expert Obaid Ali stated that ISKP was ‘likely present’ in parts of Nuristan province. It has reportedly been the case since 2016, when many of its fighters (including foreigners) came to the province, pushed out of neighbouring Nangarhar. According to the BICC report, ISKP first established in Waygal and Barg-e-Matal districts in late 2015 or early 2016. In June 2017, a governmental source quoted by AAN reported ISKP presence in the districts of Mandol, Duab, Nurgeram, Waygal and Wama. The US Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) stated that ISKP launched attacks in Nuristan in 2017, but endured significant losses in this province the following year.
As of May 2020, Nuristan was listed by the UN Security Council as one of the twelve provinces where Al Qaeda was ‘covertly active’. The report mentioned that Al Qaeda intended to form a joint unit of 2,000 fighters with the Haqqani Network, headed by Shir Khan Manga in the operational zone composed of Kunar and Nuristan. UNAMA added that Al Qaeda’s main tasks consist in ‘training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring’, while ‘being engaged in internal Taliban discussions over the movement’s relationships with other jihadists entities’. Already in 2012, Nuristan had been described as a stronghold Al Qaeda. In 2018-2019, it was said to operate training camps in the province.

While the Taliban have denied that Al Qaeda was fighting among them, LWJ pointed out that Qari Zia Rahman, a commander said to operate in Kunar and Nuristan provinces, as well as in several Pakistani tribal agencies, was affiliated to both movements. In a May 2020 report, the UN Security Council listed Tehrik-e Talib Pakistan (TTP), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) as Pakistani armed groups centred in eastern Afghan provinces, such as Nuristan, ‘where they operate under the umbrella of the Afghan Taliban’. As of 2016, along with Salafi group Jama’at al-Da’wa ila al-Quran wa-l-Sunna (JDQS), TTP reportedly controlled the Bajaur-Kunar-Nuristan corridor and used it to bring fighters and equipment into Afghanistan.

In terms of presence of government security forces, Nuristan province is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps, which falls under Train, Advise, and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), led by US and Polish forces. According to a local lawmaker, the Afghan National Police and the Afghan Local Police

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2799 Telegraph (The), Taliban claim to be preparing onslaught to drive Islamic State from Afghan stronghold, 7 August 2018, [url]
2800 National (The), Taliban prepare ‘decisive’ anti-ISIS operation in eastern Afghanistan, 5 August 2018, [url]
2801 Defesa & Sicurezza, Afghanistan, i talebani si preparano a cacciare Isis da Nangarhar, 8 August 2018, [url]
2802 Sarwary, B. [Twitter], posted on : 3 May 2019, [url]
2803 Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, BICC, June 2017, [url], p. 42
2804 Ariana News, [unofficial translation: Rising concerns on the recruitment of fighters by Daesh in Nooristan], 24 August 2019, [url]
2805 taz, „Islamischer Staat“ und Taliban: Der islamische Terrorwettbewerb : (Islamic State’ and Taliban: the Afghan terror competition), 1 February 2018, [url]
2806 Mielke, K., Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, BICC, June 2017, [url], p. 22
2807 RFE/RL/Gandhara, Afghan Province Looks To Islamic Schools To Prevent Youth From Joining Militants, 8 November 2019, [url]
2810 LWJ, Bin Laden advised relocation of some leaders to Afghanistan due to drone strikes in Waziristan, 3 May 2012, [url]
2811 Khaama Press, Taliban militants killed in U.S. drone strike in Nuristan province, 24 October 2018, [url]; LWJ, Taliban promotes training camp for ‘Commando Mujahidin’, 22 January 2019, [url]
2812 LWJ, Female Pakistani Taliban suicide bomber hits hospital, 21 July 2019, [url]
2813 UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url], p. 20
2814 USDOOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, [url], p. 13
are in insufficient numbers in Nuristan.\textsuperscript{2815} In this regard, the Diplomat reported that the ANP and ALP had 250 men combined in Waygal district and focused on preventing the Taliban to get into the district centre from the mountains.\textsuperscript{2816} The NDS-04, a unit of the NDS paramilitary strike forces, operates in Nuristan, Kunar and other provinces of North-East Afghanistan. In a 2019 report, Human Rights Watch explained that, although they are technically subordinated to the NDS, these forces are trained, equipped and overseen by the CIA. They conduct brutal night raids, targeting alleged insurgents and often injuring or killing civilians. These operations have grown increasingly frequent since late 2017.\textsuperscript{2817} According to AAN’s Kate Clark, in 2017, the NDS-04 unit numbered 250 men trained by US Special Forces.\textsuperscript{2818}

An AAN report stated that, in November 2018 almost all the districts of Nuristan province were somehow under control or influence of the Taliban and that the police’s presence was limited to district centres.\textsuperscript{2819} In January 2020, French daily newspaper Le Figaro described Nuristan as ‘a virtually inaccessible Taliban stronghold’\textsuperscript{2820}, while Afghan news agency Khaama asserted that the Taliban were active in ‘some districts’ of the province (without specifying which ones) and ‘often conduct terrorist related activities’.\textsuperscript{2821} In a 2019 article, the Diplomat stated that outside of the district centre and its immediate surroundings, most of Waygal was under Taliban’s control.\textsuperscript{2822} According to information collected by LWJ and presented in a map, Kamdesh district is ‘traditionally a hotbed of Taliban activity’. Kamdesh, Wama, Mandol (as of August 2019\textsuperscript{2823}), Waygal and Duab districts are assessed as contested by the Afghan government and the Taliban. The three remaining districts, Nurgeram, Parun and Barg-e Matal, are presented as controlled by the government or undetermined.\textsuperscript{2824}

### 2.25.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.25.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 22 civilian casualties (8 deaths and 14 injured) in Nuristan. This represents a decrease of 8% compared to 2018. Only Bamyam and Panjsher provinces recorded less casualties over 2019. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, targeted/deliberate killings and non-suicide IED.\textsuperscript{2825} According to a SIGAR analysis of data provided by Resolute Support, from January to May 2019, relatively to its population, Nuristan was the second most dangerous province for civilians (0.17 casualties per thousand inhabitants).\textsuperscript{2826} At the end of the third quarter, although the ratio had increased to 0.22, Nuristan was now only in line with the national average.\textsuperscript{2827} Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 50 civilian casualties in Nuristan in the first half of 2020, reporting similar numbers over the two first quarters.\textsuperscript{2828}

In regard with the severity of the conflict, over the full year 2019, Resolute Support recorded less than 150 enemy-initiated attacks in Nuristan province – one of the five lowest provincial numbers.\textsuperscript{2829} In

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\textsuperscript{2815} Tolonews, Governor Rejects Rumors On Daesh Presence In Nuristan, 23 August 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2816} Diplomat (The), Waigal, Afghanistan: ‘This War Will Never End Here’, 13 June 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2817} HRW, “They’ve Shot Many Like This” Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2818} Clark, K., CIA-proxy militias, CIA-drones in Afghanistan: “Hunt and kill” déjà vu, AAN, 26 October 2017, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2819} Ali, O., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2820} Le Figaro, Afghanistan: à Taranak, l’alliance secrète des talibans et de l’armée contre l’état islamique [In Taranak, the Taliban and the army’s secret alliance against the Islamic State], 30 January 2020, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2821} Khaama Press, 550 kgs of explosives discovered from a vegetables truck in Nuristan province, 11 June 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2822} Diplomat (The), Waigal, Afghanistan: ‘This War Will Never End Here’, 13 June 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{2823} LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n. d., \url{url} However the source does not systematically specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.

\textsuperscript{2824} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 94

\textsuperscript{2825} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2019, \url{url}, p. 71

\textsuperscript{2826} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2019, \url{url}, p. 75

\textsuperscript{2827} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 69 ; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 72 At the time of writing, UNAMA provincial data for 2020 was not available.

\textsuperscript{2828} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 January 2020, \url{url}, p. 69
January 2020, Pajhwok ranked Nuristan and Panjshir as the two provinces least affected by the conflict over 2019, with only two attacks recorded in each one of them.2830 However, at the end of 2019 and in January 2020, UNOCHA reported ongoing fighting in ‘various districts’ of several eastern provinces, among which Nuristan.2831 Afghan journalist Bilal Sarwary noted that, soon after the signature of the US-Taliban agreement in Doha (February 2020), the Taliban had resumed their attacks on Afghan security forces, notably in Nuristan’s Barg-e Matal district.2832 Afghan security officials also reported increasing Taliban military activity between March and May 2020 in eastern Afghanistan, particularly in Nangarhar, Kunar and Nuristan.2833 UNOCHA confirmed that fighting continued in Nuristan and other eastern provinces in early May 2020, although it did not specifically mention the Taliban.2834

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED collected data on 52 violent events in Nuristan province from open sources: 39 coded as ‘battles’ (75 %), 11 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ (21 %) and 2 as ‘violence against civilians’ (4 %).2835

![Event Type Chart](image)

**Figure 27.** Nuristan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data2836

Across these three categories, Kamdesh (18 incidents) and Nurgeram (13) stood out as the districts where most violent incidents were reported between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020, accounting for almost two thirds of the total number. Less than 10 violent events were recorded in Barg-e Matal, Duab, Wama and Waygal, and none in Mandol and Parun.2837

Regarding events coded as ‘battles’ by ACLED, all of them were ‘armed clashes’. Half of these took place in Kamdesh and Nurgeram districts. Out of 39 clashes, 25 were attributed to the Taliban and conducted against ANDSF.2838 Such events include a Taliban attack on the Afghan military in April 2019, in Nurgeram, resulting in the killing of 13 assailants.2839 In October 2019, the Taliban briefly took over

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2830 Pajhwok Afghan News, 22,300 people killed, injured in Afghanistan last year, 7 January 2020, [url](#)


2832 Sarwary, B. [Twitter], posted on: 2 March 2020, [url](#)

2833 Tolonews, ANDSF Repels Scores of Taliban Attacks in Past 24 Hours: MoD, 4 May 2020, [url](#); Tolonews, Al Qaeda, Jaish-e-Mohammad Align With Taliban in East: Officials, 11 May 2020, [url](#)


2835 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#) For more information on ACLED’s methodology, see: Introduction – Sources.

2836 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

2837 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

2838 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](#)

2839 Khaama Press, 3 Taliban commanders and their 10 fighters killed in Nuristan province, 21 April 2019, [url](#)
an ALP outpost in the Pasha Gul area of Nuristan and other provinces.

In terms of incidents coded by ACLED as ‘Explosions/Remote violence’, seven out of eleven were ‘Remote explosive/landmine/IED’, carried out by the Taliban against ANSF.

Over the reporting period, the two recorded events of violence against civilians were documented by Taliban’s Voice of Jihad. In one instance, Afghan forces were accused of randomly firing at civilians and injuring one in Waygal district in April 2019. In April 2020, the National Security Council spokesman, quoted by Pajhwok, claimed that the Taliban had killed 30 civilians across several provinces, including Nuristan, in the previous days. The conflict has significantly affected local health infrastructures. UNAMA indeed reported that between April and May 2019, the Taliban had forced 13 health clinics to close in 4 districts of Nuristan, until a mediation led by community elders secured their reopening. By June 2019, another dozen of clinics run by an Afghan aid organisation in Duab, Mandol, Nuristan, Kamdesh and Barg-e-Matal districts – representing a quarter of the 43 health centres operating in Nuristan – had been forced to close by the Taliban, who claimed to have received complaints about the quality of the services provided by the NGO. In November 2019, one the three health centres closed due to insurgent threats was reopened. Other NGO-run health centres had to close because of ongoing fighting in 2020. In August 2019, a polio immunisation campaign was disrupted in some NSAG-controlled areas of Nuristan and other eastern provinces.

Nuristan has been one of the most affected provinces by the closing of polling centres decided by the Afghan Ministry of Interior ahead of the presidential election of September 2019, because Afghan

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2840 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 31 October 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 ALP personnel killed in Nuristan [sic] attack, 17 October 2019, url
2841 Diplomat (The), Waigal, Afghanistan: ‘This War Will Never End Here’, 13 June 2019, url
2842 Afghanistan Times (The) [Twitter], posted on: 8 April 2020, url; Tolonews [Twitter], posted on: 8 April 2020, url
2843 Sarwary, B. [Twitter], posted on: 8 April 2020, url
2844 Tolonews [Twitter], posted on: 8 April 2020, url
2845 Bakhtar News, Border Policemen Shelling on Taliban in Nooristan, 12 May 2019, url
2846 Bakhtar News, Pakistan Terrorists Killed in Nooristan, 15 December 2019, url
2848 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020), url
2849 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Nuristan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020), url
2850 Voice of Jihad, انورستان: واند وایکل کی د دیبنم توبهنو3 کلیوال زولی، دی خاردي ویل [Nuristan: 1 villager wounded, 3 animals killed by enemy artillery in Want Waigal], 29 April 2019, url
2851 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill 30 civilians in a week : NSC, 12 April 2020, url
2852 UNAMA, Midyear Update On The Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict: 1 January To 30 June 2019, 30 July 2019, url, p. 5
2853 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban close 12 NGO-run health clinics in Nuristan, 11 May 2019, url; NYT, Taliban Target Aid Groups, in an Ominous Turn in Kamdesh, 13 May 2019, url
2856 UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Weekly Humanitarian Update (5-11 August 2019), 14 August 2019, url
security forces could not ensure their protection. Twenty polling centres (about a third of the provincial total number) were supposed to be kept closed in Nuristan.

2.25.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 551 persons displaced from Nuristan – one of the lowest provincial figures recorded over the period. Only 39 IDPs were reported during the first half of 2020. Half of the IDPs were displaced within the province, while the other half was headed to Panjshir province. Overall, the main districts of origin of IDPs were Mandol (259), Kamdesh (92) and Nurgeram (78). The three of them accounted for almost 80% of Nuristan’s IDPs. The highest displacement figures were recorded during the summer of 2019. According to IDPs interviewed in September 2019 by RFE/RL’s Gandhara, frequent fighting between the government forces and insurgents, but also clashes between the Taliban and ISKP, had forced them to flee. Others stated that, as government supporters, they had no other option but to leave.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 1,696 persons displaced to Nuristan province. Outside of the aforementioned 292 people displaced within the province, 1,404 IDPs came from neighbouring Kunar and primarily settled in Parun and Wama districts. Most of them fled Kunar’s Chapadara district in March and April 2019, where the Taliban and ISKP were then reportedly clashing.

Although UNAMA data does not reflect this information, in September 2019, Gandhara reported that some Nuristani civilians had taken shelter in Kunar and Nangarhar.

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2856 AAN, Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (10): What to watch out for on election day, 26 September 2019, [url]
2860 RFE/RL/Gandhara, Insecurity Prompts Thousands To Flee Homes In Eastern Afghan Province, 13 September 2019, [url]
2862 UNOCHA, Afghanistan : Kunar Conflict – Update (as of 3 April 2019), 4 April 2019, [url]
2863 RFE/RL/Gandhara, Insecurity Prompts Thousands To Flee Homes In Eastern Afghan Province, 13 September 2019, [url]
2.26 Paktika

2.26.1 General description of the province

Map 26: Afghanistan – Paktika province, source: UNOCHA

UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktika Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
A part of Loya Paktya (i.e. ‘Greater Paktya’), an area also encompassing the provinces of Paktya and Khost\textsuperscript{2865}, Paktyka is located in eastern Afghanistan, on the Afghan-Pakistani border. It borders Ghazni to the north-west, Paktya and Khost to the north, Pakistan to the south and east and Zabul to the south-west.\textsuperscript{2866} The provincial capital of Paktyka is Sharana. The province is divided into the following administrative units: Bermel, Dila (also Khushamand), Gomal, Gyan, Janikhel, Matakhain, Naka, Omna, Sarobi, Sarrawzah, Sharan, Turwo, Urgun, Wazakah, Wormamay, Yahyakhel, Yosufkhel, Zarghanunshahr (also Khairkot) and Ziruk.\textsuperscript{2867} As reported by the official website of the Office of the Afghan President, the province also has the following four non-official districts: Shakeen, Bak Khil, Charbaran and Shakhil Abad.\textsuperscript{2868}

The province is composed of three sub-regions: the northern-central sub-region, the south-east sub-region along the Afghan-Pakistani border and the south-west sub-region, called Katawaz, which was previously part of Ghazni. Paktyka became a separate province under President Daud’s rule (1973-1978), and there is still a strong sense of belonging to one of the three sub-regions among the population.\textsuperscript{2869} Moreover, local tribal relations still play an important role in the province.\textsuperscript{2870}

According to the NSIA, the population of Paktyka is estimated at 775,498 for 2020/21. The rural population accounts for 99% of the total.\textsuperscript{2871} The province is composed mainly of Pashtuns, with a Tajik minority in the cities of Sharana and Urgun.\textsuperscript{2872} RFE/RL’s Gandhara also pointed out that, in 2014, military operations in North Waziristan forced 7,000 Pakistani families to seek shelter in Khost and Paktyka, primarily in Urgun and Bermel districts.\textsuperscript{2873}

The National Highway 11 (‘NH11’) connects Ghazni province to Paktyka’s Sharan and continues to Paktyka’s Zurmat.\textsuperscript{2874} As of December 2018 the Ghazni-Paktyka Highway had been closed for six months, following Taliban attacks in Ghazni province.\textsuperscript{2875} In November 2019, the Taliban were still blocking the highway and had diverted the traffic to an unpaved road through Ghazni’s Andar district, although they denied to have abducted people and extorted money from drivers.\textsuperscript{2876} Furthermore, in May 2019, according to RFE/RL, the Taliban ‘heavily damaged’ the gravel road linking Ghazni province to Paktyka’s Urgun district, in an attempt to cut off villages from provincial capitals.\textsuperscript{2877} In May 2019 as well, Afghan security forces led ‘route clearance operations’ in unspecified Paktyka districts.\textsuperscript{2878} At last, as of March 2020, the highway crossing Wazakhah district had reportedly been blocked by the Taliban for several years in Goshta area.\textsuperscript{2879}

\textsuperscript{2866} US, Naval Postgraduate School, Paktyka Provincial Overview, n.d., \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2868} Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Paktyka, n.d., \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2869} Muzhary, F., The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktyka: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling, AAN, 13 November 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2870} Clark, K. and Muzhary, F., How to Set up a ‘Good ALP’: The experience of Yahyakhel district, Paktyka and how it became more peaceful, AAN, 11 December 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2871} Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, \url{url}, p. 4
\textsuperscript{2872} Muzhary, F., The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktyka: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling AAN, 13 November 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2873} RFE/RL/Gandhara, In Afghanistan, Lockdown Hits Waziristan Refugees Hard, 21 April 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2874} Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, \url{url}, p. 8; Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 months on, Ghazni-Paktyka highway remains closed, 13 December 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2875} Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 months on, Ghazni-Paktyka highway remains closed, 13 December 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2876} Muzhary, F., One Land, Two Rules (7): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Andar district in Ghazni province, AAN, 13 June 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 18 months on, Ghazni-Paktyka road remains shut, 3 November 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2877} RFE/RL, Afghan Teen Loses Her Eye Waiting To Prove Horrific Injury Was From War, 25 May 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2878} Khaama Press, 8 Taliban militants killed, 24 IEDs destroyed in Balkh, Farah and Paktyka provinces, 25 May 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2879} Pajhwok Afghan News, Police officer accused of torture, extortion, 19 March 2020, \url{url}
There is an unofficial motorable crossing point to Pakistan in Angur Ada, Bermel district. Besides, since the full reopening of Khost’s Ghulam Khan border point, in August 2019, the residents of Paktya, Paktika and Khost are allowed to get into Pakistan with their tazkera, under the condition that they have relatives living on the other side of the Durand Line.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Paktika has maintained poppy-free status since 2014.

### 2.26.2 Conflict background and actors in Paktika

In some parts of Paktika, such as Yahyakhel district, solid intra-tribal relations ‘hampered the emergence of mujahedin factions and strongmen and the sort of severe intra-factional conflicts that arose in other districts in Paktika and elsewhere in the 1980s and 1990s’ However, according to an AAN analysis from December 2018, the Taliban were then predominant in many areas of Paktika province. Some districts were either fully under Taliban control or contested. In July 2019, intra-Taliban clashes in Gyan district suggested potential internal dissensions.

As of May 2020, the UN Security Council listed Mullah Nasar, originally affiliated to the Peshawar Shura network, as the Taliban shadow governor in Paktya, while Mawlawi Qasam Farid was listed as the head of the military commission in Loya Paktya.

In December 2019, Pajhwok reported that a Taliban training centre had been destroyed by the Afghan security forces in Wazakhah district. Nonetheless, in April 2020, a Taliban spokesman published pictures of a training camp, named Tariq bin Ziyad Camp, in Paktika. The Taliban have also been able to send fighters from Pakistan’s Waziristan to several provinces, including Paktika, from their ‘transit hub’ in Zabul.

Moreover, Paktika is one of the provinces where the UN Security Council observed ‘strong ties’ between the Taliban and organised criminal groups involved in heroin and hashish traffics or local businesses extortion.

In April 2020, Long War Journal described Paktika as ‘a bastion of the Haqqani Network’. The group started to expand in Loya Paktya some years before 2011, mainly in the Zadran valley between Paktya, Paktika and Khost, which served as a corridor from Pakistan to Ghazni and Logar through the districts of Spera in Khos, Gyan in Paktika and Zurmat in Paktya. As of June 2019, according to Afghan officials quoted in a UN Security Council report, 1 800 – 2 000 fighters of the network were

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2881 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN , Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url], p. 21
2882 Clark, K. and Muzhary, F., How to Set up a ‘Good ALP’: The experience of Yahyakhel district, Paktika and how it became more peaceful, AAN, 1 December 2018, [url]; Muzhary, F., The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url]
2883 Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN & Global Public Policy Institute, July 2020, [url], p. 51
2884 Clark, K. and Muzhary, F., How to Set up a ‘Good ALP’: The experience of Yahyakhel district, Paktika and how it became more peaceful, AAN, 11 December 2018, [url]
2885 Khaama Press, Clashes reported among Taliban militants in Paktika province, 16 July 2019, [url]
2886 UN Security Council, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url], pp. 25, 27
2887 Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Taliban killed in Paktika operations, 19 December 2019, [url]
2888 LWJ, Taliban touts more elite ‘Red Unit’ fighter training on social media, 8 April 2020, [url]
2889 UNSG, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, [url], pp. 21, 22
2890 UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, [url], p. 12
2891 LWJ, Taliban touts more elite ‘Red Unit’ fighter training on social media, 8 April 2020, [url]
2892 Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, [url]
reportedly leading the Taliban operations in Loya Paktya, with the help of militants belonging to the Tehrik-e Talibani Pakistan. The report added that the Haqqani Network was then holding all the main shadow government positions (provincial governors and district governors) in the region.\textsuperscript{2894} As of May 2020, the Haqqani Network was allegedly working with Al Qaeda on a joint unit of 2,000 fighters, headed by Hafiz Azizuddin Haqqani in Loya Paktya.\textsuperscript{2895}

In 2019, Al Qaeda was reportedly trying to strengthen its positions in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, for instance in Paktika’s Bermel district. As stated by a UN Security Council report, the movement was then closely cooperating with Lashkar-e Tayyiba and the Haqqani Network, while providing training and religious instruction to Taliban fighters and their families.\textsuperscript{2896} In May 2019, Al Qaeda released a video flaunting its involvement in an attack launched along the Taliban on an ANA convoy, purportedly in Wazakhabh district.\textsuperscript{2897}

Links between the Haqqani Network and foreign groups connected to Al Qaeda in eastern Afghanistan (such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Islamic Jihadi Union) had been reported by LWJ in 2012.\textsuperscript{2898} In a June 2019 report, the UN Security Council listed other foreign groups active in Loya Paktya, where they benefitted from the ‘remote terrain’ and the limited capacity of the security forces to reach these areas. Among them is the TTP, with more than an estimated 3,500 fighters spread across Kunar, Paktya and Paktika provinces.\textsuperscript{2899} In February 2020, one of TTP’s leaders was killed in Kabul after travelling from Paktika. The province also appears to shelter a few logistics and religious leaders of the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, although it is mainly located in the north-eastern regions.\textsuperscript{2900}

Pakistan’s paramilitary forces have also been reported to make forays into Paktka, notably in Gomal district, where they set up barbed wire along the border, thus capturing parcels of Afghan territory, in November 2019.\textsuperscript{2901}

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Paktika province is under the responsibility of the 203\textsuperscript{rd} ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces.\textsuperscript{2902} As for the ALP, it has been commended for expelling the Taliban from Yahyakhel district and maintaining stability there since 2012. Although there has been reports of ‘abusive commanders and forced recruitments’ in some places of Paktika, the robust and ‘relatively egalitarian’ tribal structures of Loya Paktya and its tradition of local defence groups (arbaki) have contributed to ‘more instances of effective, less abusive forces’.\textsuperscript{2903} According to Human Rights Watch, the Khost Protection Force (KPF) reportedly possesses a battalion in Paktika’s Sharan district.\textsuperscript{2904} Another pro-government armed group, based in Paktika, emerged in 2019, and is locally referred to as ‘Shaheen Forces’. Also known as 904 Unit, they are headquartered at Shaheen Camp in Urgun district. As the KPF, Shaheen Forces operate outside of official security forces chains of command, with the coalition forces’ ground and air support. UNAMA added that Shaheen Forces were thought to operate in ‘close coordination’ with the NDS special forces and enjoyed impunity for their abuses, despite occasional investigations ordered by the government, which contributes to ‘anti-Government sentiment and spark protests among the civilian...
population’. Along with the KPF, the Shaheen Forces have been held responsible for the majority of civilian casualties by pro-government armed groups recorded across the country in 2019.\textsuperscript{2905} As a matter of fact, Paktika is not new to abuses committed by these groups. Referring to a HRW report and British reporter Julius Cavendish’s investigation, AAN’s expert Kate Clark indeed mentioned that as the head of a Counterterrorism Pursuit Team supported by the CIA, Colonel Azizullah Karwan (murdered in Kabul in June 2018\textsuperscript{2906}) had been accused of extrajudicial killings of civilians, collective punishment and retaliatory killings from 2008 to early 2010.\textsuperscript{2907}

According to information collected by LWJ and presented in a map, Bermel, Janikhel, Matakhan, Turwo, Urgun, Wormmamay, Yahyakhel, Yosufkhel and Ziruk districts are ‘contested’, while Dila, Gomal, Gyan, Naka, Omna and Wazakhah districts are under Taliban control. LWJ noted that in July 2019, the Afghan government had admitted of not being in control of the district centres of Gomal, Gyan and Naka. Finally, Sarobi, Sarrawazah, Sharan and Zarghunshahr districts are listed as government-controlled or undetermined.\textsuperscript{2908} While LWJ claimed that Dila district had been overrun in July 2019\textsuperscript{2909}, the UN Secretary General stated that the takeover had only been temporary.\textsuperscript{2910} As for Wazakhah district, Pajhwok reported in March 2020 that for several years, due to the Taliban’s blockage of the main road, it had been forced to airlift essential supplies.\textsuperscript{2911} Older information presented in a November 2018 AAN’s report described the Taliban as fully controlling Naka and Omna districts, and the authorities as strong around the provincial capital and in Matakhan, Yosufkhel, Khairkot (Zarghunshahr), Urgun and Yahyakhel.\textsuperscript{2912}

### 2.26.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.26.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 168 civilian casualties (128 deaths and 40 injured) in Paktika province. This represents an increase of 11 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were search operations, non-suicide IEDs and air strikes.\textsuperscript{2913} In its mid-2019 report, UNAMA had already pointed a ‘notable increase’ in civilian casualties in Paktika, ‘with an especially high proportion of deaths compared to injured persons’.\textsuperscript{2914} Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 75 civilian casualties in Paktika in the first half of 2020, reporting an increase during the second quarter compared to the first.\textsuperscript{2915}

In regard with the severity of the conflict, as in 2018, Resolute Support recorded between 301 and 500 enemy-initiated attacks in Paktika province over the full year 2019.\textsuperscript{2916} In July 2019, Afghan news agency Khaama stated that ‘the security situation in Paktika province [had] deteriorated during the recent months.’\textsuperscript{2917} Moreover, UNOCHA reported that in December 2019, Paktika was among ‘the top

\textsuperscript{2905} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, pp. 53, 56, 58, 65, 74, 84
\textsuperscript{2906} Tolonews, Who Was Commander Karwan Of Paktika?, 29 June 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2907} Clark, K., CIA-proxy militias, CIA-drones in Afghanistan: “Hunt and kill” déjá vu, AAN, 26 October 2017, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2908} LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n. d., \url{url} However the source does not systematically specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.
\textsuperscript{2909} LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., \url{url}; LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.
\textsuperscript{2910} UNSG, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 3 September 2019, \url{url}, p. 6
\textsuperscript{2911} Pajhwok Afghan News, Police officer accused of torture, extortion, 19 March 2020, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2912} Muzhary, F., The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling, AAN, 13 November 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2913} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{url}, p. 94
\textsuperscript{2914} UNAMA, Midyear Update on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict : 1 January to 30 June 2019, 30 July 2019, \url{url}, p. 3
\textsuperscript{2915} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{url}, p. 69 ; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, \url{url}, p. 72 At the time of writing, UNAMA provincial data for 2020 was not available.
\textsuperscript{2916} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 January 2020, \url{url}, p. 69
\textsuperscript{2917} Khaama Press, Clashes reported among Taliban militants in Paktika province, 16 July 2019, \url{url}
three provinces with the highest number of closed or damaged schools’. At the time, 117 schools had reportedly been forced to close due to insecurity. However, despite the ‘volatile’ situation prevailing in the province, RFE/RL noted that during the 2019 presidential election, Paktika had been one of the provinces with either a single polling centre closed or none at all. Nevertheless, on polling day, mortar grenades were launched near polling sites in Paktika, Paktya and Kunar provinces.

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED collected data on 325 violent events in Paktika province from open sources: 214 coded as ‘battles’ (66 %), 87 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ (27 %) and 24 as ‘violence against civilians’ (8 %).

Across these three categories, Sharan (41 incidents), Bermel (35) Sarrawzah (35) and Matakhan (29) stood out as the districts where most violent events were reported between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020. In each of Wazakah, Dila, Ziruk, Sarobi, Janikhel, Zarghunshahr, Yosufkhel, Yahyakhel and Wormamay districts, between 10 and 20 events were recorded. Based on ACLED data, the least affected districts were Turwo (1 event), Gyan (4), Naka (5), Omna (7), Urgun (8) and Gomal (9).

Regarding events coded as ‘battles’ by ACLED, an overwhelming majority of them were ‘armed clashes’. Sarrawzah (29), Sharan (22) and Matakhan (20) were the most affected districts by this type of violence. Conversely, Gomal, Urgun, Naka, Omna, Gyan and Turwo recorded less than five armed clashes. The remaining districts experienced levels of clashes ranging from 8 to 17. Of the 213 armed clashes that ACLED collected information about, 140 were said to have been initiated by the Taliban, and 8 others by them or an unidentified group.

Taliban attacks mainly focused on Sarrawzah, Sharan and Matakhan districts and only targeted ANDSF, except for one intra-Taliban clash in July 2019. As for the approximatively 60 armed clashes initiated by the Afghan security forces and allied militias, they were spread out across most of Paktika districts, with peaks of 12 attacks in Bermel, 9 in

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2921 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktika ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](https://www.acleddata.com/)

2922 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktika ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](https://www.acleddata.com/)

2923 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktika ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](https://www.acleddata.com/)

2924 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktika ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](https://www.acleddata.com/)

2925 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktika ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](https://www.acleddata.com/)

2926 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktika ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](https://www.acleddata.com/)

2927 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktika ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url](https://www.acleddata.com/)

2928 Khaama Press, Clashes reported among Taliban militants in Paktika province, 16 July 2019, [url](https://khaama.com/clashes-reported-among-taliban-militants-in-paktika-province/)

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Figure 28. Paktika - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data.
Sharan and 7 in Wazakhah. Examples of such incidents include two police raids ending in the killing of seven Taliban in Wazakhah and Sarobi districts, in December 2019. During the second quarter of 2019, Sarobi district police chief was injured by unidentified gunmen in the bazaar of Urgun district. In June 2019, Bermel police district chief was killed by the Taliban.

In terms of incidents coded by ACLED as ‘Explosions/Remote violence’, the two most represented sub-categories were ‘Air/drone strikes’ (61 %) and ‘Remote explosive/Landmine/IED’ (26 %). Bermel district clearly stood out as the most affected district by air/drone strikes (18 recorded out of 53 overall), followed by Sharan (7) and Matakhan (6). In April 2019, 18 people were killed in an air strike in Naka district. Afghan authorities assured that the victims were Taliban fighters, but the local population claimed they all were civilians. The most lethal strikes took place in Wormanay district, when about 105 Taliban fighters were reportedly killed over two consecutive days, in September 2019, although the group denied that it had lost that many members. In December 2019, six members of the Haqqani Network were killed in an air strike in Bermel.

Out of 23 ‘Remote explosive/Landmine/IED’ incidents recorded by ACLED, all of them were attributed to AGEs. Fourteen took place in Sharan, Sarrawzah and Ziruk districts. Three of these events made civilian fatalities and were said to have been carried out by an undetermined militant group. On 23 July 2019, in provincial capital Sharan, two civilians were killed (including a child) and six others injured after a car bomb struck the vehicle of a police commander of Matakhan district. In November 2019, at least seven civilians were killed when their vehicle hit a roadside bomb in Sarrawzah district. The Taliban were also held responsible for three grenade attacks across the province. The most recent one happened in Zarghunshar (Khairkot) district, on 3 May 2020, when a hand grenade thrown into a mosque wounded 20 worshipers.

In terms of attacks on civilians, relatively speaking, Sharan, Zarhunshahr and Bermel districts were the most affected (3 to 4 incidents each). Out of these 24 events, 17 have been attributed to Afghan forces and their NATO allies, and 7 to the Taliban. In March 2019, at least seven persons were killed by the Afghan police in Bermel. The New York Times reported that on 24 May 2019, ten civilians were killed by...
during a raid led by Afghan and US forces in Urgun district. In this regard, from March 2019, UNAMA recorded 15 incidents and 62 civilian casualties (58 killed, 4 injured) attributed to the Paktika-based Shaheen Forces. As in 2018, violent incidents attributed to the KPF were not restricted to Khost province and affected Paktya and Paktika too. UNAMA expressed concern over the killing of several men, sometimes at close range, by pro-government groups during night raids at peoples’ homes, calling it a ‘disturbing pattern’. In this regard, from March 2019, UNAMA recorded 15 incidents and 62 civilian casualties (58 killed, 4 injured) attributed to the Paktika-based Shaheen Forces. As in 2018, violent incidents attributed to the KPF were not restricted to Khost province and affected Paktya and Paktika too. UNAMA expressed concern over the killing of several men, sometimes at close range, by pro-government groups during night raids at peoples’ homes, calling it a ‘disturbing pattern’. In this regard, from March 2019, UNAMA recorded 15 incidents and 62 civilian casualties (58 killed, 4 injured) attributed to the Paktika-based Shaheen Forces. As in 2018, violent incidents attributed to the KPF were not restricted to Khost province and affected Paktya and Paktika too. UNAMA expressed concern over the killing of several men, sometimes at close range, by pro-government groups during night raids at peoples’ homes, calling it a ‘disturbing pattern’.

Incidentally, in March 2020, Pajhwok reported on the brutality of Wazakhah district police chief, Barat, towards local dwellers, who accused him of killing and beating people, extorting money from shopkeepers and drug smuggling.

Taliban acts of violence against civilians include the killing of three civilians (including a child) in Zarghunshar district, in May 2020.

According to the UN Secretary General, during the second quarter of 2020, three human rights defenders were kidnapped and mistreated by the Taliban in Paktika.

Concerning health facilities, Pajhwok reported that in March 2019, unidentified persons had dynamited a health centre of Bermel district, a month after a similar incident had taken place in the same district. Besides, according to the World Health Organization, four health care providers were killed in Paktika between January and November 2019.

2.26.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 2 317 persons displaced from Paktika – one of the lowest provincial figures recorded over the period. Except for 300 residents from Urgun and Gyan districts who were headed to Khost province, 86% found refuge within the province. Overall, the main districts of origin of IDPs were Dila (315), Gyan (287), Urgun (245), Sarobi (224) and Omna (210). The five of them accounted for almost 60% of Paktika’s IDPs. The highest displacement figures were recorded in July 2019, September through December 2019 and February 2020. In several reports from late 2019 and early 2020, UNOCHA suggested that ongoing conflict was responsible for many displacements in Paktika.

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UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 2 016 persons displaced to Paktika province. All of them were displaced within the province, mainly to Sharan (1 155), home to the provincial capital, and Urgun (686) districts.

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2943 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, url
2945 Pajhwok Afghan News, Police officer accused of torture, extortion, 19 March 2020, url
2946 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 28 May 2020, url
2948 Pajhwok Afghan News, Health clinic dynamited in Paktika’s Barmal district, 31 March 2019, url
2949 World Health Organization, Afghanistan – Attacks on Health Care in 2019 as of 17 November, 18 November 2019, url
2.27 Paktya

2.27.1 General description of the province

A part of Loya Paktya (i.e. ‘Greater Paktya’), an area also encompassing the provinces of Khost and Paktika, Paktya is located in eastern Afghanistan, on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. It borders Logar to the north, Pakistan to the east, Khost to the south-east, Paktika to the south and Ghazni to the west. The provincial capital of Paktya is Gardez. The province is divided into the following administrative units: Ahmadaba, Alikhel (or Jaji), Chamkani, Dand Wa Patan, Garda Siray, Gardez, Janikhel, Lija Ahmad Khel, Laja Mangel, Mirzaka, Rohany Baba, Sayedkaram, Shawak, Zadran and Zurmat. As of June 2020, the NISA described Garda Siray, Laja Mangel, Mirzaka and Rohany Baba as ‘temporary’ districts, meaning that they have been created by previous regimes or, more recently, under Presidents Karzai and Ghani, and that their status has not been approved by the Afghan parliament yet. In 2018, AAN added that Rohany Baba had been created out of Zurmat district.

However, in its 2014 provincial atlas, UNOCHA respectively presented Sayedkaram/Mirzaka and Lija Ahmad Khel/Laja Mangel as different names referring to the same district.

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2954 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktya Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url]
2956 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Paktya Provincial Overview, n.d., [url]
2957 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktya Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url]
2959 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url], p. 22
2960 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, [url], p. 22
2961 Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, [url]
2962 Khan P. & Ruttig, T., The 2018 Election Observed (1) in Zurmat, Paktia: Real voting only in the district centre, AAN, 29 October 2018, [url]
2963 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktya Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url]
According to the NSIA, the population of Paktya is estimated at 611,952 for 2020/21 and is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Tajiks. As reported by AAN, a small Shia community of mostly bilingual (Dari as a first language and Pashtu as a second) residents lives in Khwajah Hassan, in the north-east of the provincial capital. They belong to a group called Sadat (singular Sayyed), who are said to have been living in the area without conflict with the Sunni (Tajik and Pashtun) communities of the province and have actually fought along them to defend Gardez, since the Soviet invasion. According to the BBC, there used to be a Sikh and Hindu minority in Paktya, Gardez City, but most of them have fled the province, with allegedly only one Sikh individual left in Gardez in the last years.

The Kabul-Gardez Highway connects the provincial capital to Kabul City crossing through Logar. Another highway, called the G-K or Gardez-Khost Highway, passes through the districts of Shawak and Zadran as well as through Khost province, and reaches the road leading to Ghulam Khan at the Afghan-Pakistani border. Since the full reopening of the Ghulam Khan border point, in August 2019, the residents of Paktya, Paktika and Khost are allowed to get into Pakistan with their tazkera, under the condition that they have relatives living on the other side of the Durand Line.

In July 2018, Taliban militants were reported to search vehicles and look for government employees on the Gardez-Kabul Highway, abduct civilians and attack officials convoys. Moreover, the Ghazni-Paktya Highway was closed by Taliban militants after fights with the Afghan security forces in Ghazni province, in May 2018. In March 2019, the Afghan authorities announced that they were now in full control of the 50-kilometre-road linking Paktya’s Dand Wa Patan district to Khost’s Qajimaydan district. For the previous five years, the highway had been under the influence of the Taliban and the Haqqani Network.

In August 2019, local residents complained that the 30-kilometre-long Gardez-Zurmat road, whose construction work was launched in April 2018, was still yet to be built, allegedly due to indifference from Afghan authorities and to attacks by the Taliban, who are said to be hostile to the project. However, AAN also noted that they organised the rehabilitation of a part of the 52-kilometre-long Gardez-Ghazni road, requesting the local population to fund and take part to the construction work.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Paktya has maintained its poppy-free status since 2013.

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2963 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, June 2020, url, p. 4
2965 Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia’s Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, url
2966 BBC News, The only survivor of the Sikh minority in Paktya: I don’t want to leave my city, 6 October 2019, url
2967 Pajhwok Afghan News, Insecurity growing on Kabul-Gardez highway’, 18 July 2018, url; Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia’s Shias, 18 August 2018, AAN, url
2971 Khaama Press, Taliban militants kidnap 22 passengers from Kabul-Gardez highway, 31 July 2018, url
2973 LWJ, Taliban blockade of Ghazni-Paktia highway enters second month, 9 June 2018, url
2974 Tolonews, Afghan Forces Hold ‘Full Control’ Of Key Highway In Southeast, 31 March 2019, url
2975 Pajhwok Afghan News, 18 months on, Paktians await work on Gardez-Zurmat road, 25 August 2019, url; Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, url
2976 Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, url
2977 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 19
2.27.2 Conflict background and actors in Paktya

Paktya, a conservative province, mainly inhabited by Pashtuns, played a significant role during the Soviet invasion in the 1980s, the civil war and Taliban rule in the 1990s, as well as during the post-2001 years. The province is home to many ex-mujahideen commanders who were members of the Harakat-e Enqelab-e Islami-e Afghanistan (The Islamic Revolutionary Movement of Afghanistan), a traditionalist Sunni tanzim, or mujahideen-party, with a local and rural social base. Founded in 1979-1980 in Peshawar, it operated mainly in Paktya and Logar provinces, until many of its fighters joined the Taliban in the mid-1990s. As of December 2015, the Harakat party has returned to the political scene as a more moderate movement among different tanzims. It has thus been seen by many as a ‘bridge’ for peace talks with the Taliban, due to its ‘special relationship’ with them.

Although Paktya province is witnessing an active insurgency, a 2011 academic article quoted by AAN stated that historically, the majority of local tribes tried to avoid supporting one of the warring parties but kept contacts with all of them: ‘In other words, the tribal system in Paktya obstructs or at least constrains the emergence of warlordism as well as the influence of the State.’ The fact that the hostility of ‘even a minor community’ would be counterproductive for the AGEs ‘discourages acts that would antagonise whole communities’. For instance, in June 2018 Gardez City hosted a pro-peace gathering with tribal elders from Paktya, Paktika and Khost provinces, who pleaded the Taliban to agree to an extended ceasefire. According to the aforementioned 2011 academic article, quoted by AAN, the exception appears to be the Zurmat district, where the weakened tribal structure provided AGEs with more opportunities to gain a foothold.

By 2011, according to AAN, even though Loya Paktya ‘had not been Taleban heartland, […] the Taliban had dealt with it reasonably well’. Important senior Taliban members, like Jalaluddin Haqqani, also came from Paktya province. Even so, in the first stage after 2001, the people from Loya Paktya overthrew the Taliban through tribal councils and supported the Afghan government. However, this mindset changed after the tribal elders of the region were excluded from the state-building process, which was mainly controlled by the new politicians in Kabul and Northern Alliance members. In Zurmat district, a strategic ‘transit corridor’ for fighters from Pakistan to Ghazi, the Taliban had first to coexist with a powerful local family, the Mansurs, who joined them and obtained high-ranking positions within the Islamic Emirate, while retaining some autonomy until their influence gradually vanished.

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2978 Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, url; Ruttig, T., A Bridge for the Taliban? Harakat, a former mujahedin party, leaps back into action, AAN, 14 December 2015, url; Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, url
2979 Ruttig, T., A Bridge for the Taliban? Harakat, a former mujahedin party, leaps back into action, AAN, 14 December 2015, url; For instance, in June 2018 Gardez City hosted a pro-peace gathering with tribal elders from Paktya, Paktika and Khost provinces, who pleaded the Taliban to agree to an extended ceasefire.
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2983 According to the aforementioned 2011 academic article, quoted by AAN, the exception appears to be the Zurmat district, where the weakened tribal structure provided AGEs with more opportunities to gain a foothold.
2984 Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, url; Ruttig, T., A Bridge for the Taliban? Harakat, a former mujahedin party, leaps back into action, AAN, 14 December 2015, url; For instance, in June 2018 Gardez City hosted a pro-peace gathering with tribal elders from Paktya, Paktika and Khost provinces, who pleaded the Taliban to agree to an extended ceasefire.
2985 In Zurmat district, a strategic ‘transit corridor’ for fighters from Pakistan to Ghazi, the Taliban had first to coexist with a powerful local family, the Mansurs, who joined them and obtained high-ranking positions within the Islamic Emirate, while retaining some autonomy until their influence gradually vanished.
In October 2018, AAN’s Thomas Ruttig described Paktya province as a ‘Taliban stronghold’. As of May 2020, the Taliban shadow governor in Paktya was said to be Abdul Rahman Bilal, originally affiliated to the Peshawar Shura network. He was appointed after the ‘reshuffle’ of the Taliban government structure during the 2019-2020 winter, ahead of the 2020 fighting season. Furthermore, Paktya was one of the provinces where Taliban forces were provided with ‘increased supplies of ammunition and explosive materials’. The UN Security Council also named Mawlawi Qasam Farid as the head of the military commission in Loya Paktya. At least in Zurmat district, Pakistani and Central Asian fighters have been reported to fight within Taliban ranks. According to security officials interviewed by RFE/RL in June 2020, some of the local Taliban freed by the authorities in the frame of the USA/Taliban agreement had resumed fighting soon after.

Moreover, Paktya is one of the provinces where the UN Security Council observed ‘strong ties’ between the Taliban and organised criminal groups involved in heroin and hashish traffics or local businesses extorsion. The Taliban have also been reported to collect taxes from truck drivers going from Paktya to Ghazni.

The Haqqani Network started to expand in Loya Paktya some years before 2011 and has now become powerful in Paktya province. As of June 2019, according to Afghan officials quoted in a UN Security Council report, 1 800 – 2 000 fighters of the network were reportedly leading the Taliban operations in Loya Paktya, supported by Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants. The network was also said to hold all of the main Taliban shadow government positions (provincial governors and district governors) in Loya Paktya. As of May 2020, the Haqqani Network was rumoured to plan a joint unit of 2 000 fighters with Al Qaeda, headed by Hafiz Azizuddin Haqqani in Loya Paktya.

In June 2019, the UN Security Council noted that many foreign terrorist fighters were active in Loya Paktya, where they benefitted from the ‘remote terrain’ and the limited capacity of the security forces to reach these areas. Among these foreign AGEs, the UN Security Council listed the TTP, with 3 500 fighters across Kunar, Paktya and Paktika provinces, and Al Qaeda, said to number 400 to 600 fighters across 12 provinces and to be ‘covertly active’ in Paktya. UNAMA added that its main tasks consist in ‘training, including weapons and explosives, and mentoring’.

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2988 taz, Nicht nur die Taliban als Problem [Not only the Taliban as a problem], 21 October 2018, url
2989 UNSG, Letter dated 19 May 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 27 May 2020, url, pp. 8-9, 25, 27
2990 Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, url
2991 RFE/RL/Gandhara, For Now, Fewer Former Afghan Prisoners Returning To The Battlefield, 23 June 2020, url
2992 UNSC, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, url, p. 12
2993 Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, url
2994 Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paklia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, url
2995 Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, url
2996 UNSG, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, url, pp. 17-18
2998 UNSG, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, url, p. 17
2999 UNSG, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, url, p. 18
3000 UNSG, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, url, p. 12
As of July 2019, the UN Security Council described ISKP attempts to expand in Paktya as ‘unsuccessful’.3003

In terms of presence of government security forces, Paktya province is under the responsibility of the 203rd ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces.3004 As for the ALP, Paktya is often listed as one of the provinces where it is working well, due to the robust tribal structures of Loya Paktya and its tradition of local defence groups (arbaki).3005 However, in Zurmat district, due to abuses against civilians, the ALP unit has been disbanded in 2018.3006 According to AAN and Human Rights Watch, the 01 unit of NDS Special Forces (‘NDS 01’) and the Khost Protection Force (‘KFP’) operate in Paktya. Backed by the CIA, both have been accused of killing civilians in several raids in Zurmat.3007 In another report, AAN added that the KPF and NDS-supported ‘uprising forces’ hold posts along the Gardez-Tamir road.3008 Another pro-government armed group, the Paktika-based Shaheen Forces, also appeared to conduct operations in Paktya.3009

According to information collected by LWJ and presented in a map, Ahmadaba Alikhel (Jaji), Dand Wa Patan, Lija Ahmed Khel and Sayedkaram, districts were ‘contested’. The Taliban were reported to fully control three of them, apart from the district centre. LWJ also listed Chamkani, Gardez, Shawak and Zadran districts as government-controlled or undetermined, and Janikhel and Zurmat districts as under Taliban control.3010 Regarding Zurmat district, in several 2019 reports, AAN described it as a Taliban stronghold, the withdrawal of the ANA leaving only the district centre under the government’s control.3011

2.27.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.27.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 218 civilian casualties (78 deaths and 140 injured) in Paktya province. This represents a decrease of 49% compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by targeted/deliberate killings and search operations.3012 Resolute Support recorded between 102 and 150 civilian casualties in Paktya in the first half of 2020, reporting a marked increase during the second quarter compared to the first.3013

In regard with the severity of the conflict, Resolute Support recorded between 501 and 1,000 enemy-initiated attacks in Paktya province over the full year 2019 – an increase in comparison with 2018 (301 – 500).3014 In 2020, interviewed by AAN after the February ‘reduction in violence’ period had

3003 UNSG, Letter dated 15 July 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qa’ida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, 15 July 2019, url, p. 15
3004 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2020, url, p. 14
3005 Clark, K. et al., Ghosts of the Past: Lessons from Local Force Mobilisation in Afghanistan and Prospects for the Future, AAN & Global Public Policy Institute, July 2020, url, pp. 46–47, 93
3006 Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, url
3007 Ruttig, T., “Murder Is Always”: The Kulalgo night raid killings, AAN, 17 August 2019, url; HRW, “They’ve Shot Many Like This” Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, url
3008 Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, url
3009 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 58
3010 LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n. d., url However the source does not systematically specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.
3011 Ruttig, T., “Murder Is Always”: The Kulalgo night raid killings, AAN, 17 August 2019, url; Ali, O., Sadat, S. A. and Bleuer, C., One Land, Two Rules (8): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected insurgent-controlled Zurmat district, AAN, 4 September 2019, url
3012 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 94
3013 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, url, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, url, p. 72 At the time of writing, UNAMA provincial data for 2020 was not available.
3014 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 January 2020, url, p. 69
ended, a local journalist stated that the Taliban had soon resumed attacks against security forces posts in the districts of Jaji (Alikhel), Zurmat, Sayedkaram and Rohani Baba (Zurmat). In April 2020, a resident of Shawak district observed that violence had remained ‘somewhat reduced’, due to weather conditions and longing of Taliban for peace. In Zurmat, a local elder noted that the Taliban had stopped pressuring people for food or questioning them about their travels.

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED collected data on 651 violent events in Paktya province from open sources: 450 coded as ‘battles’ (69 %), 176 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ (27 %) and 25 as ‘violence against civilians’ (4 %).

Across these three categories, Gardez (177 incidents) and Zurmat (137) stood out as the districts where most violent incidents were reported between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020, accounting for almost half of the total number. Between 30 and 70 violent events were recorded in Lija Ahmed Khel, Alikhel (Jaji), Ahmadaba, Zadran, Dand Wa Patan and Chamkani districts, and less than 10 in Laja Mangel, Mirzaka and Shawak. Regarding events coded as ‘battles’ by ACLED, an overwhelming majority of them were ‘armed clashes’. Half of these took place in Gardez and Zurmat districts, followed by Lija Ahmed Khel (45 clashes), Ahmadaba (32) and Alikhel (Jaji) (30). 85 % of the armed clashes were recorded as initiated by the Taliban against the ANDSF. Examples of such incidents include a long-lasting clash, in June 2019, between Taliban and a police unit in Ahmadaba district. The overall death toll ranged from 35 to 50. On 29 May 2020, despite the extension of the Eid ceasefire, Taliban fighters killed 14 border

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3015 AAN, Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (1): What has happened since the reduction in violence ended?, 21 March 2020, url
3016 Clark, K., Voices from the Districts, the Violence Mapped (2): Assessing the conflict a month after the US-Taliban agreement, AAN, 8 April 2020, url
3017 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url For more information on ACLED’s methodology, see: Introduction – Sources.
3018 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
3019 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
3020 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
3021 NYT, Dozens Killed as Taliban Bombs in 4 Humvees Rip Through Afghan District, 30 June 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 18 security personnel killed, 17 injured in Paktia attack, 30 June 2019, url
security agents while attacking a checkpoint in Dand Wa Patan district. According to security officials quoted by Tolonews, the Taliban ‘suffered heavy casualties’ too.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 security personnel killed in Paktia attack, 29 May 2020, \url{url}; Tolonews, 14 Border Forces Killed in ‘Taliban Attack’ Despite Ceasefire, 30 May 2020, \url{url}}

The Afghan security forces, along with coalition forces and pro-government militia groups, initiated 62 armed clashes, half of them recorded in Alikhel (Jaji), Ahmadaba and Zurmat districts.\footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}} For instance, during the summer of 2019, Afghan press agency Khaama reported that several Afghan special forces operations had taken place in the Taliban-controlled district of Zurmat.\footnote{Khaama Press, Afghan forces storm another Taliban prison in Zurmat district of Paktiya, 6 June 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Afghan forces killed, wound 34 Taliban militants in Khost, Paktya: 203rd Thunder Corps, 13 July 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, NDS Special Forces kill 2 Taliban leaders and their fighters during a raid in Paktya, 12 August 2019, \url{url}} During the first part of 2020, ACLED recorded 8 of the 16 ANDSF-initiated armed clashes between 8 and 17 May.\footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}}

In terms of incidents coded by ACLED as ‘Explosions/Remote violence’, the two most represented sub-categories were ‘Remote explosive/Landmine/IED’ (44\%) and ‘Air/drone strikes’ (39\%). Provincial capital Gardez was clearly the most affected district by explosive/IED attacks (30 incidents out of 78 recorded in Paktya), followed by Lija Ahmad Khel and Dand Wa Patan. All of them were attributed to the Taliban and, for a minor part, to unidentified armed groups.\footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}} For instance, in January 2020, a magnetic IED planted by an unidentified armed group killed one civilian and injured eight others in Gardez.\footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}}

The only two suicide attacks recorded in Paktya also took place in Gardez, in March\footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}} and May 2020, when the Taliban took responsibility for the explosion of a suicide truck near an ANA facility, in a populated area of the city, killing 5 people (including 3 civilians) and injuring at least 14.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 January - 2 February 2020), 2 February 2020, \url{url}} Zurmat district accounted for 27 of the 68 NATO and ANDSF-initiated air/drone strikes, with Alikhel (Jaji) and Sayedkaram as distant followers.\footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}} Most notably, in two separate incidents in Alikhel, 14 civilians were killed by drone strikes in November 2019.\footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}} Meanwhile, the Taliban claimed responsibility for most of the recorded shelling/artillery/missile attacks. They primarily targeted ANDSF bases and checkpoints and took place in Zadran district.\footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}}

Out of the 25 recorded events of violence against civilians, 14 were attributed to Afghan security forces and its NATO allies, primarily in Gardez, Jaji and Zurmat districts.\footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}} Such events include the killing of five civilians from a single family by the KPF, during a search operation against the Taliban in Zurmat district in March 2019. This incident prompted local residents to organise a protest in front of the

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\item \footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 security personnel killed in Paktia attack, 29 May 2020, \url{url}; Tolonews, 14 Border Forces Killed in ‘Taliban Attack’ Despite Ceasefire, 30 May 2020, \url{url}}
\item \footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}}
\item \footnote{Khaama Press, Afghan forces storm another Taliban prison in Zurmat district of Paktiya, 6 June 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Afghan forces killed, wound 34 Taliban militants in Khost, Paktya: 203rd Thunder Corps, 13 July 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, NDS Special Forces kill 2 Taliban leaders and their fighters during a raid in Paktya, 12 August 2019, \url{url}}
\item \footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}}
\item \footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (27 January - 2 February 2020), 2 February 2020, \url{url}}
\item \footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 injured in Gardez suicide bombing, 23 March 2020, \url{url}}
\item \footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 killed, 34 injured in Gardez truck bombing, 14 May 2020, \url{url}; Reuters, Truck bomb in eastern Afghan city kills five, Taliban claim responsibility, 14 May 2020, \url{url}}
\item \footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}}
\item \footnote{NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 2 December 2019, \url{url}}
\item \footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}}
\item \footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}}
\item \footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}}
\item \footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya ; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}}
\end{itemize}}
provincial governor headquarters.\textsuperscript{3034} Also illustrating this trend is the killing of 11 civilians on 11 August 2019, during a night raid carried out by the NDS-01 Special Forces Unit and US forces, in the Kulalogo area of Zurmat district. While Afghan officials claimed that the victims were Talibani fighters, family members and local elders denied it and added that they should have been questioned instead of being shot from close range. The Afghan authorities ordered an investigation on the matter but, several months later, its conclusions had not yet been made public.\textsuperscript{3035} UNAMA expressed concern over several similar incidents involving NDS Special Forces, the KPF and Paktika-based Shaheen Forces, but noted that the 25 civilian deaths attributed to the KPF across Khost, Paktya and Paktika in 2019 represented a ‘significant drop’ from 2018 and that almost all of them had been reported during the first quarter of 2019 alone. KPF search operations appeared to be less frequent during the remainder of the year.\textsuperscript{3036}

The Taliban were held responsible for six events of violence against civilians by ACLED.\textsuperscript{3037} These included the murder of tribal elders in August 2019 and June 2020, respectively in Zadran\textsuperscript{3038} and Jaji (Alikhel) district.\textsuperscript{3039} Besides its high numbers across the three ACLED categories detailed above, Gardez capital district has also been the scene of increasing criminality. In June 2019, the city dwellers expressed concerns about the growing pattern of targeted killings by unidentified gunmen and robberies. This prompted the local police chief to announce increased efforts to tackle violence.\textsuperscript{3040} According to Pajhwok, in early 2020, the Taliban were preventing Paktya’s health centres to receive medical supplies, reportedly because of their discontent towards the quality of services provided by the NGO in charge of medical supplies.\textsuperscript{3041} In mid-February 2020, UNOCHA noted that 45 health care facilities had forcibly been closed by anti-government groups in Paktya, depriving up to one million people from basic health services.\textsuperscript{3042}

During the September 2019 presidential election, local sources told AAN that only 5 of 22 polling centres in Zurmat district were actually open (and not 18, as claimed by the authorities), with 'very little' turnout, presumably due to fear of a Talibani attack. On polling day, mortar grenades were launched near voting sites in Paktika, Paktya and Kunar provinces.\textsuperscript{3043} The day after the election, a truck driver carrying ballot boxes to Gardez was injured by the Talibani in Zurmat district.\textsuperscript{3044}

2.27.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 2,541 persons displaced from Paktya – one of the lowest provincial figures recorded over the period. Except for a couple of hundred IDPs who were headed to Khost, Wardak and Herat provinces, 90% found refugee within the province, more specifically in Gardez capital district.\textsuperscript{3045} Overall, the main districts of origin of IDPs were Sayedkaram (798), Zurmat (567), Alikhel (497) and Janikhel (343). The four of them

\begin{footnotes}
\item[3034] UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 64
\item[3035] Ruttig, T., “Murder Is Always”: The Kulalogo night raid killings, AAN, 17 August 2019, url; NYT, U.S. Seeks to Reassure Afghan Military Amid Uncertainty Over a Peace Deal, 15 August 2019, url; HRW, “They’ve Shot Many Like This” Abusive Night Raids by CIA-Backed Afghan Strike Forces, 31 October 2019, url
\item[3036] UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, pp. 57-58, 64
\item[3037] EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Paktya; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020), url
\item[3038] NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: Aug. 23-29, 29 August 2019, url
\item[3039] NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 2 July 2020, url
\item[3040] Pajhwok Afghan News, Rising targeted killings spark concerns in Gardez, 16 June 2019, url
\item[3041] Pajhwok Afghan News, Medical supplies to Paktia clinics yet to resume, 30 January 2020, url
\item[3042] UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (10 February – 16 February 2020), 19 February 2020, url
\item[3043] Bjelica, J. and Ruttig, T., Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (11): A first look at how E-Day went, AAN, 28 September 2019, url
\item[3044] UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict – Special Report : 2019 Election-Related Violence, October 2019, url, p. 5
\item[3045] UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url
\end{footnotes}
accounted for almost 90% of Paktya’s IDPs. UNAMA attributed the displacements recorded in July-August 2019 to insecurity. As of 30 June 2020, all the displacements recorded in 2020 occurred in January and February, for the most part in Sayedkaram, Zurmat, Alikhel and Janikhel.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 2,464 persons displaced to Paktya province, all of them to Gardez district. Outside of the aforementioned 2,303 people displaced within Paktya, 161 came from Logar.

### 2.28 Panjsher

#### 2.28.1 General description of the province

Panjsher province is located in the central region of Afghanistan and has borders with the provinces of Takhar to the north, Badakhshan to the north-east, Nuristan to the east, Laghman to the south-east, Kapisa to the south, Parwan to the west and Baghlan to the north-west. Nearly the entire province consists of mountainous or semi-mountainous terrain, located between the southern and south-eastern Hindu Kush mountain ranges. The province is divided into the following administrative units:

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3046 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url]
3048 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url]
3049 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, [url]
3050 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Panjsher Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url]
3051 Afghanistan, MRRD, National Area Based Development Program - Panjshir Provincial Profile, n.d., [url], p. 1
Bazarak, Dara (or Hes-e Duwumi), Ab Shar (listed as temporary district by NSIA), Khunj (Hes-e Awal), Onaba (or Anawa), Paryan, Rukha and Shutul. The provincial capital is Bazarak.  

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Panjsher province has a population of 169,926. The main ethnic group in the province is Tajik. Other groups present include a minority of Hazara, Pashai, Nuristani and Ghilzai Pashtun. A very small population of Kuchi is also reported to reside in Panjsher.

A road passing through Bagram district of neighbouring Parwan province connects Panjsher with Kabul. The distance between Kabul and Bazarak is about 150 kilometres. The deep and narrow gorge at the beginning of the Panjsher Valley, described as ‘tailor-made for obstruction and ambush’, has kept the province isolated and difficult to access. Panjsher province has no functioning airstrip and air traffic is regularly interrupted by bad weather conditions.

According to UNODC’s Opium Survey from 2018, Panjsher province has maintained its poppy-free status since 2013. UNODC data obtained by AAN in June 2020 indicated a 52% reduction in opium-poppy cultivation in the provinces of the central region (including Panjsher province) and the central highlands. Together with Balkh, Panjsher province is reportedly famous for its high quality Afghan hashish or chars, also known as shirak. According to AAN Shirak-e Panjsher has become ‘the most sought-after and expensive product on the Afghan market’.

2.28.2 Conflict background and actors in Panjsher

Certain regions in Afghanistan, like Panjsher province and the area of the central highlands, have been described as relatively safe and less affected by conflict-driven violence. According to an Afghan military expert cited by Tolonews, the relative stability of Panjsher as well as the central highland region is related to the social cohesion among its inhabitants, as most of them belong to the same ethnic or tribal group.

Panjsher province led the resistance against the Soviets and the Taliban during the 1980s and the 1990s. The province is home to Tajik Ahmad Shah Massoud, called the Lion of Panjsher, who fought against the Soviets and headed the Northern Alliance against the Taliban. In September 2019,  

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Ahmad Shah Massoud's son, Ahmad Massoud, was reported to have started a new political movement in Panjsher, aiming to establish an anti-Taliban and pro-decentralisation front, following the footsteps of his father's Northern Alliance.\textsuperscript{3070}

The Panjsheris, as the ethnic Tajiks of the Panjsher Valley are called, are known for their historical opposition to the Taliban and went on to dominate the initial post-Taliban order in both politics and security forces. After the 2001 attacks, they were recruited by the first CIA operatives in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{3071} In 2012, about 70% of NDS personnel originated from Panjsher or was connected to the Northern Alliance.\textsuperscript{3072} In 2014, new and reinforced Afghan police checkpoints, mainly controlled by NDS agents, were set up across the road into Panjsher.\textsuperscript{3073} Many Panjsheris have been members of the Afghan political and military elite, like former CEO and current chairman of the High Council of National Reconciliation Dr Abdullah Abdullah or former NDS chief/Minister of Interior and now Vice-President Amrullah Saleh.\textsuperscript{3074} Panjsher’s political spectrum is dominated by the Jamiat-e Islami party.\textsuperscript{3075}

An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source-controlled, consulted on 2 July 2020, indicated all districts of Panjsher province as ‘government-controlled’ or ‘undetermined’.\textsuperscript{3076} After Kuran Wa Munjan district of neighbouring Badakhshan province was overrun by the Taliban at the end of July 2019, the militant group reportedly threatened Panjsher’s Paryan district in the beginning of August 2019. LWJ referred to Paryan district as surrounded by several other districts controlled or contested by the militant group, such as Pul-e Hissar and Khost Wa Firing districts in Baghlan province and Mandol district in Nuristan province. According to Taliban sources cited by LWJ, there has been a long-term military interest of the militant group in gaining control over strategic areas such as Panjsher province.\textsuperscript{3077} In response to this possible Taliban infiltration in Paryan district in August 2019, dozens of former mujahideen fighters and members of public uprising forces were reported mobilizing alongside the Afghan national security forces, to defend the area.\textsuperscript{3078} Also in August 2019, the Taliban’s deputy shadow governor for Panjsher, known as Abdul Ahad or Zulfiqar, was killed in Nejrab district of Kapisa province. Zulfiqar was reportedly a member of the Taliban’s military commission for Panjsher and involved in activities of the militant group in several provinces in the region.\textsuperscript{3079}

In March 2018, Afghan news agency Pasbanan reported on ISKP-affiliated individuals, belonging to two Iraqi families and operating under the shield of the pan-Islamic Tahrir Party, recruiting fighters in Panjsher province. They were reported to have settled in Dara (or Ab Shar or Hes-e Duwumi) district, after entering Panjsher through neighbouring Nuristan and Laghman provinces. The families were purportedly interested in getting control over the emerald and azure mines in Panjsher.\textsuperscript{3080} No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP have been recorded in Panjsher province between

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\textsuperscript{3070} Asia Times, Afghanistan: Ahmad Massoud Seizes Father’s Torch, 5 September 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3071} NYT, Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url]
\textsuperscript{3072} Christian Science Monitor (The), Why Afghanistan’s Intelligence Agency Has a Major Blind Spot, 23 April 2012, [url]
\textsuperscript{3073} NYT, Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url]
\textsuperscript{3074} Telegraph (The), Afghanistan’s Former Spy Chief: ‘Never Trust the Taliban’, 13 August 2011, [url]; NYT, Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, [url]; NYT, Afghan Rivals Sign Power-Sharing Deal as Political Crisis Subsides, 17 May 2020, [url]
\textsuperscript{3075} NYT, Players Say Soccer Chief Sexually Abused Them for Years. He May Still Win, 18 March 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3076} LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url]; (LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.)
\textsuperscript{3077} LWJ, Taliban Threatens Panjsher Province, 4 August 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3078} Tolonews, Local Forces Mobilize to Purge Taliban Threats in Panjsher, 2 August 2019, [url]; LWJ, Taliban Threatens Panjsher Province, 4 August 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3079} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s Shadow Deputy Governor for Panjsher Killed: Mol, 4 August 2019, [url]; Ariana News, Taliban’s Shadow Deputy Governor for Panjsher Killed, 4 August 2019, [url]
\textsuperscript{3080} Pasbanan, Panjshir Is threatened by ISIS Recruitment, 8 March 2018, [url]
1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 by ACLED. In a 2020 USIP report, analyst Borhan Osman mentioned Panjsher as an area where ISKP has been recruiting for its Kabul cell.

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Panjsher is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps. Panjsher province is included in the Train, Advise and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), which is part of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-E is led by US and Polish forces and has its headquarters in Laghman province.

2.28.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.28.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented no civilian casualties in Panjsher province. Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 50 civilian casualties in Panjsher province in the first half of 2020, with no variation between the first and second quarter of the year.

ACLED collected data on six violent events in Panjsher province from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, of which four were coded as ‘battles’, one as ‘explosions/remote violence’ and one as ‘violence against civilians’. Four incidents were recorded in the western district of Bazarak. The other two incidents were registered in the southern district of Dara. In the rest of the province, no violent incidents were recorded.

The four ‘battles’ recorded by ACLED in Panjsher were all ‘armed clashes’ between Taliban militants and ANDSF forces, recorded in Bazarak and Dara districts in the second, third and fourth quarters of 2019. The incident categorised as ‘violence against civilians’ was reported as a Taliban gunfire attack.

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3081 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Panjsher; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]

3082 Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join Islamic State, USIP, June 2020, [url], pp. 4, 11-12

3083 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, [url], p. 13

3084 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, [url], p. 94

3085 Civilian casualty data for 2020 have not yet been published by UNAMA.

3086 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, [url], p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, [url], p. 72.

3087 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Panjsher; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]

3088 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Panjsher, [url]

3089 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Panjsher; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
According to UNHCR, Panjsher is one of the four provinces with the highest percentage of returnees in Panjsher province. Additionally, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on three rockets that landed near the house of Panjsher’s provincial governor in July 2019, no casualties were reported.

Panjsher’s voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 reached around 25 %.

In June 2019, the Kabul-Panjsher Highway was reportedly closed in Onaba (Anawa) district by protesters demanding the release of an arrested criminal.

2.28.3.2 Displacement

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Panjsher province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 1 057 persons displaced to Panjsher province. The majority of these IDPs (749 individuals) came from Kuran Wa Munjan district of Badakhshan province, with a peak in April-May 2019 and a smaller number in August 2019, all finding refuge in Panjsher’s Paryan district. 259 IDPs coming from Nuristan’s Mandol district in April, May and August 2019 found refuge in Panjsher’s Bazarak district. A small number of 49 IDPs from Dawlatshah district in Laghman province found refuge in Panjsher’s Rukha district in April 2019. Additionally, UNOCHA reported on displaced families from Tala Wa Barfak district in Baghlan province seeking shelter in Panjsher in June 2019.

According to IOM displacement data published in August and October 2019, most IDPs and returnees in Panjsher province resided in Khenj (Hes-e Awal) district, followed by Rukha and Bazarak districts. According to UNHCR, Panjsher is one of the four provinces with the highest percentage of returnees who originate there but choose to live somewhere else once they return.

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3090 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Panjsher; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
3091 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Panjsher; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
3092 Pajhwok Afghan News, UNAMA Vehicle under Attack in Panjsher, 14 November 2019, url
3093 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, url, p. 98
3094 Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, url, p. 62
3095 Pajhwok Afghan News, Rocket Attacks on Panjshir Province, 20 August 2019, url
3096 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url
3097 UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Panjsher Province - Meeting Summary, 11 June 2019, url, p. 1
3098 UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Panjsher Province - Meeting Summary, 11 June 2019, url, p. 1
3099 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url
3100 UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Panjsher Province - Meeting Summary, 11 June 2019, url, p. 1
3101 IOM, Afghanistan - Panjsher Conflict Displacement Summary Results Round 7 (October - December 2018), 1 August 2019, url, pp. 1, 2, 6; IOM, DTM Afghanistan Baseline Mobility Assessment I District Level I Total Inflow (Returnees+IDPs) I June 2019 I Province: Panjsher, 9 October 2019, url
2.29 Parwan

2.29.1 General description of the province

Parwan province is located in the central region of Afghanistan and has borders with the provinces of Baghlan to the north, Panjsher and Kapisa to the east, Kabul and Wardak to the south and Bamyan to the west. Parwan province has a population of 737,700. The main ethnic group in Parwan is Tajik, with a presence in every district of the province. Other groups present include Pashtun, Uzbek, Qizilbash, Kuchi and Hazara. Shinwari district has a Pashtun majority and Ghorband district a significant Pashtun population, as well as Koh-e Safi district. Parwan’s Hazara mainly reside in the districts of Shekhali and Surkh-e Parsa. According to AAN analyst Thomas Ruttig,
Surkh-e Parsa is inhabited by a Sunni Hazara population, who ‘traditionally are at odds with their Shiite fellow-Hazaras in neighbouring Bamian and therefore have always supported Hezb-e Islami (HIG)’.

The Salang Pass tunnel, located between the provinces of Parwan and Baghlan and purportedly used by more than 10 000 vehicles daily, connects Kabul to northern Afghanistan. The roads leading to the tunnel have been in a bad condition and lack proper maintenance. Restoration projects are being assessed by the government. In April 2020, USAID completed a power-infrastructure project next to the strategically located tunnel, through which reportedly over 80 % of Afghanistan’s north-south trade passes.

A highway from Kabul runs through the districts of Charikar, Jabalus Saraj and Salang to Kunduz province. Another highway connecting Parwan to Bamyan province runs through the districts of Charikar, Shinwari, Ghorband, Shekhali and the Shibar Pass.

According to UNODC’s Opium Survey from 2018, Parwan province has maintained its poppy-free status since 2013. UNODC data obtained by AAN in June 2020 indicated a 52 % reduction in opium-poppy cultivation in the provinces of the central region (including Parwan province) and the central highlands.

### 2.29.2 Conflict background and actors in Parwan

Parwan province is described as among the relatively calm provinces in Afghanistan. Remote areas, such as the Ghorband Valley, have been reported as the most insecure regions of the province.

In 2011, AGEs started to expand their activities into Parwan’s Siya Gird (or Ghorband) and Shinwari districts, where the majority of the residents are Pashtun, and into Surkh-e Parsa district, where the Sunni Hazara majority sympathized with Hezb-e Islami (HIG) forces. The Pashtun areas of the Ghorband Valley have traditionally supported Hezb-e Islami during the civil war, but some of these structures have been absorbed by the Taliban since their regime in the 1990s. The Taliban in Parwan have also appointed Tajiks into their ranks to avoid limiting the insurgency exclusively to the Pashtun ethnicity. According to AAN analyst Thomas Rutti, Parwan province has witnessed a long-established rivalry between Jamiat-e Islami and Hezb-e Islami (HIG), as several ethnic Tajiks affiliated with Jamiat were powerful strongmen and had important networks throughout the area. Many of them were in control of Parwan’s administration and have reportedly actively contributed to the insecurity in the region.

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3112 Rutti, T., Ghorband - A Valley Once Friendly, AAN, 19 July 2011, [url](url)
3113 Xinhua, Feature: Afghanistan’s Vital Salang Pass Tunnel in Dire Need of Restoration, 17 September 2019, [url](url)
3114 Telegraph (The), Through Mountain Passes and Taliban Land: the Longest Journey in the World for Covid-19 Samples, 10 June 2020, [url](url)
3115 Tolonews, Road Works Underway on Salang Pass, 1 September 2018, [url](url)
3116 Tolonews, Govt Reports Back on New Salang Tunnel Progress, 18 June 2018, [url](url); Xinhua, Feature: Afghanistan’s Vital Salang Pass Tunnel in Dire Need of Restoration, 17 September 2019, [url](url)
3117 Rutti, T., Ghorband - A Valley Once Friendly, AAN, 19 July 2011, [url](url); SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, p. 142; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, p. 147
3118 Rutti, T., Ghorband - A Valley Once Friendly, AAN, 19 July 2011, [url](url); UNOCHA, Afghanistan Parwan Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](url); Afghanistan, IDC - MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, [url](url)
3119 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, p. 19
3120 Bjelica, J., New World Drug Report: Opium Production in Afghanistan Remained the Same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, [url](url)
3121 Khaama Press, Airstrike Destroys Car Bomb in Bagram District of Parwan Province, 8 May 2019, [url](url); Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, [url](url), pp. 51-52
3122 Al Jazeera, Life in the City: Tackling Kabul’s Urban Challenges, 11 July 2019, [url](url)
3123 Khaama Press, Airstrike Destroys Car Bomb in Bagram District of Parwan Province, 8 May 2019, [url](url)
3124 Rutti, T., Ghorband - A Valley Once Friendly, AAN, 19 July 2011, [url](url)
In December 2019, a clash between two former Jamiat-e Islami commanders in Siya Gird district resulted in several civilian casualties.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Father, Son Killed as Ex-Commanders Clash in Parwan, 31 December 2019, \url{url}}

The Kabul-Bamyang Highway, going through Jalrez district in Wardak province, has many side roads and mountain paths leading to several districts in Wardak, Parwan and Kabul provinces. According to AAN analyst Ehsan Qaane, these serve as ‘supply and escape routes’ providing safe havens to militant groups and impeding the movement of government forces. For example, the unpaved road connecting Sanglah in Jalrez district to Surkh-e Parsa district in Parwan is a difficult pass, neither safe nor accessible for military vehicles.\footnote{UNSC, Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitor Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2501 (2019) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace, Stability and Security of Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, \url{url}, p. 9}


Sources in 2019 and 2020 reported on a Taliban presence in the districts of Shinwari, Ghorband (or Siya Gird), Saydkhel and Koh-i Safi. In August 2019, the Taliban reportedly closed eight religious schools in the districts of Siya Gird and Shinwari. According to Parwan’s provincial governor, all eight closed madrasas were located in areas under Taliban control.\footnote{AAN, One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, \url{url}} In the same month, local residents of Shinwari district, reportedly fed up with the Taliban presence in their area, set fire to a hideout/base of the militants in the village of Qala-e Qorhir.\footnote{EASO Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Security Situation, 2020, p. 27} Several prominent Taliban figures were reported to have been killed or arrested in Parwan.\footnote{Salaam Times, Fed Up with Taliban, Parwan Residents Torch Militants’ Hideout, 22 August 2019, \url{url}; EASO Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Security Situation, 2020, p. 27} In May 2019, a key Taliban member, identified as Hameedullah and purportedly involved in activities of the militant group in Ghorband district, was arrested in the district of Shinwari.\footnote{Life Support for Civilian War Victims, A Quiet Revolution: the Emergency Anabah Maternity Centre and Female Empowerment, 16 October 2019, \url{url}, p. 27} In September 2019, a Taliban commander, known as Mullah Qudus, was killed in an operation near the provincial capital Charikar City.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Father, Son Killed as Ex-Commanders Clash in Parwan, 31 December 2019, \url{url}} In April 2020, the Taliban’s head of intelligence for Shinwari district, known as Noor Mohammad or Omari, was killed during an operation in the Azgard area.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Order Shutdown of 8 Seminaries in Parwan, 29 August 2019, \url{url}} According to a May 2020 UN Security Council report, the Taliban ordered increased supplies of ammunition and explosive materials for their forces in Parwan province.\footnote{EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}}

ACLED recorded one security incident specifically attributed to ISKP in Parwan between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.\footnote{See sources mentioned below.} In April 2020, ISKP claimed responsibility for a rocket attack targeting Bagram
Airbase, no casualties were reported. Additionally, ACLED recorded one incident in December 2019 in which Afghan military forces responded to an attack by suspected Taliban and/or ISKP militants in Bagram district, as well as several incidents in which Taliban and/or ISKP militants were wounded or killed during air strikes or military operations in Bagram, Jabalus Saraj and Ghorband districts. In a 2020 USIP report, analyst Borhan Osman mentioned Ghorband district as an area where ISKP has been recruiting for its Kabul cell.

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Parwan is under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps. Parwan province is included in the Train, Advise and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), which is part of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-E is led by US and Polish forces and has its headquarters in Laghman province. NDS unit 01, a paramilitary CIA-backed militia accused of human rights abuses, is reported to operate in the central region, including in Parwan province. Parwan’s Bagram district hosts Bagram Airbase, the largest NATO military base in Afghanistan. Bagram town depends on the military base for its economy and supplies the base with a local work force, reportedly making it a preferred target for the Taliban.

In December 2018, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on a growing number of Parwan’s wealthy residents, such as high government officials, lawmakers, provincial council members and businessmen, leaving the province due to an increasing insecurity and incidents of extortion, intimidation and armed robbery. Some families reportedly moved abroad, the majority shifted to the capital Kabul and transferred their wealth to other provinces. According to a civil society activist, the armed groups causing these threats were reportedly often connected to local commanders and strongmen with close relations to officials in the central government.

### 2.29.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.29.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 246 civilian casualties (65 deaths and 181 injured) in Parwan province. This represents an increase of 500% compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were suicide IEDs, followed by ground engagements and search operations. Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 25 civilian casualties in Parwan province in the first quarter of 2020. According to Resolute Support, Parwan was one of the three provinces where the highest number of civilian casualties was recorded in the fourth quarter of 2019. However, this number declined significantly in the first quarter of 2020.

In the second quarter of 2020, Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in Parwan province.

ACLED collected data on 187 violent events in Parwan province from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, of which 93 were coded as ‘battles’, 81 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ and 13 as ‘violence against civilians’. Bagram in the eastern region of the province stood out as the

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3140 RFE/RL, No Casualties in Rocket Attack on Largest U.S. Afghan Base, 9 April 2020, url
3141 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
3142 Osman, B., Bourgeois Jihad: Why Young, Middle-Class Afghans Join ISKP, USIP, June 2020, url, pp. 4, 11-12
3143 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan - June 2020, 1 July 2020, url, p. 13
3145 LWJ, Taliban Suicide Bomber Kills 3 Czech Soldiers, 5 August 2018, url; Ruttig, T., First Breakthrough Toward Peace? A Look at the Seven-Day ‘Reduction of Violence’, AAN, 17 February 2020, url
3146 NYT, A Growing U.S. Base Made This Afghan Town. Now It’s Dying., 12 January 2020, url
3147 Pajhwok Afghan News, Feeling Unsafe, Traders & Well-Off Persons Flee Parwan, 1 December 2018, url
3148 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 94
3149 Civilian casualty data for 2020 have not yet been published by UNAMA.
3150 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, url, p. 69
3151 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, url, p. 72
district where most incidents were reported, with 69 incidents recorded, followed by the centrally located districts of Charikar (where the provincial capital is located), Shinwari and Ghorband. Eight or less incidents were recorded in Koh-e Safi, Jabalus Saraj, Shekh Ali and Sayed Khel districts. In the rest of the province, no violent incidents were reported. Most violent incidents in Parwan province were recorded in the third and fourth quarters of 2019.3152

Figure 31. Parwan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data 3153

ACLED coded around 50 % of the violent incidents in Parwan as ‘battles’, all ‘armed clashes’. This category represented the most prevalent incident type in nearly all of Parwan’s districts -with the exception of Bagram district, where most incidents were registered under the category of ‘explosions/remote violence’. The majority of the armed clashes in Parwan were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police and NDS personnel as well as members of pro-government militias or so-called *arbakis* (the term *arbaki* is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan local police or other pro-government militias).3154 Examples of such incidents included the targeted killings of military, police and NDS personnel by gunmen in Bagram district in July 20193155, in Charikar district in June 20193156 and October 20193157 and in Jabalus Saraj district in December 20193158, as well as ambushes on police convoys, such as a Taliban attack on an ANP convoy on the Kabul-Parwan Highway in March 20203159, assaults on security checkpoints, for example in Siya Gird district in May 20203160 and in Koh-e Safi district in June 20203161; and attacks on military bases, such as a Taliban assault on a medical facility attached to Bagram Airbase in December 2019, resulting in dozens of civilian casualties.3162

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3152 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
3153 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Parwan, url
3154 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
3155 Pajhwok Afghan News, NDS Employee Shot Dead in Parwan, 27 July 2019, url
3156 Pajhwok Afghan News, One army Officer Shot Dead, Another Wounded in Parwan, 17 June 2019, url
3157 Pajhwok Afghan News, NDS Personnel Killed, Weapons, Explosives Recovered in Parwan, 11 October 2019, url
3158 Pajhwok Afghan News, Kapisa Police Officer Gunned Down, 29 December 2019, url
3159 Tolonews, ‘Taliban’ Attack ANP Convoy in Bagram, 1 ANP Killed, 7 March 2020, url
3161 Tolonews, ‘17 Taliban Killed’ in Parwan Attack: Official, 30 June 2020, url
3162 RFE/RL, Taliban Assault on Key U.S. Base in Afghanistan Kills Two, Wounds Dozens, 11 December 2019, url; Al Jazeera, At Least Two Killed in Taliban Suicide Attack near US Base, 11 December 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Killed in Bagram Attack, Taliban Claim Credit, 11 December 2019, url
Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED. These involved operations in Charikar district in April and September 2019, killing a Taliban commander and several other militants. Two civilians were also reported killed in the April operation in two villages on the outskirts of Charikar City. In Bagram district, five Taliban militants, reportedly planning IED emplacements, were killed in an ANDSF raid in April 2019 and a proclaimed Taliban attack coordinator was killed during an operation in June 2019. In Parwan district, 40 Taliban militants were reportedly killed during an operation of the Afghan Special Forces in July 2019.

ACLED coded 20% of the violent incidents in Parwan as ‘shelling, artillery and missile attacks’. For example in May 2019, the Taliban fired several missiles at the US military base of Bagram. In April 2020, an ISKP-claimed rocket attack shelled the same base. In May 2020, several missiles were fired at transmission towers in the Gul Ghondi area of Charikar City. No civilian casualties were reported in these incidents. At the end of May 2020, three children were killed when a mortar shell fired by the Taliban (who reportedly denied their involvement in the attack) hit a civilian house instead of an ANDSF checkpoint in Ghorband district.

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeting the Afghan security forces, represented 17% of all reported security incidents in Parwan. For example in April 2019, a Taliban-claimed vehicle-borne (VB) IED attack close to Bagram Airbase killed and injured several American service members. Near the same military base in Bagram district, car bomb explosions were reported in August 2019 and in March 2020. In August 2019, the platoon commander of a special unit was killed in a magnetic bomb blast in the second police district of Charikar. Some of these IED incidents resulted in casualties among civilians. This happened in September 2019, when an explosion in Charikar district killed one child and wounded nearly a dozen more. In May 2020, explosives detonated at the site of electricity transmission towers in Charikar City, causing several civilian casualties among employees from the country’s state electricity company Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS).

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1363 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
1364 Tolonews, Two Civilians Killed in Parwan Operation: Official, 27 April 2019, url
1365 RFE/RL, Afghan Officials: Talibans Suffers Heavy Casualties in Several Provinces, 22 September 2019, url
1366 Tolonews, Two Civilians Killed in Parwan Operation: Official, 27 April 2019, url
1367 Khaama Press, 5 Taliban Explosives Facilitators Killed in Parwan, 28 April 2020, url
1368 Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces Kill 4 Taliban Attack Coordinator in Bagram, 25 June 2019, url
1369 Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill 40 Taliban Militants, Arrest 13 Others in Parwan Province, 29 July 2019, url
1370 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
1371 Ariana News, Taliban Shells Missiles on Bagram Airfield, 23 May 2019, url
1372 RFE/RL, No Casualties in Rocket Attack on Largest U.S. Afghan Base, 9 April 2020, url
1373 Tolonews, 1 Killed in Latest of 4 Attacks on Power Pylons: DABS, 5 May 2020, url
1374 Tolonews, 3 Civilians Killed in Shelling in Parwan, 31 May 2020, url
1375 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
1376 NYT, Three Americans Killed in Afghan Blast, Despite Continuing Peace Talks, 8 April 2019, url; Al Jazeera, Three US troops, One Contractor Killed in Afghanistan Explosion, 8 April 2019, url; Tolonews, Foreign Forces Convoy Attacked near Bagram Airbase, 8 April 2019, url
1377 Tolonews, US Forces Convoy Attacked in Parwan, 24 August 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Suicide Bomber Targets NATO Convoy in Parwan, 24 August 2019, url
1378 Khaama Press, Mini Truck Packed with Explosives Goes Off Close to Bagram Airfield, 22 March 2020, url
1379 Pajhwok Afghan News, Platoon Commander Killed in Parwan, 31 August 2019, url
1381 Tolonews, 1 Killed in Latest of 4 Attacks on Power Pylons: DABS, 5 May 2020, url; National (The), Why Blackouts Are So Common in Afghanistan, 27 May 2020, url
Air/drone strikes represented 4 % of all reported violent incidents in Parwan. Most air/drone strikes were carried out in Bagram district, for example in May 2019. Two air/drone strikes were reported in Charikar district, one in Ghorband (or Siya Gird) and Jabalus Saraj districts each. The majority of these air/drone strikes were carried out by Afghan military forces, some were attributed to NATO forces. While these air/drone strikes mostly inflicted losses among AGEs in the aforementioned districts, some also caused civilian casualties - such as a drone strike on the village of Qala Jali in Bagram district in November 2019, according to the Taliban.

ACLED categorised 7 % of all reported violent incidents in Parwan as ‘violence against civilians’. These incidents involved the killing of Parwan’s provincial prosecutor by the Taliban in Charikar district in October 2019, the shooting of an off-duty NDS employee and two civilians while travelling by car in the Qala-i-Naw area of Charikar City in February 2020; the killing of six local contractors working at Bagram Airbase in April 2020; the storming of a mosque in the Khala Zayi area of Charikar City by unknown gunmen (the government blamed the Taliban, while the militants accused the government) in May 2020, causing more than a dozen casualties among worshippers, and the shooting of a tribal elder by unknown gunmen in Charikar City in June 2020.

Parwan’s voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 reached around 15 %. In the Asia Foundations 2019 Survey of the Afghan People, 26-50 % of respondents in Parwan province reported to have experienced fear while voting. In the lead-up to polling day, on 17 September 2019, the Taliban carried out a suicide attack in Parwan’s provincial capital Charikar City near an ANP training centre where an election rally for President Ashraf Ghani was taking place. The attack caused 81 civilian casualties (30 deaths and 51 injured). President Ghani remained unharmed. Commenting on the attack, the Taliban stated they ‘deliberately aimed at disrupting elections’ and they ‘had warned people not to attend election

1181 Khaama Press, Airstrikes Kill 8 Taliban Militants in Takhar, Wardak and Parwan Provinces, 13 July 2019, url
1182 ACLED analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
1183 Khaama Press, Airstrikes Kill 8 Taliban Militants in Takhar, Wardak and Parwan Provinces, 13 July 2019, url
1184 Voice of Jihad, War Crimes of the Foreign Occupying Forces and Their Internal Mercenaries (November 2019), 4 December 2019, url
1185 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
1186 RFE/RL, Afghan Government Official Shot and Killed in Kabul, 13 October 2019, url
1187 Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 Killed, NDS Worker Injured in Parwan Attack, 1 February 2020, url: EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Parwan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
1189 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 2020, 21 May 2020, url
1191 Tolonews, Tribal Elder Killed in Attack by Unknown Gunmen in Parwan, 11 June 2020, url
1192 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, p. 98
1193 Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, p. 62
1196 Al Jazeera, Taliban Suicide Attacks Kill at least 48 before Afghan Elections, 17 September, url
1197 Guardian (The), Taliban Suicide Attacks in Afghanistan Leave Dozens Dead, 17 September 2019, url
gatherings as they were considered military targets. The Taliban claimed to have blocked roads and attacked security forces personnel transporting election material the day before polling day in Parwan. Without providing further details, Pajhwok Afghan News reported on seven election related assaults on polling day in Parwan province, including the threatening of two observers in Siya Gird district and a clash in the provincial capital Charikar City resulting in the killing of one individual. The Taliban reportedly fired rockets towards a school used as polling centre in Siya Gird district on the day of 28 September. One of the rockets landed on a residential home, causing several civilian casualties. In the evening of election day, eight employees from the Independent Election Commission (IEC) were abducted by the Taliban in the Namak Aab area of Shinwari district. After the mediation from tribal elders, they were released in December 2019.

On the highways connecting Parwan to its neighbouring provinces and to the capital security incidents have been reported, such as clashes between Taliban militants and Afghan security forces. In April 2019, the Kabul-Parwan Highway, passing through Charikar City, was reportedly closed due to protests after several civilians were killed in an ANDSF operation.

### 2.29.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 42 persons displaced from Parwan province, constituting a group of 6 families coming from Shinwari district and finding refuge within the province itself (in Charikar district) in August 2019.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 441 persons displaced to Parwan coming from other provinces. Almost half of the IDPs (210 individuals) were displaced from Qaysar district in Faryab province in May and July 2019 and found refuge in Parwan’s Charikar district. Smaller numbers of people displaced from the provinces of Kapisa (Tagab district), Kunduz (Chardara and Alabad districts), Badakhshan (Kuran Wa Munjan district), Baghlan (Nahrin district), Kunar (Shigal Wa Sheltan district) and Laghman (Dawlatshah district) found refuge in Parwan’s Charikar, Bagram and Jabalus Saraj districts.

According to IOM displacement data published in August and October 2019, most IDPs and returnees in Parwan province resided in Bagram district, followed by Koh-e Safi and Charikar districts.

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3201 Reuters, Taliban Worries Loom as Afghanistan Prepares to Vote for a President, 27 September 2019, [url](http://example.com)
3202 Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Observers Killed, Many Beaten on Polling Day, 17 October 2019, [url](http://example.com)
3203 Pajhwok Afghan News, 32 Killed, 123 Wounded in Election Day Attacks, 28 September 2019, [url](http://example.com)
3205 Reuters, Afghan Election Set to See Big Drop in Voter Numbers, 29 September 2019, [url](http://example.com); Pajhwok Afghan News, Efforts Ongoing for Release of Election Workers, 1 October 2019, [url](http://example.com)
3206 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Free 8 Election Workers in Parwan, 9 December 2019, [url](http://example.com)
3208 Pajhwok Afghan News, Protestors Close Kabul-Parwan Highway after Civilian Deaths, 27 April 2020, [url](http://example.com); Tolonews, Two Civilians Killed in Parwan Operation: Official, 27 April 2019, [url](http://example.com)
3209 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, [url](http://example.com)
2.30 Samangan

2.30.1 General description of the province

Samangan province is located in the north of Afghanistan and has borders with Balkh province to the north and north-east, Baghlan to the east, Bamyan to the south and Sar-e Pul to the west. Samangan province is divided into the following administrative units: Aybak, Dara-i-Suf-e-Payin (Lower Dara-i-Suf), Dara-i-Suf-e-Bala (Upper Dara-i-Suf), Feroznakhchir, Hazrat-e-Sultan, Khuram Wa Sarbagh and Ruy-e-Dub. The provincial capital of Samangan is Samangan City, formerly known and still often referred to as Aybak.

According to estimates for 2020-2021 by NSIA, the province has a population of 430 489, 118 537 of whom live in the provincial capital, Aybak. Ethnic groups present in Samangan province are Tajiks, Uzbeks, Pashtuns, Hazaras, Arabs, Tatars and Aimaq.

The province lies strategically, to the north of the Hindu Kush. A section of the Ring Road (Highway One) from Kabul to Mazar-e-Sharif crosses Samangan’s districts of Khuram wa Sarbagh, Aybak and Hazrat-e-Sultan and connects Samangan to the northern provinces until Herat.

3215 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Samangan Province - District Atlas, April 2014,
3216 Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Samangan, 2020,
3217 AAN, Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (22): Glances at Kunduz, Baghlan, Samangan, 30 October 2019,
3218 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020,
3219 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Samangan Provincial Review, n.d.,
3220 Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Samangan, 1 February 2017,
3221 RFE/RL, Afghanistan’s New Northern Flash Points, n.d.,
3222 Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015,
In October 2018, the Taliban reportedly increased taxes on trucks transporting coal from mines in Dara-i-Suf district. According by December 2019 provincial council members and truck drivers accused both security forces and Taliban from extorting money.

Afghanistan Analyst Obaid Ali points out that control of Dara-I Suf-e Payin district’s coal mines is a driving force that exacerbates the conflict in that district. According to The Liaison Office (TLO), Dande Toor and Gramak areas of the district are housing most illegally mined coals deposits in Afghanistan. Over 350 illegal mines are overseen by politicians, warlords and local power brokers.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Samangan province lost its poppy-free status in 2017. Opium poppy-cultivation decreased by 2% and therefore remained stable compared to 2017. The main opium poppy-cultivating districts were Lower Dara-I Suf and Upper Dara-I Suf.

### 2.30.2 Conflict background and actors in Samangan

Having been more secure in comparison to neighbouring Baghlan, more attacks, incursions by the Taliban and fighting were reported from early 2016 onwards in Samangan province.

Around the time of the presidential elections in September 2019 the Taliban’s presence and control in Dara-i-Suf-e-Payin district had grown. It was the only district, out of six, in Samangan province that was mostly controlled by the Taliban. In the other districts the government presence was higher. In previous years control over Dara-I Suf-e Payin’s district centre had switched several times between government forces and the Taliban. Taliban claims of having taken control over the district on 27 September 2019 were denied by a local government official, but in October 2019, a provincial council representative claimed that the Taliban controlled the Dara-i-Suf - Aybak and Dara-i-Suf - Mazar-e-Sharif Highways, adding that they had also been in control of Dara-i-Suf-e-Bala and Dara-i Suf-e-Payin districts’ roads that connect both districts with Samangan City for the last three years and had taken control of roads between the two districts and Mazar-e-Sharif City. In that same month the district governor claimed that all areas of Dara-i-Suf-e-Payin were under control of the Taliban except for the district centre. In May 2020, Afghanistan analyst Thomas Ruttig reported frequent Taliban activity in mostly Taliban-controlled Dara-i Suf-e Payin and government-controlled Dara-i Suf-e Bala districts. As of 2 July 2020 an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Dara-i Suf-e Payin district as ‘Taliban-controlled’, Aybak district as ‘contested’ and the remaining districts in Samangan province as ‘government-controlled’.

According to governmental sources quoted by Pajhwok Afghan News in April 2018, ‘dozens’ of illegal armed groups were active in Samangan, as were pro-government militias.

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3223 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban increase tax on coal trucks in Samangan, 29 October 2019, [url]
No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Samangan between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.\textsuperscript{3237}

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Samangan province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen corps. Samangan province is included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North is led by German forces and has its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province.\textsuperscript{3238}

\subsection*{2.30.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population}

\subsubsection*{2.30.3.1 General}

In 2019, UNAMA documented 45 civilian casualties (11 deaths and 34 injured) in Samangan. This represents a decrease of 2\% compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by targeted/deliberate killings and non-suicide IEDs.\textsuperscript{3239} Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 50 civilian casualties in Samangan in the first half of 2020, reporting similar numbers of civilian casualties between the first and the second quarter of 2020.\textsuperscript{3240}

ACLED collected data on 84 violent events in Samangan province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, 70 of which were coded as battles, 10 as explosions/remote violence and 4 as violence against civilians.\textsuperscript{3241} Dara-i Suf-e Payin stood out as the district where most incidents were reported, with 31 incidents, registered by ACLED. No violent events were registered by ACLED in Feroznakhchir district.\textsuperscript{3242}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure32.png}
\caption{Samangan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data\textsuperscript{3243}}
\end{figure}

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{3237} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Samangan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{ACLED, Curated Data Files}
\item\textsuperscript{3238} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, 23 January 2020, \url{USDod}, pp. 11-12, p. 50; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. June 2020, 1 July 2020, \url{USDod}, p. 14
\item\textsuperscript{3239} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{UNAMA}, p. 94. No UNAMA data on civilian casualties in Samangan province were available for the first half of 2020.
\item\textsuperscript{3240} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, \url{SIGAR}, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, \url{SIGAR}, p. 72.
\item\textsuperscript{3241} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{ACLED, Curated Data Files}
\item\textsuperscript{3242} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{ACLED, Curated Data Files}
\item\textsuperscript{3243} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Samangan, \url{ACLED, Curated Data Files}
\end{itemize}
ACLED coded 83% of the violent incidents in Samangan province as battles, nearly all armed clashes. The majority of those incidents were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police or NDS personnel and members of pro-government militias or local uprising forces, or attacks on their facilities such as checkpoints and military bases. As a result of a Taliban attack on a village in Samangan City on 1 May 2019 that killed three pro-government militia members, the head of the Junbish political party was also killed.

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs, such as in Dara-i-Suf-e Payin district in March and December 2019 in Samangan/Aybak City in October 2019, were also registered under armed clashes.

The Taliban attacked Dara-i-Suf-e-Payin district a few times in the reporting period. In January 2020 the a Taliban group attack on the centre of Dara-Suf-e Payin was repelled. According to Afghanistan analyst Thomas Ruttig the Taliban attacked Dara-i-Suf-e Bala district several times in April 2020.

In April 2019 a clash broke out between members of two illegal armed groups in Samangan/Aybak City. Two members were killed as a result.

Out of ten incidents categorised by ACLED under explosions/remote violence, six were air strikes carried out by Afghan forces in both Dara-i-Suf districts, inflicting losses among AGEs. ACLED registered three incidents which involved the use IEDs, including the detonation of an IED inside a mosque during Friday prayers on 28 June 2019. Sources told UNAMA the Taliban were targeting the mullah for praising the ANDSF. As a result of the explosion 14 civilians were injured.

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3244 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Samangan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
3247 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, url
3248 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, url
3249 Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Taliban killed in Samangan operation, 22 March 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s military leader among 11 killed in Samangan clash, 28 December 2019, url
3250 Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 militants killed, 11 wounded in Samangan operation, 20 October 2019, url
3251 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Samangan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
3252 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, url
3253 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s groups attack on Dara-i-Souf Paen district repulsed, 3 January 2020, url
3254 Ruttig, T., The case of Mawlawi Mehdi and Balkhab District: Are the Taliban attracting Hazaras?, AAN, 23 May 2020, url
3255 Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, url
3257 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, url
3258 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, url
3259 Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Taliban killed in Samangan operation, 22 March 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s military leader among 11 killed in Samangan clash, 28 December 2019, url
3260 Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 militants killed, 11 wounded in Samangan operation, 20 October 2019, url
3261 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Samangan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
3262 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, url
3263 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s groups attack on Dara-i-Souf Paen district repulsed, 3 January 2020, url
3264 Ruttig, T., The case of Mawlawi Mehdi and Balkhab District: Are the Taliban attracting Hazaras?, AAN, 23 May 2020, url
3265 Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, url
3266 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Samangan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
3268 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, url
3269 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, url
3270 Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Taliban killed in Samangan operation, 22 March 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s military leader among 11 killed in Samangan clash, 28 December 2019, url
3271 Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 militants killed, 11 wounded in Samangan operation, 20 October 2019, url
3272 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Samangan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
3273 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 25-Aug. 1, 1 August 2019, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, url
3274 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s groups attack on Dara-i-Souf Paen district repulsed, 3 January 2020, url
3275 Ruttig, T., The case of Mawlawi Mehdi and Balkhab District: Are the Taliban attracting Hazaras?, AAN, 23 May 2020, url
3276 Pajhwok Afghan News, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 26-May 2, 2 May 2019, url
3277 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Samangan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
3279 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Samangan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url; UNAMA, Midyear Update On The Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict: 1 January To 30 June 2019, 30 July 2019, url, p. 7
launched by the Taliban on 11 May 2019 in Dara-i Suf-e Payin district hit the house of the family of a pro-government militia commander, killing five family members and injuring 10.\footnote{NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 10-16, 16 May 2019, \url{https://afghanwarcasualties.org/}.}


There were reports from the northern region, which includes Samangan province, about electricity and mobile phone networks being interrupted before and during the presidential election in September 2019. Private mobile companies were warned to close down their networks until after the presidential election. By the end of September, early October 2019 all networks started functioning again.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, p. 49.}

Analyst Obaid Ali described the security situation in Samangan in the presidential election period as relatively better as compared to Kunduz or Baghlan. Insecurity, in particular Taliban shelling, reportedly hindered the conduct of the elections in some parts of Ruy-e Duab, Khuram wa Sarbagh and Hazrat-e-Sultan districts, but especially in Dara-i Suf-e Payin where only in 2 out of 17 polling centres the election was held. However no large-scale attacks were carried out against ANDSF on election day in Samangan.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, \url{https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-monthly-humanitarian-update-september-2019}.}

AGEs closed 19 health facilities in Dara-i Suf-e Payin district on 14 October 2019. As a result, nearly 200 000 people were denied access to health, according to UNOCHA.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, \url{https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-monthly-humanitarian-update-september-2019}.} After more than two weeks of continued negotiations the health facilities reopened in the second week of November 2019.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, \url{https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-monthly-humanitarian-update-september-2019}.}

### 2.30.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 3 570 persons displaced due to conflict from Samangan province, mainly from Ruy-e Duab, Aybak and Dara-i Suf-e Payin...
districts. More than 95% were displaced within the province itself. A few dozen were displaced to Balkh and Kabul provinces.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 3 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 12 July 2020, url}

2.31 Sar-e Pul

2.31.1 General description of the province

Sar-e Pul province is located in the north of Afghanistan and has borders with Jawzjan to the north, Balkh to the north-east, Samangan to the east, Bamyan and Ghor to the south and Faryab to the west. The province is divided into the following administrative units: Balkhab, Gosfandi, Kohestanat, Sanchark, Sar-e Pul, Sayad and Sozmaqala. It became province of its own in 1988, when Jawzjan ceded it. The provincial capital is Sar-e Pul.

According to estimates for 2020-2021 by NSIA, the province has a population of 621 002, 176 994 of whom live in the provincial capital, Sar-e Pul. The main ethnic group in the province are Uzbeks. Other groups present include Hazaras, Tajiks, Pashtun, Arabs, Aimaq and Balochs.

A highway from Shiberghan, Jawzjan province, connects the provincial capital of Sar-e Pul with the Mazar-e Sharif–Herat section of the Ring Road (Highway One).

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, poppy cultivation in Sar-e Pul province decreased by 81 % in 2018, compared to 2017. The districts with the highest rate of opium-poppy cultivation were Sayad, Sanchark and the Sar-e Pul provincial centre. Moreover, the 2018 drought affected the rain-fed agricultural area.

As reported by Reuters in January 2019, oil wells near Sar-e Pul City are an important source of income for the province, and the Taliban try to either control or destroy them.

2.31.2 Conflict background and actors in Sar-e Pul

Sar-e Pul province is said to have become a ‘Taliban stronghold’ since 2012. The administration as well as military structure of the Taliban network in Sar-e Pul has consisted mainly of non-Pashtun locals, reflecting the multi-ethnic character of the province. The insurgency used to get its fighters from the prevailing ethnic groups in the districts. For instance, in Kohestanat, the movement was mainly led by Aimaq and Tajiks, whereas in Sozmaqala it was mostly controlled by Uzbeks. On 22 April 2020 the Taliban shared a video introducing the Taliban governor of Balkhab district, Mawlawi Mehdi Mujahed, a Shia Hazara. This evoked surprise in some comments on Twitter and in Afghan media reports, that stressed the fact that this was the first time a Shia Hazara Taliban commander was presented. This ethno-religious group is barely represented in the Taliban movement. Looking into the Taliban presence in Balkh district and Mehdi’s background, Afghanistan analyst Thomas Ruttig considered this was an exceptional case but concluded that with only a small group of fighters under his command and not having a presence in the district, Mehdi’s military relevance was low and his appointment could hardly

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3274 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Sar-e Pul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
3276 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Sar-i-Pul province, n.d., url
3277 Afghanistan, Office of the President, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, url, p. 32
3281 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 26
3282 Reuters, Taliban threaten oil fields in northern Afghanistan, 4 January 2019, url
3284 Voice of Jihad, مصاحبه استندبیوی الإمراء با مستند وسایل بیلگاب ولایت سربیل مزاره (پوسته محتوی مجازات به نشر در هیچ شرکت امضا شده نمی‌شود) [informal translation: Al Emarah Studio has published the interview with Mawlawi Mahdi Mujahid, responsible for Balkh district of Sar-e Pul province’], 22 April 2020, url; Voice of Jihad, Video: Interview with governor of Balkh – Mawlawi Mahdi Mujahid, 24 April 2020, url
3285 Nasr, W. (@SimNasr), [Twitter], posted on 22 April 2020, url; Mehsud, I. T. (@IhsanTipu), [Twitter], posted on 22 April 2020, url; Khaama Press, Taliban appoints first Shia Hazara as shadow district chief of the group, 28 April 2020, url
change the perception and mistrust among Hazaras of the Taliban. However it showed how switching alliances, even between unexpected sides, could occur as a result of complicated local power balance.3287

As reported by AAN in mid-2018, Taliban militants controlled half of the province, mostly the western and southern parts and some parts of Sayad, Balkhab and Sancharak districts.3288 In 2019 the provincial council chief of Sar-e Pul claimed 60% of the province was under Taliban control.3289 An Afghanistan analyst contacted by the Swedish Migrations Agency (Migrationsverket) in January 2020, considered Sar-e Pul and Faryab to be the most Taliban-controlled or influenced provinces in the northern region.3290

As of 2 July 2020 an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, indicated Kohestanat district as ‘Taliban-controlled’, Balkhab district as ‘government-controlled’ and the remaining districts in Sar-e Pul province as ‘contested’.3291

According to AAN, Central Asian militants from the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) have been active in Sar-e Pul province and operating alongside the Taliban since 2015. IJU militants are mainly Uzbeks from Uzbekistan, who have settled in Kohestanat district. Their main activity in the province has consisted of offering military training to new Taliban recruits.3292 AAN found no evidence of the presence of militants affiliated with ISKP in Sar-e Pul province, as claimed by several sources mid-2018, noting that existing reporting and locals may have confused ISKP with the IJU.3293 No security incidents specifically attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Sar-e Pul province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.3294

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Sar-e Pul province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen corps. Sar-e Pul province is included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC – North), which is part of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North is led by German forces and has its headquarters in Mazar-e Sharif, Balkh province.3295

2.31.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.31.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 217 civilian casualties (48 deaths and 169 injured) in Sar-e Pul. This represents an increase of 115% compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by explosive remnants of war and non-suicide IEDs.3296 Resolute Support recorded between 26 and 75 civilian casualties in Sar-e Pul in the first half of 2020, reporting an increase in the number of civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020, compared to the first.3297

3291 LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d.
3295 LWI, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d.
3296 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Sar-e Pol; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020).
3299 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, p. 72.
ACLED collected data on 142 violent events in Sar-e Pul province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, 117 of which were coded as battles, 17 as explosions/remote violence and 8 as violence against civilians. While ACLED registered violent events in all of Sar-e Pul’s districts, Sar-e Pul and Sayad stood out as districts where most incidents were reported, with 50 and 31 incidents respectively.

ACLED coded 82% of the violent incidents in Sar-e Pul province as battles, nearly all armed clashes. The majority of those incidents were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police or NDS personnel, and members of pro-government militias, or government representatives, attacks on their facilities such as checkpoints, and attacks on convoys. At times these incidents resulted in civilian casualties, as for example on 17 February 2020, when the Taliban attacked military bases and houses in Sayad district, killing a child and injuring two other civilians. Relatives of the Sayad district chief were killed in December 2019.

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3298 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Sar-e Pol; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
3299 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Baghlan; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; Geoprecision code: 1 & 2; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
3300 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Sar-e Pol, [url]
3301 ACLED analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan – Sar-e Pol, [url]
3303 Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 killed in attack on district chief residence, 2 December 2019, [url]
3306 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 1-7, 7 March 2019, [url]; Pajhwok Afghan News, 20 security forces suffer casualties in Sar-i-Pul attack, 2 March 2019, [url]
3307 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: February 2020, 6 February 2020, [url]
as a result of a Taliban attack on his house.\textsuperscript{3308} Retreating under resistance from the security forces after their attack on security posts, the Taliban looted nearly 100 sheep from residents in Gosfandi district in April 2019, according to a local official cited by local media.\textsuperscript{3309} Two civilians were killed and another was wounded by crossfire in Gosfandi district in March 2020.\textsuperscript{3310}

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs, as for example in Sancharak district in October 2019\textsuperscript{3311}, were also registered under armed clashes. Such operations could result in the displacement of people from their villages, as happened in Tabar and Taghikhwa villages of Sancharak district in March 2019.\textsuperscript{3312}

There were reports of the Taliban capturing villages and localities in Sancharak district in March and April 2019.\textsuperscript{3313} In December 2019 government forces reportedly managed to regain control over villages in Sar-e Pul district.\textsuperscript{3314}

Civilian casualties were reported in a number of the 17 reported incidents of explosions/remote violence in Sar-e Pul province registered by ACLED between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020\textsuperscript{3315}, such as incidents of rocket or mortar fire both by Taliban and ANDSF in Sayad and Sar-e Pul districts.\textsuperscript{3316} A premature detonation of a car bomb in Sayad district on 28 November 2019 inflicted injuries on 13 civilians and damage on 10 houses.\textsuperscript{3317} Five children were killed when an unexploded rocket shell went off while they were playing in Sar-e Pul district in July 2019.\textsuperscript{3318} Three civilians were killed and four others when a civilian vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb in Sar-e Pul district on 2 June 2020.\textsuperscript{3319}

Eight incidents categorised by ACLED as violence against civilians included the killing of civilians by both the Taliban and ANDSF for refusing to follow orders\textsuperscript{3320} and the killing of civilians for unknown or unclear reasons.\textsuperscript{3321} The Taliban also killed an election commission employee\textsuperscript{3322} and an incident of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{3308} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 killed in attack on district chief residence, 2 December 2019, \url{url}
  \item \textsuperscript{3309} Khaama Press, Taliban militants loot Gosfandi district in Sar-e Pul province, snatch 100 sheep from local residents, 14 April 2019, \url{url}; Ariana News, Taliban Militants Looting 100 Sheep of Villagers in Sar-e Pol, 14 April 2019, \url{url}
  \item \textsuperscript{3310} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, \url{url}
  \item \textsuperscript{3311} Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 killed, 7 wounded in fresh wave of violence, 7 October 2019, \url{url}
  \item \textsuperscript{3312} Pajhwok Afghan News, Seeking aid, dozens of Sar-i-Pul IDPs rally against govt, 5 March 2019, \url{url}
  \item \textsuperscript{3313} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 12-18, 18 April 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, ‘Taliban overrun Gajwae locality in Sar-i-Pul’s Sancharak district’, 3 March 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Sar-i-Pul: Taliban besiege Sancharak district center, 15 April 2019, \url{url}
  \item \textsuperscript{3314} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Sar-e Pol; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}
  \item \textsuperscript{3315} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Sar-e Pol; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}
  \item \textsuperscript{3316} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, \url{url}
  \item \textsuperscript{3317} Khaama Press, Premature car bomb explosion damages 10 houses, injures 13 civilians in Sar-e Pul, 28 November 2019, \url{url}
  \item \textsuperscript{3318} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 12-18, 18 July 2019, \url{url}; EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Sar-e Pol; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Unexploded rocket kills 4 Sar-i-Pul children, 17 July 2019, \url{url}
  \item \textsuperscript{3319} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, \url{url}
  \item \textsuperscript{3320} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, \url{url}
  \item \textsuperscript{3321} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Sar-e Pol; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{url}; Khaama Press, Couple shot dead by Taliban militants in Sar-e Pul province, 20 April 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, ‘Taliban behead a handicapped farmer in Sar-i-Pul’, 4 August 2019, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Taliban militants behead a disabled man in Sar-e Pul province, 4 August 2019, \url{url}; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, \url{url}
  \item \textsuperscript{3322} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill poll panel worker in Sar-i-Pul, 8 October 2019, \url{url}
\end{itemize}
flogging of women in Sancharak district in March 2019 was picked up by the international press. In addition to the incidents registered by ACLED the New York Times reported about the killing in February 2020 of three former Taliban members who were living a civilian life in Sar-e Pul district. Also Afghan news agency Pajhwok reported about the kidnapping and release after a few days of five members of a health care team in Kohestanat district in January 2020.

There were reports from the northern region, which includes Sar-e Pul province, about electricity and mobile phone networks being interrupted before and during the presidential election in September 2019. Private mobile companies were warned to close down their networks until after the presidential election. By the end of September, early October 2019 all networks started functioning again. The New York Times reported about 19 Taliban attacks on polling sites across Sar-e Pul province on 28 September 2019, election day. One child was killed and 20 other civilians were wounded when the Taliban fired a mortar round towards a polling centre. The polling centre had to close.

Security incidents, such as attacks on security checkpoints or on a police vehicle, were reported in Sar-e Pul province, on the highway connecting the province to Jawzjan in March and August 2019 and in January and March 2020.

Within the framework of its attacks on health care initiative, the World Health Organisation (WHO) did not register such attacks in Sar-e Pul province in 2019.

### 2.31.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 7,357 persons displaced due to conflict from Sar-e Pul province, 79 % of whom were displaced within the province itself, while others sought refuge in Balkh, Jawzjan and to a lesser extent in Kabul, Faryab and Ghor provinces. Most IDPs were registered as displaced from Sancharak district, followed by Sayad, Sozmaqala and Sar-e Pul districts.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 7,938 persons displaced to Sar-e Pul province. Sar-e Pul district hosted all. Almost three out of four were displaced within the province. In April 2019 and January 2020 Sar-e Pul province also hosted IDPs from Faryab and Jawzjan.
2.32 Takhar

2.32.1 General description of the province

Map 32: Afghanistan – Takhar province, source: UNOCHA

3333 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
Takhar province is located in the north-eastern part of Afghanistan and has borders with Badakhshan to the east, Panjshir and Baghlan to the south and south-west and Kunduz to the west and an international border with Tajikistan to the north. Takhar province is divided into the following administrative units: Baharak, Bangi, Chahab, Chal, Darqad, Dasht-e-Qala, Eshkamesh, Farkhar, Hazar Sumuch, Kalafgan, Khwajabahawuddin (Khwaja Bahawuddin), Khwajaghar (also Khwaja Ghar), Namakab, Rostaq, Taloqan, Warsaj and Yangi Qala. The provincial capital is Taloqan.

According to estimates for 2020-2021 by NSIA, the province has a population of 1,093,092, 258,724 of whom live in the provincial capital, Taloqan. The main ethnic group in the province are Uzbeks and Tajiks. Other groups present include Pashtuns, Hazaras and Arabs.

The Kunduz-Takhar Highway runs through the districts of Kalafgan, Taloqan and Bangi. According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Takhar was poppy-free from 2008 until 2017. In 2018 the province lost its poppy-free status, as 251 hectares of opium poppy were cultivated in Rostaq, Kalafgan and Farkhar districts. Drug smuggling routes leading into Central Asia run through some districts of Takhar province.

### 2.32.2 Conflict background and actors in Takhar

In 2017, AAN reported that the Taliban had been unable to ‘establish a stronger foothold’ in Takhar, despite some territorial gains starting in 2014, which prevented them from ‘connecting their fronts in [...] the west and south-west on the one hand, and [...] the east on the other’. In May 2019, journalist Bilal Sarwary noted an increased Taliban presence in Takhar province. According to Afghanistan analysts Obaid Ali and Thomas Ruttig their presence had grown in most parts of Takhar over the past few years and several offensives in the province in 2019 enabled them to expand their control towards Taloqan City, raising concern among the local people.

Reporting on the presidential elections of 28 September 2019, AAN described Khwajabahawuddin, Khwajaghar, Yangi Qala and Dasht-e Qala districts as ‘heavily contested’. According to a November 2019 assessment by AAN, following six districts were under government control: Rostaq, Farkhar, Warsaj, Kalafgan, Hazar Sumuch and Chal. The remaining districts were either ‘heavily contested or largely under Taleban control, or the government was only visible in the district centre and immediate vicinity’.

As of 2 July 2020 an assessment by the Long War Journal presented in a frequently updated...

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3334 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
3335 Afghanistan, IEC, Afghanistan 2019 Presidential Elections – Final results by Polling Stations: Province Takhar, 2020, url
3336 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
3337 Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, url
3338 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Takhar province, n.d., url
3339 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-21, June 2020, p. 28
3340 Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, url
3341 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Takhar province, n.d., url
3342 Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Takhar, 1 February 2017, url
3343 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
3344 Afghanistan's Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, url
3345 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 27
3346 Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, url
3347 Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, url
3348 Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on: 22 May 2019, url
3349 Ali, O., Rutting, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, url
3350 Afghanistan Times, Rampant insecurity stymies peace in Takhar, 8 April 2020, url
3351 AAN, Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (13): Observations from Kundahar, Takhar, Wardak and Balkh, 4 October 2019, url
map and based on open-source information, indicated Baharak, Chahab, Khwajaghar and Yangi Qala districts as ‘Taliban-controlled’, Bagi, Darqad, Dasht-e Qala, Eshkamesh, Khwajabahawuddin and Taloqan districts as ‘contested’ and the remaining districts in Takhar province as ‘government-controlled’.3351

Besides the Taliban, militants from ISKP, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), drug runners and criminals were reportedly active along the Tajik border in 20183352, as well as members of the terrorist movement Jundullah, a splinter group of IMU, mainly composed of non-Pashtun3353 Afghans.3354 According to a February 2019 AAN report, Jundullah’s military wing, Jabha-ye Qariha, was operating in some northern districts of Takhar province.3355 Purportedly, a small number of Islamic Jihad Union fighters, a movement mainly composed of Uzbeks from Uzbekistan, were active in parts of the province in 2018. These fighters were part of an independent front called Imom Bukhari’s Battalion, operating in northern and north-eastern Afghanistan.3356 According to information submitted to the UN Security Council for its June 2019 report, in Afghanistan Central Asian groups are under the direct operational and financial control of the Taliban, with about 50 fighters of the Islamic Jihad Group in Takhar and Badakhshan provinces.3357

Taliban fighters started to emerge in 2010 in Darqad, a Pashtun dominated district, coming from Kunduz with a mix of Takharis and outsiders in their ranks.3358 Militants affiliated to IMU, Jundullah and the Taliban fought alongside each other against the Afghan security forces until the end of 2014. In mid-2015, the IMU allied with the IS. Consequently, the already precarious relations between the Pashtun and the non-Pashtun AGEs worsened and the Taliban ordered the disarmament and even the killing of some Uzbek Jundullah fighters in order to prevent them from allying with the IS, as IMU did.3359

Throughout the years the Taliban appointed more local Uzbek and Tajik commanders to key positions in order to broaden their base in the ‘largely non-Pashtun’ province and to prevent it from becoming an IS stronghold.3360 This policy was interrupted with the replacement of the former Uzbek shadow governor of the province by a Pashtun, which led to a further deterioration of the relations between the two ethnic groups. Although the situation improved after an Uzbek, the former Taliban commander Mawlawi Nurullah, was appointed as the new shadow governor of Takhar in 2017, AGEs affiliated with IMU and Jundullah continued to fight autonomously from the Taliban. Although the three groups share the same religious views, as they all follow the Hanafi school of law, the IMU and Jundullah ignore local culture, such as the role of elders in conflict resolution and in other important issues.3361

While a researcher for the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies (AISS) mentioned small pockets of ISKP emerging in Takhar and Badakhshan provinces in August 20193362, no security incidents specifically

3351 LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., url. The source, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.
3352 RFE/RL, In The Dark: Tajik Border Residents Live Not Knowing What Lies Beyond, 22 November 2018, url
3353 Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, url
3354 Ali, O., Precarious Consolidation: Qari Hekmat’s IS-affiliated ‘island’ survives another Taleban onslaught, AAN, 4 March 2018, url
3355 Ali, O., One Land, Two Rules (3): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Dasht-e Archi district in Kunduz province, AAN, 26 February 2019, url
3356 Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, url
3357 UN Security Council, Letter dated 10 June 2019 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 13 June 2019, url, p. 18
3358 Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, url; Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, url
3359 Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, url
3360 Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, url; Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, url
3361 Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, url
3362 National (The), ISIS recruitment is growing in Afghanistan as US and Taliban work for peace, 8 August 2019, url
attributed to ISKP were recorded by ACLED in Takhar province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020.\footnote{3363 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Takhar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), \url{https://www.acleddata.com}}

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Takhar province is under the responsibility of the 217\textsuperscript{th} ANA corps after ANA’s 20th Division, previously under the ANA 209th Corps, was reassigned in April 2019 to become a new corps, the 217\textsuperscript{th} Corps.\footnote{3364 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2019, \url{https://www.sigrd.osd.mil/content/dam/opa/documents/publications/2019/Q3/Q3-2019.pdf}} The 217\textsuperscript{th} Corps has its headquarters in Kunduz.\footnote{3365 USDOD, Operation Freedom’s Sentinel. Lead Inspector General Report To The United States Congress. April 1, 2019–June 30, 2019, \url{https://www.dodig.mil/Documents/2019/03/28/IG-19-004-024.pdf}} As of 30 April 2020, Takhar province was still included in the area of responsibility of the Train Advise Assist Command – North (TAAC–North), which is part of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TAAC-North is led by German forces and has its headquarters in Mazar-e-Sharif, Balkh province.\footnote{3366 Khaama Press, Taliban’s ambush in Takhar kills 20 members of public uprising forces, 29 December 2019, \url{https://khaama.com/taliban-ambush-takhar-kills-20-public-uprising-members/}}

According to Afghanistan analyst Kate Clark in November 2019, the ANA Territorial Force was established in Taloqan City and was also planned for Khwajabahawuddin district.\footnote{3367 Clark, K., A Maelstrom of Militias: Takhar, a case study of strongmen co-opting the ALP, AAN, 14 November 2019, \url{https://aaw.anadoluagency.com/en胥ls/2019/11/30/khaama_press_taliban_ambush_takhar_kills_20_public_uprising_members/}}

ALP, local uprising forces and pro-government militias are present and active in some of Takhar’s districts.\footnote{3368 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan. December 2019, \url{https://www.dodig.mil/Documents/2019/03/28/IG-19-004-024.pdf}} The Takhar ALP is cited among the worst of the ALP units, due to the power of local strongmen over it and the involvement of some of its units in drug smuggling or abuses of the local population. Replacing all ALP commanders earlier in 2019 in Takhar seemed not to have brought actual changes. Like the ALP, local uprising forces are said to be controlled and mobilised by local strongmen. Afghanistan analyst Kate Clark describes Takhar as a province where ‘the commander class that emerged during Afghanistan’s long years of war is particularly strong’. Experts interviewed by Kate Clark mentioned deep historical grievances and conflict between several commanders in Takhar. While they can cooperate in case of a big external threat, they start fighting each other again once that threat is gone, in turn presenting a threat to the local people themselves and making Takhar a vulnerable province to the Taliban.\footnote{3369 SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress. April 1, 2019–June 30, 2019, \url{https://www.sigrd.osd.mil/content/dam/opa/documents/publications/2019/Q3/Q3-2019.pdf}}

In December 2019 residents and civil society activists from Takhar expressed concern about increasing crime in the province, attributing it to a rise in the number of illegal gunmen and unemployment.\footnote{3370 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, \url{https://www.unama.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/UNAMA-APCA2019-Final_EN.pdf}}

## 2.32.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### 2.32.3.1 General

ACLED collected data on 292 violent events in Takhar province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, 205 of which were coded as battles, 76 as explosions/remote violence and 11 as violence against civilians. Two out of three incidents occurred in following five districts: Eshkamesh, Baharak, Darqad, Dasht-e Qala and Khwajaghar. No violent events were registered by ACLED in Hazar Sumuch and Warsaj districts.

ACLED coded 70% of the violent events in Takhar province as battles, mainly armed clashes. The majority of those armed clashes were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including police, military or NDS personnel and members of pro-government militias or so-called Arbakis (the term ‘Arbaki’ is often used locally and by the Taliban in reference to members of the Afghan Local Police or other pro-government militias), or attacks on military or police facilities such as checkpoints, bases and headquarters and on vehicles and convoys. Some of those incidents resulted in civilian casualties, such as clashes between Taliban and government forces in Khwajaghar district in April 2019, in Eshkamesh district in June 2019 or in Dasht-e Qala district in February 2020. One civilian was killed in a Taliban attack on the residence of the Khwajaghar district police chief on

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3373 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Takhar, [url]
3374 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Takhar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
3375 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Takhar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
3380 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-7 July 4, 4 July 2019, [url]
30 March 2020. Fighting destroyed the houses of four families in Baharak district in May 2020. At least one civilian was killed during clashes following a Taliban attack in Chahab district in late June 2020.

Operations and attacks carried out by Afghan security forces against AGEs, as for example in Dasht-e Qala in April 2019, were also registered under armed clashes. With the approval of the Ministry of Defence's Operation Khalid on 2 April 2019, Takhar was one of the provinces in the north-east that security forces’ operations focused on. Several of the security operations were backed by air strikes.

Clashes between pro-government militias in Kalafgan district in March 2019 and in Chahab district in August 2019 also caused civilian casualties.

In the reporting period the Taliban carried out several attacks on parts of various districts in Takhar province, such as an attack on Taloqan City in July 2019 and on Khwajaghar district centre in June and September 2019, prompting residents and civil society activists from Takhar to gather in Kabul in early October 2019, to express concern that Taloqan might fall to the Taliban, while officials denied this threat. Control over Yangi Qala and Darqad districts has been changing hands between the Taliban and the government in the reporting period. The Taliban attacked Darqad district centre in November 2019 and April 2020, took over Chahab district centre for a few hours on 30 August 2019 and attacked a village in Baharak district in January 2020.

Air/drone strikes represented 21% of all violent incidents registered by ACLED in Takhar province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020. Most were carried out in Eshkamesh district, followed by Darqad district. The majority of air strikes were carried out by Afghan forces, some were attributed

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3383 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban raid leaves 14 security forces dead in Takhar, 30 March 2020, url; Tolonews, Attacks in Takhar, Zabul Kill 19 ANDSF, 30 March 2020, url
3385 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 2020, 4 June 2020, url; Afghan Islamic Press (@aip_news), [Twitter], posted on: 24 June 2020, url
3386 Pajhwok Afghan News, 28 Taliban rebels killed in Takhar operation, 24 April 2019, url
3388 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Takhar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url; Khaama Press, 6 Taliban militants killed in Special Forces raid, airstrike in Takhar province, 6 July 2019, url
3389 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: August 2-8, 8 August 2019, url; NYT,Afghan War Casualty Report: March 22-28, 29 March 2019, url
3390 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-july 4, 4 July 2019, url
3391 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, url; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 7-13, 13 June 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban lose 15 fighters in battle for Khwaja Ghar district, 12 June 2019, url; Tolonews, Heavy Clashes Ongoing In Takhar’s Khwaja Ghar District, 9 September 2019, url
3392 Tolonews, Residents Take Protest To Kabul As Takhar Security Deteriorates, 3 October 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Residents worried as clashes approach Taloqan, 3 October 2019, url
3394 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: November 2019, 7 November 2019, url
3395 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, url
3397 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, url
3398 These do not include air strikes carried out during operations categorised by ACLED under ‘battles’. For more information on ACLED’s methodology, please consult the introduction.
to NATO forces.3399 While those air strikes inflicted losses among AGEs3400, some also caused civilian casualties, for example in Yangi Qala district on 18 September 20193401 or in Eshkamesh district on 23 December 2019.3402

The remaining incidents of explosions/remote violence registered by ACLED included incidents where the Taliban or unidentified armed groups used roadside bombs and IEDs or rockets and shelling to target security forces or government officials.3403 Some of these incidents caused civilian casualties as for example in Darqad district on 5 September 2019 when shelling by the Taliban killed two civilians, and injured two, on 2 November 2019 when school children were killed and wounded after stepping on a road side bomb3404 or on 12 January 2020 when a rocket fired by the Taliban hit a house, killing one child and injuring two.3405 Seven civilians were injured when a bomb exploded in a hotel in Eshkamesh district in October 2019.3406 A Taliban roadside bomb exploded prematurely in Taloqan on 20 March 2020, killing not only four of their own members, but also two children.3407 At least nine students were killed, as a result of a bomb explosion inside a religious school in Eshkamesh district in June 2020.3408

Eleven incidents categorised by ACLED as violence against civilians included the killing of civilians by Afghan security forces, as for example in in Dash-e-Qala district in June 20193409 or the killing of civilians in Darqad district by the Tajikistan border police on 25 December 2019.3410 The killing of a doctor in Rostaq district in March 2019 was attributed to unidentified armed men. The Taliban killed civilians during an attack on Yangi Qala bazaar.3411 They also killed a civilian working as a cook on a military base in Dash-e-Qala district in March 20203412 and kidnapped and beheaded a tribal elder in Taloqan City in April 2020.3413 Unknown armed men killed an imam and the Taliban kidnapped and killed a former jihadi commander in Chahab district in June 2020.3414

There were reports from the north-eastern region, including from Takhar province, about electricity and mobile phone networks being interrupted before and during the presidential election in

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3399 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Takhar; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
3400 Khaama Press, Airstrikes kill more than 40 Taliban militants in Takhar and Kunduz provinces, 11 September 2019, url; Khaama Press, Precision airstrike kills deputy commander of the Red Unit of Taliban in Takhar, 15 February 2020, url
3401 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, url
3402 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, url
3405 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: January 2020, 2 January 2020, url
3406 Bakhtar News, Mine Blast Wounds Seven Civilians in Takhar, 23 October 2019, url
3408 Pajhwok Afghan News, Takhar seminary blast leaves 10 students dead, 18 June 2020, url
3409 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: June 28-7July, 4 July 2019, url
3410 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: December 2019, 5 December 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Takhair residents shot dead by Tajik border guards, 26 December 2019, url
3411 Xinhua, Over 40 including 3 civilians killed within one day in Afghan fighting, 4 March 2019, url
3412 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020, url
3413 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: April 2020, 2 April 2020, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban behead influential elder in Takhar, 4 April 2020, url
September 2019. Following through on an earlier warning, the Taliban destroyed towers of cell phone companies in Takhar province. Cell phone networks and internet were largely not functioning between 27 September and 2 October 2019. Several attacks by the Taliban were reported in various parts of Takhar province on 28 September 2019, the day of the presidential election. The head of the Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA) told Pajhwok that five of their agents were held hostage during a Taliban attack in Chahab district on election day.

There were reports of security incidents and occasional closures due to clashes on the Kunduz-Takhar Highway road in the reporting period. At times the Taliban blocked the highway to obstruct security reinforcements, but preventing the movement of civilians at the same time. In June 2019 the Taliban destroyed a bridge connecting several of Takhar’s districts with provincial capital Taloqan. As a result all routes from 20 villages to Taloqan City were blocked, impacting access to food and hospitals. In order to prevent the security forces from tracking them, the Taliban destroyed several other bridges in or around Taloqan in April 2020, again cutting off hundreds of families from the capital. Sources told AAN that in the aftermath of the 31 August 2019 attack on Kunduz the Taliban continued to set up mobile checkpoints on the Kunduz-Takhar Highway. In two separate incidents on that same highway five people were reportedly abducted and a woman was killed at illegal checkpoints in April 2020. The Taliban reportedly set up checkpoints on the Takhar-Baghlan Highway in February 2020.

On 16 March 2019 clashes broke out between Afghan police and soldiers inside a health facility in Darqad district. Sources reported about the closure of several health facilities by the Taliban, including in Darqad, Khwajabahawuddin, Khwajaghar, Baharak, Rostaq and Cha-ab districts in March 2020, depriving people of health services. The Taliban ascribe the closure to non-availability of facilities and corruption. At the time of writing, no updated information regarding the closure or reopening of those facilities was available. Fighting between the Taliban and ANDSF nearby, inflicted/caused damage to a local hospital in Dasht-e Qala district on 24 March 2020.

On 3 February 2020 the Taliban reportedly set fire to the Bodala Girls School in Taloqan City.

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3415 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Monthly Humanitarian Update (September 2019), 18 October 2019, [url]
3416 NYT, To Disrupt Elections, Taliban Turn to an Old Tactic: Destroying Cell Towers, 2 October 2019, [url]
3417 AAN, Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (13): Observations from Kandahar, Takhar, Wardak and Balkh, 4 October 2019, [url]
3418 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019, [url]
3419 Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 observers killed, many beaten on polling day, 17 October 2019, [url]
3420 Xinhua, Roundup: 20 killed in Afghanistan within 24 hours amid violence reduction in Afghanistan, 3 March 2020, [url]
3421 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: September 2019, 5 September 2019, [url]
3423 Salam Times, Taliban’s destruction of key bridge cuts off 20 villages in Takhar Province, 4 July 2019, [url]
3424 Salam Times, Taliban blow up bridge in Takhar, cutting off thousands of villagers, 29 April 2020, [url]
3425 Ali, O., Ruttig, T., Taliban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, [url]
3428 Tolonews, 2 Confirmed Attacks on Afghan Forces on Second Day of RIV, 23 February 2020, [url]
3429 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 15-21, 22 March 2019, [url]
3431 Afghan Islamic Press (@aip_news), [Twitter], posted on 9 March 2020, [url]
3433 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban set fire to girls’ school in Takhar: Rahimi, 3 February 2020, [url]; Khaama Press, Girls school set on fire in the northern Takhar, 3 February 2020, [url]; Salaam Times, Taliban blow up bridge in Takhar, cutting off thousands of villagers, 29 April 2020, [url]
In its report covering 2019 UNAMA noted that in certain parts of Afghanistan, including Takhar, several private telecommunications companies, with the exception of Salaam Telecommunications, shut down their services in the evening following up on orders issued by the Taliban in order to prevent being tracked down or targeted during operations.\textsuperscript{3431} According to a Twitter post by journalist Bilal Sarwary in May 2019 the Taliban asked major mobile service provider companies to stop services in Taloqan City.\textsuperscript{3432} A short break during the week of reduction in violence at the end of February 2020 aside, all telecom operators, except for the Salaam Telecom, had to shut down services between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. in Takhar, because of Taliban threats and intimidation. This impacted online education and access to health facilities in times of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.\textsuperscript{3433} Electricity pylons providing power from Tajikistan to Takhar province were destroyed on 23 September 2019 due to clashes between the Taliban and security forces. As a result Takhar province had no electricity for about a week.\textsuperscript{3434}

Within the framework of the attacks on health care initiative, the World Health Organisation (WHO) did not register such attacks in Takhar province in 2019.\textsuperscript{3435} UNAMA documented the abduction by the Taliban of three healthcare workers in Khowajaghar district between March and May 2020. The organisation they worked for was accused of failing to pay the salaries to their employees.\textsuperscript{3436} Also a mortar round fired during fighting between the Taliban and Afghan forces, caused damage to a hospital in Dasht-e Qala district on 24 March 2020.\textsuperscript{3437}

2.32.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA reported regularly about continued clashes between AGEs and the ANDSF in Takhar causing displacement in the reporting period.\textsuperscript{3438}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 85 127 persons displaced by conflict from Takhar province, 96 % of whom were displaced within the province itself, while others sought refuge in Kunduz province and to a lesser extent in Kabul and Kapisa provinces. It makes Takhar the province where conflict caused the largest displacement in the reporting period.\textsuperscript{3439} More than half of all reported IDPs from Takhar were displaced from Baharak district, in particular in June 2019 when Afghan security forces stepped up their operations in Takhar, often with air support\textsuperscript{3440} and in September 2019, due to clashes.\textsuperscript{3441} The second largest group of IDPs was displaced from Eshkamesh district, mainly in June and August 2019, due to heavy clashes and operations in the

3432 Sarwary, B., [Twitter], posted on 22 May 2019, url
3433 Salaam Times, Taliban resume telecom restrictions in Takhar, hindering coronavirus response, 22 April 2020, url
3434 AAN, Afghanistan’s 2019 Election (13): Observations from Kandahar, Takhar, Wardak and Balkh, 4 October 2019, url
3436 UNAMA, Special Report: Attacks On Health Care in 2019 as of December 31, 2019, 31 December 2019 url
3441 Khaama Press, Special Forces fully clear Baharak district of Takhar from the presence of Taliban militants, 6 July 2019, url; Ali, O., Rutig, T., Taleban attacks on Kunduz and Pul-e Khumri: Symbolic operations, AAN, 11 September 2019, url
Most were displaced to Taloqan, but many also within the district or to Kunduz province. Conflict also caused the displacement of over 5,000 residents of Namakab and Darqad districts. Of all IDPs registered by UNOCHA from Takhar province in the reporting period, most were registered in the second half of 2019. So far in 2020, May was the only month in which UNOCHA registered IDPs from Takhar. However in the last days of June 2020 UNOCHA noted the 'most significant displacement since March 2020' in three north-eastern provinces, including Takhar.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 84,112 persons displaced by conflict to Takhar province, nearly all from within the province and nearly all seeking refuge in Taloqan and Farkhar districts. In November and December 2019 Taloqan also hosted IDPs from Guzargah-e-Nur district in Baghlan.

2.33 Uruzgan

2.33.1 General description of the province

Map 33: Afghanistan – Uruzgan province, source: UNOCHA

3447 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Uruzgan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
Uruzgan province is located in the central part of Afghanistan and is also known by the name ‘Rozgan’ or ‘Uruzganis’. \(^{3448}\) Uruzgan borders on Daykundi in the north, Ghazni in the east, Zabul and Kandahar in the south and Helmand in the west. Uruzgan is divided into the following administrative units: Tirinkot with the provincial capital Tirinkot City (also known as Tarinkot), Dehraoud, Chora (also Chinarto), Shahidhassas (also Shahid-e Hassas, Charchino), Khasuruzgan (also Khas Uruzgan) and Tirinkot. \(^{3449}\) The district of Gizab, which was formerly part of Daykundi province, now falls within the administration of Uruzgan. \(^{3450}\) Chinarto and Surab are two new districts of the province; their status has not been officially recognised yet. \(^{3451}\) According to NSIA, the population of Uruzgan is estimated at 436,079 for 2020/21. Urban population, living in provincial capital Tirinkot and two other small towns Dehraoud and Gizab, constitutes less than 4% of all inhabitants. \(^{3452}\) Nearly all population of the province is agrarian and Uruzgan is one of the least developed provinces in terms of education, health facilities and infrastructure. \(^{3453}\)

The Kandahar-Uruzgan Highway runs through the districts of Chora and Tirinkot. \(^{3454}\) Taliban militants purportedly set up check-points along the highway and they searched or abducted travellers. \(^{3455}\) Moreover, passengers complained about the ‘shabby condition’ of the road, which extended the travel time and had a negative impact on vehicles and security. \(^{3456}\) Military operations were ongoing in February 2019, in order to clear the road from Taliban insurgents. \(^{3457}\) The city of Tirinkot hosts an airport, which was served by domestic scheduled passenger flights as of March 2019. \(^{3458}\)

According to the UNODC data obtained by AAN, poppy cultivation in Uruzgan province decreased by 38% in 2019, compared to 2018. \(^{3459}\) According to the Jordanian news website Al Bawaba, any dwellers relied economically on poppy cultivation and the number of addicts, including women and children, reached up to 15,000. \(^{3460}\)

### 2.33.2 Conflict background and actors in Uruzgan

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Uruzgan province is under the responsibility of the 205th ANA Corps, which falls under Train Advise Assist Command-South (TAAC-S), led by US forces. \(^{3461}\) The ANA soldiers are usually originated from the other provinces and they do not usually leave military bases. In practice, their main task is not to defend local people but not to surrender the base or checkpoint to Taliban. The responsibility to protect the locals against the AGEs was put mainly on police forces, ANP and especially on ALP. \(^{3462}\)

At the same time, army and police checkpoints, bases, and office buildings which represent the only government’s presence and control in the countryside, are the main target of repeated Taliban attacks.
Soldiers have to protect military bases, sometimes without any outside reinforcement. The only effective option for maintaining the military posts, are air strikes.3463

According to local people, the central government appoints top provincial officials without consulting the locals. The top officials take the decision without any coordination and they are often busy with internal infightings. The corruption is widespread among police chiefs in the region. In one case, a former police chief was accused of stealing 58 000 litres of oil during four months which should have been used for police transport and generators.3464 In January 2020, provincial police chief was dismissed for the extortion of bribes from his subordinates and for stealing money intended for employees' remuneration.3465

Uruzgan was one of the first provinces affected by Taliban resurgence after 2001.3466 According to LWJ, only one Uruzgan district, Chora, is fully controlled by Taliban, others are contested.3467 In practice, the central authority is limited to the provincial capital, Tirinkot and AGEs took initiatives in the rest of the province.3468 The central administration is not present in most district centres and towns and people felt let alone with no choice but to cooperate with Taliban.3469 The government administration has been evacuated to other place at least in two districts, according to Tolonews Survey.3470 However, in some districts of the province, like Khas Uruzgan, Hazara communities used to live in self-governed enclaves under local agreements with the Taliban, which so far have ensured them the stability.3471

According to Pajhwok Afghan News, ISKP has been active in the province, particularly in Chora district, recruiting new supporters, even among women. Purportedly, ISKP fighters in the province have been former Taliban militants.3472

### 2.33.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.33.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 145 civilian casualties (73 deaths and 72 injured) in Uruzgan province. This represents a decrease of 16 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by air strikes and non-suicide IEDs.3473 Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 25 civilian casualties in Uruzgan in the first quarter of 2020, reporting an increase in the number of civilian casualties in the second quarter of the year, with 26-50 casualties recorded (from 1 April to 30 June 2020).3474

In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED reported total 642 incidents related to security in Uruzgan province, of which 435 battles, 199 remote violence, 8 cases of violence against civilians,3475

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3467 LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., [url](http://www.talibanistan.com)
3468 The Canberra Times, Lessons to be learnt from failures in Uruzgan 26 June 2019, [url](http://www.canberratimes.com.au)
3475 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Nimroz; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, [url](https://acleddata.com))
In 2018, Taliban extended their operations to new areas like the district of Khas Uruzgan where mixed Pashtun and Hazara population live. This caused battles between the Hazara ALP leader, Hakim Shujai, his militiamen and the Taliban. The fighting, accounting for many civilian casualties and internally displaced people, mostly among the Hazara civilian population, went on for almost one month until late November 2018. There are many theories about the reasons for the Taliban expansion into new areas: some observers point to their desire to gain more territory to improve their position in the peace talks, others point to their move to expand their influence among all ethnic groups and, third, some believe that the Taliban want to establish their own administration and collect taxes. In 2019 and 2020 there were numerous reports of clashes and air strikes in Khas Uruzgan. Although most victims were AGEs fighters or ANSF staff, civilians also suffered from the acts of violence. Most of them were killed by Afghan security services supported by NATO forces during air strikes (for example 11 civilians were killed on 22 July 2019, 9 civilians were killed on 5 September 2019 and 7 civilians were killed on 4 April 2020).

Throughout 2019 and 2020, Taliban militants were active also in other districts in the province. To prevent AGEs attacks, multiple air strikes were conducted by US and Afghan forces at the suburbs of provincial capital Tirinkot during the reporting period. Some civilian victims were reported, including women and children (2 April 2019 13 civilians were killed, 10 June 2019 eight children were killed, 4 August 2019 13 civilians killed, 31 January 2020 - five children, two women and one man were killed).

In August 2019, AGEs besieged military base in Charchino (Shahid-e-Hassas).

In Remote Afghan Corner, Besieged Afghan Troops Cry For Help 06 August 2019.

MENA FN, Afghanistan- 50 civilians killed, injured in airstrikes last month, 8 February 2020.


SATP, Uruzgan Timeline 2019.

Khaama Press, Taliban commander, in charge of high-tech weapons, among 23 killed in Uruzgan, 16 May 2020.

Figure 35. Uruzgan - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data.

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3476 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Nimroz; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, url)
3477 Adili, A., Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (I): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 28 November 2018, url; Adili, A. Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (II): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 29 November 2018, url; Reuters, Afghan Shi’ite militia battles Taliban, raising sectarian fears, 3 November 2018, url
3478 Adili, A., Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (I): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 28 November 2018, url
3479 Adili, A., Y. and van Bijlert, M., Taleban Attacks on Khas Uruzgan, Jaghori and Malestan (II): A new and violent push into Hazara areas, AAN, 29 November 2018, url
3480 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Uruzgan; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, url)
3481 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Uruzgan; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, url)
3482 RFE/RL/Gandhara, In Remote Afghan Corner, Besieged Afghan Troops Cry For Help 06 August 2019, url
3483 SATP, Uruzgan Timeline 2019, url; Khaama Press, Taliban commander, in charge of high-tech weapons, among 23 killed in Uruzgan, 16 May 2020, url
3484 MENA FN, Afghanistan- 50 civilians killed, injured in airstrikes last month, 8 February 2020, url
3485 RFE/RL/Gandhara, In Remote Afghan Corner, Besieged Afghan Troops Cry For Help 06 August 2019, url
district and three days later 26 civilians were killed at the air strikes there.\textsuperscript{3486} 16 December 2019 security forces have rescued at least 12 civilians from a Taliban-run detention centre in Charchino (Shahid-e Hassas), according to the Ministry of Defense.\textsuperscript{3487}

In October 2019, heavy battles took place in Gizab district.\textsuperscript{3488} ACLED reported also about killing of civilians accused of cooperation with government by Taliban. Children were also victims of this act of revenge. This incident took place in Deh Rahwod district on 2 December 2019.\textsuperscript{3489}

2.33.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 4371 persons displaced in Uruzgan province. Most of them were resettled within the province. Some families however left Uruzgan for Herat City and Kandahar City. In November 2019, 377 persons arrived to provincial capital of Uruzgan - Trinkot - from Shah Wali Kot district in Kandahar province.\textsuperscript{3490}

2.34 Wardak

2.34.1 General description of the province

Map 34: Afghanistan – Wardak province, source: UNOCHA\textsuperscript{3491}

\textsuperscript{3486} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Uruzgan; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, url
\textsuperscript{3487} Pajhwok, 12 civilians freed from Taliban prison in Uruzgan, 16 December 2019, url; Xinhua, Afghan forces storm Taliban hideout in S. Afghanistan, set free 12 detainees, 16 December 2019, url
\textsuperscript{3488} Tolo News, Heavy Clashes Ongoing In Uruzgan with Casualties on Both Sides, 21 October 2019, url
\textsuperscript{3489} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Uruzgan; Event types: Violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, url
\textsuperscript{3490} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 03 March 2020, url; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2020, last updated: 28 June 2020, url
\textsuperscript{3491} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Wardak Province - District Atlas, April 2014, url
Wardak province, also known as Maydan Wardak, is located in the central region of Afghanistan and has borders with the provinces of Bamyan to the north-west, Parwan to the north, Kabul and Logar to the east and Ghazi to the south and south-west. Wardak province is divided into the following administrative units: Chak, Daymirdad, Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud, Jaghatu, Jarez, Markaz-e Behsud (or Hesa-i Duwum-e Behsud), Maydan Shahr, Nerkh and Saydabad. The provincial capital is Maydan Shahr, located approximately 40 kilometres south-west of Kabul.

According to estimates for 2020-21 by NSIA, Wardak province has a population of 660,258. The main ethnic group in Wardak is Pashtun, followed by Hazara and Tajik enclaves. The local Pashtun population belongs to a variety of Ghilzai tribes, primarily the Wardak, Kharoti and Hotak tribes. The districts of Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud, Markaz-e Behsud and Daymirdad are predominantly inhabited by Hazara, as well as periodically visited by migrating Kuchi nomads (see below). Wardak province is inhabited by Sunni, as well as Shia Muslims.

Wardak is described as a politically and strategically important province, due to its proximity to Kabul and its location on a crossroad of highways connecting the west and the east, as well as the north and the south of Afghanistan. The Kabul-Kandahar Highway passes through Wardak province, traversing the districts of Maydan Shahr, Nerkh and Saydabad. A provincial road runs west from Maydan Shahr to Bamyan province, through the districts of Jalrez, Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud and Markaz-e Behsud. The areas around the Kabul-Kandahar Highway are densely populated. Wardak province has no functioning airstrip and air traffic is regularly interrupted by bad weather conditions.

According to UNODC’s Opium Survey from 2018, Wardak province has maintained its poppy-free status since 2013. UNODC data obtained by AAN in June 2020 indicated a 52% reduction in opium-poppy cultivation in the provinces of the central region (including Wardak province) and the central highlands. Central Afghanistan, including Wardak province, is mentioned as home to the ephedra sinica plant, which contains the natural stimulant ephedrine, used to make the drug methamphetamine and expected to take up a central role in Afghanistan’s drug economy soon.
2.34.2 Conflict background and actors in Wardak

Wardak is described as ‘among the relatively volatile provinces’ in the central region of the country, as an ‘area of high insecurity’ and ‘a hotbed for the insurgency’. Intense fighting between militant groups and government forces has been reported in several parts of the province, with civilians often caught in the crossfire.

The Taliban reportedly re-emerged and gained influence in Wardak province from 2006-2007, amid power struggles among rival militias. By 2009, the militant group controlled much of the Pashtun-dominated southern and eastern districts of the province. Some districts, such as Chak and Saydabad, have reportedly gone back and forth between Taliban and government control since then. According to several sources reporting in 2019 and 2020, the Taliban in Wardak have been strengthening their presence, influence and control and ‘enjoy widespread support’ in their ‘strongholds’ in the province. The militant group’s Khalid bin Walid training camp has reportedly been training recruits in Wardak. In May 2020, the UN Security Council reported on a reorganisation of the Taliban shadow governance and military structure in several provinces, with key new appointments made in Wardak province. According to the same report, the Taliban have ordered increased supplies of ammunition and explosive materials for their forces in Wardak province. Taliban groups from Pakistan reportedly use the route through the southern district of Shamulzayi in Zabul province to deploy their forces further into Ghazni and Wardak provinces.

According to an HRW study published in July 2020, the Taliban’s control over Wardak province is less secure and less visible compared to provinces like Kunduz or Helmand. However, the militant’s ‘Vice and Virtue’ policing is reportedly active in the province, with people being questioned, beaten and detained for offenses against the Taliban’s rules. The Taliban in Wardak are reported to have established a regulated system to collect taxes.

An LWJ assessment mapping Taliban control in Afghanistan in a frequently updated map and based on open-source information, consulted on 2 July 2020, indicated Saydabad district as ‘Taliban-controlled’ and Daymirdad, Chak, Jaghatu, Nerkh, Maydan Shah and Jalrez districts as ‘contested’. A USDOD

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3508 Warden, S., Past as Prologue? What the Parliamentary Election Results Tell Us About the September Presidential Election, AAN, 23 August 2019, url; PBS, What Life is Like for Afghans under Taliban Control, 31 December 2019, url
3509 Christian Science Monitor (The), Inside the Taliban: What These Jihadis Say about Their Her Assassination, 4 October 2019, url
3510 International Crisis Group, Intensiﬁng Violence Dulls Afghans’ Hopes for Peace, 5 July 2019, url; Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Aﬀected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, url; PBS, What Life is Like for Afghans under Taliban Control, 31 December 2019, url
3511 Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Aﬀected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, url; HRW, “You Have No Right to Complain”: Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, url, pp. 31-32
3512 Arab News, In the Line of Fire: Wardak Residents Struggle to Stay Afloat in Afghanistan, 23 June 2019, url; Tolonews, Maida, Wardak Faces Imminent Threat as Taliban Expands Presence, 26 June 2020, url
3513 PBS, What Life is Like for Afghans under Taliban Control, 31 December 2019, url; An Afghan analyst Lifos spoke to in January 2020. Sweden, Lifos/Migrationsverket, Säkerhetsläget i Afghanistan (Version 2.0), 7 April 2020, url, p. 52
3514 NYT, Afghan Town’s First Female Mayor Awaits Her Assasination, 4 October 2019, url
3515 International Crisis Group, Intensiﬁng Violence Dulls Afghans’ Hopes for Peace, 5 July 2019, url
3516 LWJ, Taliban Promotes its ‘Preparation for Jihad’, 14 August 2019, url
3518 Sabawoon, A. M., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul’s Capital under Threat, AAN, 5 November 2019, url
3519 HRW, “You Have No Right to Complain”: Education, Social Restrictions, and Justice in Taliban-Held Afghanistan, 30 June 2020, url, pp. 48-52
assessment of July 2019, reported by LWJ in the same map, designated Saydabad district as ‘contested’ and Maydan Shahr district as ‘government-influenced’. Markaz-e Behsud and Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud districts were categorised as ‘government-controlled’ or ‘undetermined’ in this assessment.\textsuperscript{3520}

Sources in 2019 and 2020 reported on a Taliban presence in the districts of Jalrez\textsuperscript{3521}, Saydabad\textsuperscript{3522}, Chak\textsuperscript{3523}, Daymirdad\textsuperscript{3524} and Nerkh.\textsuperscript{3525} According to a May 2019 USIP report, the Afghan government had a limited presence in the districts of Saydabad and Chak, retaining compounds in the district centres and controlling the main roads, however its control remained confined to its bases and checkpoints. Residents from both districts stated Taliban militants have returned soon whenever the government’s military operations were concluded.\textsuperscript{3526} In May 2019, Chak district was reportedly assaulted by 200 Taliban fighters.\textsuperscript{3527} A June 2019 LWJ article indicated Saydabad as one of the more insecure areas in Wardak, with the Taliban imposing a strict form of Sharia law in much of the district.\textsuperscript{3528} In July 2019, the Taliban reportedly banned shops and bakeries in the bazaar of Chak’s district centre.\textsuperscript{3529} In April 2020, the area of Seebak Bazar in Chak district was reported under Taliban control, with militants patrolling the village.\textsuperscript{3530} In June 2020, the Tangi Valley in Saydabad was described as a haven for the Taliban in Wardak province.\textsuperscript{3531}

According to a December 2019 dispatch from AAN analyst Ehsan Qaane, Jalrez district’s geographically strategic position has made it prone for conflict and guerrilla activity for decades. Qaane related the district’s importance to its proximity to Kabul, its location along the Kabul-Bamyan Highway and its many side roads and mountain paths leading to various districts in Wardak, Parwan and Kabul provinces. Several of those reportedly served as ‘supply and escape routes’, providing safe havens to militant groups and impeding the movement of government forces. In 2003, Jalrez was among the first places where the Taliban re-emerged and started to reorganise its fighters. Since 2006, the district has been highly contested, with an increased Taliban activity reported from 2014 onwards. According to Qaane, in December 2019, half of Jalrez district was under Taliban control, with the other half controlled by the Afghan government. The district centre remained highly contested and has been regularly attacked by the Taliban, for example in August and September 2019. During larger offensives, the local Taliban in Jalrez received support from fighters from other districts, particularly form Nerkh. 20 kilometres of the Kabul-Bamyan Highway, traversing Jalrez district, have reportedly been under

\textsuperscript{3520} LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., url; (LWJ, however, does not specify when and which information of the aforementioned map was last updated.)\textsuperscript{3521} HRW, Taliban Linked to Murder of Afghan Rights Defender, 6 September 2019, url; HRW, World Report 2020: Afghanistan - Events of 2019, 14 January 2020, url; According to international sources Landinfo spoke to in October 2019.


Taliban control, with militant’s checkpoints stopping vehicles and kidnapping passengers suspected of working for the Afghan government, NGOs or international troops. In December 2019, the Pul-e Hawaiy area of Zaiwalat was reported as one of the most dangerous parts of Jalrez, where passers-by were regularly killed at temporary checkpoints. Kot-e Ashro, 5 kilometres from the provincial capital, was reportedly the main frontline in Jalrez, alongside other frontlines such as Bazar Jalrez, Seyah Petap and Aysa Khakbad. The Afghan Local Police (ALP) is mentioned as the main pro-government actor fighting the Taliban in Jalrez, alongside a strong Taliban resistance from Wardak’s Hazara community. Qaane’s research indicated the Taliban’s direct intervention in several areas of service delivery in Jalrez and their operation of a separate justice system.

Several prominent Taliban figures were killed or arrested in the aforementioned districts. In March 2019, a key Taliban commander, reportedly involved in facilitating several high profile attacks and assassinations of government employees, was killed in Saydabad district. In July 2019, the Taliban shadow district chief of Nerkh district, known as Aminullah, was killed. In the same district, several senior Taliban leaders, including a Red Unit commander, an intelligence chief and another shadow district chief, known as Mullah Qayum or Obaid, were killed in August and September 2019. In October 2019, the Taliban’s shadow district chief of Chak district, known as Mullah Jan or Abid and reportedly also acting as the group’s shadow provincial governor, was killed. In November 2019, a Taliban commander, known as Asad and reportedly involved in the militant group’s activities on Highway One in Wardak, was killed. In January 2020, the Taliban deputy shadow intelligence chief for Jalrez district was arrested in an NDS Special Forces’ raid on hideouts of the militant group in the villages of Ahmad Khel and Mohammad Noor Khel. In April 2020, the shadow governor for Wardak, known as Wali Jan or Hamza, was killed. In the same month, the Taliban’s shadow police district chief of Saydabad district, known as Qari Jawid or Mansoor and reportedly in charge of a group of 50 militants, was killed. In June 2020, a key member of the Taliban’s Red Unit, known as Qari Zalmai or Ansar, was killed in Jalrez district.

The Haqqani Network reportedly expanded to Wardak province in the past and merged there with jihadist groups who were operating south of Kabul. In Wardak, the Haqqani Network has mainly provided indirect support in the form of funds, training, sanctuary and the appointment of local Islamist militant leaders.

3533 Qaane, E., One Land, Two Rules (9): Delivering Public Services in Insurgency-Affected Jalrez District of Wardak Province, AAN, 16 December 2019, url
3534 See sources mentioned below.
3535 Khaama Press, Taliban Commander Involved in High Profile Attacks, Assassinations Has Been Killed in Wardak, 9 March 2019, url
3536 According to an article from Salaam Times, the district chief of Nerkh district, also referred to as Aminullah, was killed in October 2019. Salaam Times, Sustained Annihilation of Taliban Leaders Throws Group into Disarray, 5 November 2019, url
3537 Khaama Press, Taliban’s Shadow District Chief and His 6 Security Guards killed in Wardak, 7 July 2019, url
3538 Khaama Press, Airstrike Kills Top Taliban Leaders Including the Group’s Intelligence Chief in Wardak, 20 August 2019, url
3539 Reuters, Taliban Suicide Bomber Kills at Least 10 Civilians, Two NATO Troops in Kabul, 5 September 2019, url
3540 Pajhwok Afghan News, Key figures Among 22 Rebels Killed in Maidan Wardak, 5 September 2019, url
3541 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s District Chief killed in Wardak Airstrike, 17 October 2019, url
3542 Khaama Press, Infighting among Taliban Militants Leaves 4 Dead in Wardak Province, 23 November 2019, url
3543 Xinhua, Afghan Intelligence Agency Captures 6 Taliban Militants Near Kabul, 27 January 2020, url
3545 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s District Police Chief Among 7 Killed in Wardak Firefight, 5 April 2020, url; Khaama Press, Prominent Taliban Leader Killed in Wardak Province, 5 April 2020, url
3546 Stanford University, Mapping Militant Organizations: Haqqani Network, 8 November 2017, url
Mid-July 2016, UNAMA reported on groups claiming allegiance to ISKP as operational in Wardak. In 2017, a possible emergence of ISKP was reported in the Takana area in Jalrez district. ACLED recorded one incident specifically attributed to ISKP in Wardak province between 1 March 2019 and 30 June 2020. In October 2019, ISKP militants reportedly fired missiles at ANDSF forces in Chak district, no casualties were reported. Additionally, ACLED recorded more than 25 incidents in which Taliban and/or ISKP militants were wounded and/or killed during military operations in the districts of Nerkh, Saydabad, Chak, Daymirdad, Jalrez and Maydan Shahr; and two incidents in which Taliban and/or ISKP militants were wounded and/or killed when ANDSF forces repulsed their attacks in Nerkh and Chak districts.

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Wardak is under the responsibility of the 203rd ANA Corps. Wardak province is included in the Task Force Southeast (TF-Southeast), which is part of NATO’s Resolute Support Mission within Afghanistan. TF-Southeast is led by US forces and has its headquarters in Paktya province. NDS unit 01, a paramilitary CIA-backed militia accused of human rights abuses, is reported to operate in the central region, including in Wardak province.

During spring and summer, migrations of Kuchi nomads regularly result in violent clashes caused by land disputes in Wardak’s predominantly Hazara districts of Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud, Markaz-e Behsud and Daymirdad. When the tensions between Kuchi nomads and local Hazara residents intensified in 2015, a public uprising force, called the Resistance Front, was created by Hazara commander Abdul Ghani Alipur. In November 2018, Alipur was arrested by the Afghan intelligence service on charges of human rights abuses and corruption. His militia group was accused of attacking security forces, as well as of extorting, harassing and kidnapping Pashtun passengers on the highway between Maydan Shar and Jalrez, reportedly in retaliation for attacks on Hazaras. His supporters claimed that Alipur had been fighting the Taliban, patrolling and ensuring the safety of Hazara travellers on the main highway leading to Kabul. After violent Hazara protests broke out in several parts of the country, Alipur was released from NDS custody. According to AAN analyst Fabrizio Foschini, the Taliban have exploited local land disputes between ethnic Hazaras and Kuchis to gain the latter’s support. In May 2019, the Taliban attacked the Hazara populated neighbourhood of Mirhazar in Markaz-e Behsud (or Hesa-i Duwum-e Behsud) district (see below), reportedly as a sign of support for the Pashtun Kuchi people in the area. In June 2020, dozens of road construction workers were reportedly abducted.
and abused by armed men from Alipur’s Hazara militia\(^{3561}\), and the killing of more than a dozen people due to armed confrontations between local residents and Kuchi nomads was reported.\(^{3562}\)

### 2.34.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.34.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 184 civilian casualties (108 deaths and 76 injured) in Wardak province. This represents a decrease of 18% compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by air strikes and search operations.\(^{3563}\) Resolute Support\(^{3564}\) recorded between 0 and 25 civilian casualties in Wardak province in the first quarter of 2020\(^{3565}\) and between 26 and 50 civilian casualties in the second quarter of 2020.\(^{3566}\) In a June 2020 UN Secretary General report, Wardak is indicated as one of the four provinces where ‘the highest amount of conflict activity’ occurred in the second quarter of 2020.\(^{3567}\)

ACLED collected data on 604 violent events in Wardak province from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020 from reports in open sources, of which 388 were coded as ‘battles’, 184 as ‘explosions/remote violence’ and 32 as ‘violence against civilians’. Saydabad stood out as the district where most incidents were reported, with 190 incidents recorded, followed by the districts of Maydan Shahr, Chak, Nerkh, Jaghatu and Jalrez. In Wardak’s remaining districts, 13 or less incidents were reported. Most violent incidents in Wardak province were recorded in the third and fourth quarters of 2019.\(^{3568}\)

![Figure 36. Wardak - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data](#)

ACLED coded around 64% of the violent incidents in Wardak as ‘battles’, all ‘armed clashes’. This category represented the most prevalent incident type in all of Wardak’s districts. Several of the armed clashes in Wardak were attacks by the Taliban on Afghan security forces, including military, police and NDS personnel as well as members of pro-government militias or so-called arbakis (the term arbaki is locally often used to refer to members of the Afghan local police or other pro-government militias).\(^{3570}\)

Examples of such incidents included assaults on security checkpoints/outposts and headquarters in

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\(^{3561}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Alipour’s Men Kidnap, Beat Road Workers in Wardak, 23 June 2020, url

\(^{3562}\) Tolonews, Team to Investigate Maidan Wardak Clashes, 25 June 2020, url

\(^{3563}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 94

\(^{3564}\) Civilian casualty data for 2020 have not yet been published by UNAMA.

\(^{3565}\) SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2020, url, p. 69

\(^{3566}\) SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 July 2020, url, p. 72


\(^{3568}\) EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Wardak; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url

\(^{3569}\) EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak, url

\(^{3570}\) EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Afghanistan - Wardak; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, url
different areas near the provincial capital Maydan Shahr in May 2019, in May 2020 and in June 2020, in Sayyabad district in May 2019, in April 2020 and in May 2020, in Chak district in May 2019, in Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud district in May 2019, in Nerkh district in April 2020 and in May 2020, in Jalrez district in June 2020; as well as attacks/ambushes on security convoys/vehicles in Sayyabad district in September 2019 and in Nerkh and Jalrez districts in March 2020. These incidents resulted in several casualties among the security forces. Apart from the bodyguard of the governor of Bamyan province who was killed in the attack on a security outpost in Maydan Shahr in May 2019, no civilian casualties were reported in the aforementioned incidents.

Operations and attacks by Afghan security forces against AGEs were also registered under armed clashes by ACLED, representing a substantial share of this category of incidents recorded in Wardak. These incidents involved several ANDSF operations in Sayyabad district in March 2019, in June 2019, in August 2018, in October 2019 and in November 2019, reportedly killing and arresting dozens of Taliban militants. In Chak district, dozens of AGEs were killed and detained in Special Forces’ clearing operations in June 2019, in August 2019, in October 2019 and in November 2019. In operations in Nerkh district in July 2019, in August 2019 and in September 2019, several prominent Taliban figures were killed (see above). In several operations in Jaghatu district in May 2019 and in Jalrez district in January 2020, Taliban encampments were raided and militants were killed, wounded and arrested. Some operations resulted in civilian casualties —such as a CIA-backed NDS Special Forces’ night raid on the Tangi Saidan health clinic run by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) in Daymirdad district in the beginning of July 2019, in which several doctors were killed and the head of the hospital went missing. According to UNAMA, the level of

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3572 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url]
3573 Khaama Press, Afghan Forces Repulse Taliban Attack in Wardak Province: 203rd Thunder Corps, 6 May 2020, [url]
3574 Tolonews, [Twitter], posted on: 26 June 2020, [url]
3575 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Claims Inflicting Casualties on Security Forces in Maidan Wardak, 7 May 2019, [url]
3576 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban’s District Police Chief Among 7 killed in Wardak Firefight, 5 April 2020, [url]
3577 Pajhwok Afghan News, 23 Talibans Killed in Maidan Wardak, Logar Clashes, 1 May 2020, [url]
3578 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Claims Inflicting Casualties on Security Forces in Maidan Wardak, 7 May 2019, [url]
3579 Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Pro-Govt Fighters Killed in Maidan Wardak Attack, 12 May 2019, [url]
3580 Khaama Press, 6 Talibans Killed, 4 Wounded in Wardak Operations: Thunder Corps, 20 April 2020, [url]
3581 Pajhwok Afghan News, 23 Talibans Killed in Maidan Wardak, Logar Clashes, 1 May 2020, [url]
3582 Khaama Press, Key Talibans Red Unit Group Member Killed in Wardak Clash, 16 June 2020, [url]
3586 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 24-30, 30 May 2019, [url]
3587 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Wardak; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
3588 Khaama Press, Taliban Commander Involved in High Profile Attacks, Assassinations Has Been Killed in Wardak, 9 March 2019, [url]
3589 Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill 13 Militants, Detain 9 More in Wardak Operations, 30 June 2019, [url]
3590 Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill, Detain 9 Talibans Militants in Wardak Province, 10 August 2019, [url]
3591 Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill, Detain 38 Talibans Militants in Daykundi and Wardak, 31 October 2019, [url]
3592 Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 Talibans Killed in Maidan Wardak Raid, Airstrike, 9 November 2019, [url]
3593 Khaama Press, 9 Militants Killed, Roadside Bombs and House-borne IED Destroyed in Kapisa and Wardak, 29 June 2019, [url]
3594 Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill 13 Militants, Detain 9 More in Wardak Operations, 30 June 2019, [url]
3595 Khaama Press, Special Forces Kill, Detain 9 Talibans Militants in Wardak Province, 10 August 2019, [url]
3596 Pajhwok Afghan News, Clearing operation Ongoing in Maidan Wardak, 24 October 2019, [url]
3597 Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 Talibans Killed in Maidan Wardak Raid, Airstrike, 9 November 2019, [url]
3598 Khaama Press, Talibans Shadow District Chief and His 6 Security Guards killed in Wardak, 7 July 2019, [url]
3599 Pajhwok Afghan News, Special Forces Kill, Detain 13 Talibans Militants During the Operations in Wardak, 6 August 2019, [url]
3600 Pajhwok Afghan News, Key figures Among 22 Rebels Killed in Maidan Wardak, 5 September 2019, [url]
3601 Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces Inflict Casualties on Talibans Militants in Wardak Province, 20 May 2019, [url]
3602 Al Jazeera, Air, Ground Attacks Kill Civilians Hours After Afghans Talk Peace, 9 July 2019, [url]; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: July 5-11, 11 July 2019, [url]; Intercept (The), A CIA-Backed Militia Targeted Clinics in Afghanistan, Killing Medical
civilian harm caused during search operations, particularly those carried out by NDS special forces and other CIA-backed militia groups, is rising.\textsuperscript{3602} Together with Paktya province, Wardak is mentioned as a ‘hot spot’ for this kind of operations.\textsuperscript{3603}

Air/drone strikes represented 15\% of all reported violent incidents in Wardak. Most air/drone strikes were carried out in Saydabad district, followed by Chak and Nerkh districts. The majority of these air/drone strikes were carried out by Afghan military forces, some were attributed to NATO forces.\textsuperscript{3604} While these air/drone strikes mostly inflicted losses among AGEs,\textsuperscript{3605} some also caused civilian casualties - such as a combined US and Afghan forces air strike in Jaghatu district in July 2019, killing several civilians,\textsuperscript{3606} an air strike conducted by American and Afghan forces in Saydabad district in September 2019, causing the death of at least seven civilians,\textsuperscript{3607} and several air strikes in the Sadmarah area of Nerkh district in October 2019, resulting in the killing of at least seven members of one family.\textsuperscript{3608}

AGEs using roadside bombs or IEDs, often targeting the Afghan security forces, represented 12\% of all reported security incidents in Wardak. The majority of IED incidents were registered in Saydabad district, where for example several Afghan soldiers were killed and wounded when their vehicle hit a roadside bomb planted by the Taliban in March 2020,\textsuperscript{3609} followed by Maydan Shahr, Chak and Nerkh districts.\textsuperscript{3610} Some of these incidents resulted in casualties among civilians. This happened in August 2019 in Jaghatu district, when a roadside bomb hit a civilian vehicle, killing a university teacher from Kandahar and four of his family members.\textsuperscript{3611} In October 2019, a car bomb targeting the convoy of Wardak’s governor killed three civilian traffic department employees in a nearby car.\textsuperscript{3612}

ACLED coded 3\% of the violent incidents in Wardak as ‘shelling, artillery and missile attacks’.\textsuperscript{3613} Some of these incidents resulted in civilian casualties - for example in August 2019, when an ANA-fired

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{3602} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2019, 30 July 2019, url, pp. 10-11
  \item \textsuperscript{3603} Rutigli, T., “Murder Is Always'': The Kulargol Night Raid Killings, AAN, 17 August 2019, url
  \item \textsuperscript{3604} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Wardak; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
  \item \textsuperscript{3606} Pajhwok Afghan News, Perpetrators of Civilian Casualties Be Punished: Senate, 16 July 2019, url; International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch Tracking Conflict Worldwide: Global Overview, Afghanistan, July 2019, url
  \item \textsuperscript{3607} Tolonews, Seven Civilians Reportedly Killed in Maidan Wardak Airstrike, 9 September 2019, url; Reuters, Fighting Picks Up in Afghanistan After Talks Collapse, 11 September 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, US Forces Apologize for Wardak Civilian Deaths, 14 September 2019, url
  \item \textsuperscript{3608} Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 of a Family Killed in Maidan Wardak Airstrike, 16 October 2019, url
  \item \textsuperscript{3609} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 2020, 5 March 2020 (updated 26 March 2020), url
  \item \textsuperscript{3610} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Wardak; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
  \item \textsuperscript{3611} Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 of a Family Including University Teacher Killed in Wardak Blast, 13 August 2019, url
  \item \textsuperscript{3612} NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: October 2019, 4 October 2019 (updated 31 October 2019), url; Tolonews, Spokesman: Governor of Wardak Survives Car Bomb, 20 October 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Maidan Wardak Governor Survives Bomb Attack, 20 October 2019, url
  \item \textsuperscript{3613} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Wardak; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), url
\end{itemize}
artillery round hit a wedding celebration in Chak district, and in October 2019, when a rocket fired by the Taliban landed on a civilian home in Nerkh district.

ACLED categorised 5% of all reported violent incidents in Wardak as ‘violence against civilians’. These incidents involved ANDSF (night)raids and operations in Saydabad district in March 2019, killing several civilians including women and children; a Taliban attack on the Hazara neighbourhood of Mirazar in Markaz-e Behsud (or Hesa-i Duwum-e Behsud) district (see above), killing five civilians and wounding a dozen more; Taliban ambushing/attacks and killings of civilians and off-duty security personnel in Jalrez district in June 2019, in Saydabad district in April 2020 and in Chak district in May 2020; a Taliban shooting of a tribal elder and three of his family members in Chak district in June 2020 (however, the Taliban reportedly denied their involvement in the incident); the kidnapping and killing of the head of Afghanistan’s Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) of Ghor province by the Taliban along the highway in Jalrez district in September 2019; and the abduction by the Taliban of dozens of civilians, reportedly professionally related to the Afghan government, from several villages in Chak district in March 2020.

Wardak’s voter turnout as percentage of its registered voters for the presidential elections on 28 September 2019 reached around 27%, AAN related Wardak’s below average voter registration to the ‘high insecurity’ in the province. In the Asia Foundations 2019 Survey of the Afghan People, 51-75% of respondents in Wardak province reported to have experienced fear while voting. In the lead-up to polling day, in August 2019, two rockets landed near an election campaign rally of presidential candidate and Hezb-e Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in Maydan Shahr City, no casualties were reported. According to Taliban reports, the main road in Maydan Shahr was blocked the night before election day. In the whole province, there was reportedly no mobile phone connection on 28 September, caused by an imposed blackout on telecom companies by the Taliban. The majority of the violence in Maydan Shahr on polling day involved indirect fire, especially rockets, rather than targeted attacks. The roads in and around the provincial capital were described as almost entirely deserted. According to an Independent Election Commission (IEC) manager, Wardak’s poor

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3614 Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 Wedding Guest Killed, 6 Injured in Wardak Artillery Strike, 23 August 2019, [url]
3615 Tolonews, Three Wardak Residents Killed as Rocket Hits Their House, 4 October 2019, [url]
3616 EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus; Afghanistan; Wardak; Event types: Battles; Explosions/Remote Violence; Violence against Civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020), [url]
3617 Al Jazeera, Civilians, Including Children, Killed in Afghan Forces’ Operation, 10 March 2019, [url]; NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: March 8-14, 15 March 2019, [url]
3619 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 10-16, 16 May 2019, [url]
3620 NYT, Afghan War Casualty Report: May 31-June 6, 6 June 2019, [url]
3621 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban Kill 3 Off-Duty Soldiers in Wardak, 21 April 2020, [url]
3622 Pajhwok Afghan News, Chak District Police Chief Killed in Taliban Attack, 23 May 2020, [url]
3626 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2020, [url], p. 98
3627 Warden, S., Past as Prologue? What the Parliamentary Election Results Tell Us About the September Presidential Election, AAN, 23 August 2019, [url]
3628 Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People - Afghanistan in 2019, 2 December 2019, [url], p. 62
3629 Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Rockets Land near Hekmatyar’s Election Campaign Rally, 22 August 2019, [url]
security situation caused the low voter turnout in the province. For example in Saydabad district, continuous shelling by the Taliban against the district centre and by government forces against surrounding villages held by the Taliban prevented people from voting.\textsuperscript{3632}

Many of Wardak’s highways are described as ‘not safe for civilians’\textsuperscript{3633} and ‘unprotected by the government’.\textsuperscript{3634} In May and June 2019, the Afghan army started to close various small checkpoints along several highways. The Afghan troops stationed in these small outposts, difficult to protect and reportedly frequently attacked by AGEs, were to be consolidated into larger bases, with each about 40 troops, along the main highways in the province.\textsuperscript{3635} According to an international source Lifos spoke to in January 2020, the Kabul-Kandahar Highway, passing through Wardak, has been insecure for years - with more incidents recorded in 2019 compared to previous years. AGEs, such as the Taliban, have been reportedly active on this highway\textsuperscript{3636}, controlling some parts of the road\textsuperscript{3637} and using roadblocks to target government employees and members of the Afghan security forces.\textsuperscript{3638} In March 2019, the Kabul-Kandahar Highway was blocked by an anti-government demonstration, after several civilians were killed in an air strike in Saydabad district (see above).\textsuperscript{3639} In June 2019, the Taliban reportedly killed three civilian passengers on the road from Maydan Shahr to Jalrez district.\textsuperscript{3640} In October 2019, the same road, also known as Highway Two connecting Afghanistan’s capital to the Hazarajat region\textsuperscript{3641}, was reopened by ANDSF forces, after having been closed since mid-September.\textsuperscript{3642} In July 2019, the road between Chak district and Kabul was blocked by ANDSF forces, impeding civilian movement and trade routes to the capital region.\textsuperscript{3643} In December 2019, AAN reported on an increasing number of Afghans taking flights or longer routes to bypass roads situated in contested or Taliban-controlled areas. An NGO employee, cited by AAN, declared to use the Ghorband Valley route (through Parwan province) to travel from Jalrez to Kabul, instead of the road between Maydan Shahr and Bamyan.\textsuperscript{3644}

Mid-July 2019, reportedly in reaction to an NDS raid on a health clinic (see above), the Taliban forced the closure of 42 clinics from the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan in three different areas under their control in Wardak. After a week, the Taliban agreed to reopen all of the closed clinics.\textsuperscript{3645} In June 2020, UNAMA expressed its concern on the scale of deliberate attacks on healthcare in Afghanistan at a time when the country has been confronted with the Covid-19 pandemic, documenting several Taliban abductions of healthcare workers in Wardak province between 11 March and 23 May 2020.\textsuperscript{3646}
2.34.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 2,865 persons displaced from Wardak province, mainly coming from Jalrez district (1,444 individuals) with a peak (of 1,297 individuals) in August and in the beginning of September 2019, reportedly due to armed clashes between non-state armed groups and ANDSF forces. Due to military operations and conflict, smaller numbers of IDPs came from the districts of Jaghatu (with a peak of 434 individuals in May 2019), Saydabad, Maydan Shah, Daymirdad and Nerkh. In the first half of September 2019, UNOCHA reported on the displacement of around 1,400 people from the area of Deh Afghan in Maydan Shahr district, due to clashes between non-state armed groups and ANDSF forces.

The majority of the displaced people (2,023 individuals) from Wardak found refuge within the province itself, mainly in Maydan Shahr district or in the districts of Saydabad, Jalrez, Nerkh and Daymirdad. Others sought shelter in the neighbouring provinces of Kabul (Kabul district) and Bamyan (Bamyan district). In August 2019, surging insecurity and conflicts between armed opposition groups and Afghan security forces reportedly displaced hundreds of families from several villages in Jalrez and the Maydan Valley of Wardak to neighbouring Bamyan province. As soon as the situation improved, some IDP families left Bamyan and returned to their villages in Jalrez or moved on further towards Kabul.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, reporting 35 persons displaced to Wardak coming from other provinces, constituting a group of five families from Zurmat district in neighbouring Paktya province who found refuge in Wardak’s Maydan Shahr district in October 2019.

IOM data from the first half of 2019 ranked two out of five persons in Wardak found refuge in Bamyan City due to clashes between non-state armed groups and ANDSF forces.

According to IOM displacement data published in August and October 2019, most IDPs and returnees in Wardak province resided in Maydan Shahr district, followed by Saydabad, Nerkh and Hesa-i Awal-e Behsud districts. According to UNHCR, Wardak is one of the four provinces with the highest percentage of returnees who originate there but choose to live somewhere else once they return.

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3647 UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October - 3 November), 3 November 2019, url, p. 2
3649 UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Maidan Wardak Province - Meeting Summary, 19 March 2019, url, p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October - 3 November), 3 November 2019, url, p. 2
3650 UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Maidan Wardak Province - Meeting Summary, 23 October 2019, url, p. 2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Weekly Humanitarian Update (28 October - 3 November), 3 November 2019, url, p. 2
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3657 IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results March - June 2019, 1 July 2019, url, p. 1
3658 IOM, Afghanistan - Wardak Baseline Mobility Assessment Summary Results Round 7 (October - December 2018), 1 August 2019, url, pp. 1, 2, 6, 11; IOM, DTM Afghanistan Baseline Mobility Assessment I District Level I Total Inflow (Returnees+IDPs) I June 2019 I Province: Wardak, 9 October 2019, url
2.35 Zabul

2.35.1 General description of the province

Zabul province is located in the southern part of Afghanistan and shares an international border with Pakistan. Among the Afghan provinces, Zabul borders Kandahar, Uruzgan, Ghazni and Paktika. The provincial capital is Qalat (formerly known as Qalat-i Ghilzai)3661; Zabul is divided into the following administrative units: the provincial capital Qalat, Tarnak Wa Jaldak (also known as Shahr Safa), Shinkai (also Seori, Seyuri), Mizan, Arghandab, Shah Joi, Daichopan, Atghar, Naw Bahar, Shemel Zayi, Kakar (also known as Khak-e Afghan).3662 According to NSIA, the population of Zabul is estimated at 384 349 for 2020/21. Urban population, living in provincial capital Qalat, constitutes about 3.5% of all inhabitants.3663 It is composed mainly of Pashtuns belonging to mainly Hotak and Tokhi tribes3664 and Baloch.3665 The province is also known by the name ‘Zabalistan’ and is considered the birthplace of the Pashtun ethnic group.3666

The province is one of the poorest provinces in the country with many families migrating to Pakistani Balochistan to seek greater economic opportunities. Migrant communities in Pakistan are under strong influence of Islamic radicals and religious parties. Anti-government sentiments are very strong among

3660 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Zabul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
3661 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Zabul Provincial Overview, n.d., url
3663 Afghanistan, NSIA, Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021, url, p 36
3664 Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul’s capital under threat, 05 November 2019, url
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Afghan youth originating from Zabul but living in Pakistani diaspora. It has a very negative impact on security situation in the province.3667

The Kabul-Kandahar Highway, also known by the name of Highway One3668, runs through the districts of Tarnak wa Jaldak, Qalat and Shahjoy.3669 The road has a significant strategic relevance, as it connects the capital city with Kandahar. It passes through remote areas of the province, many of which are not under government control. It is a key supply route for the south.3670 Conflict-related security incidents such as illegal armed groups attacking police checkpoints and detonations of improvised explosive devices are reported to have taken place along some highway sections in Zabul province.3671 Taliban also set up their own roadblocks and check passing cars.3672

Zabul also has a 65-kilometre long, porous border with Pakistan. There are three unpaved roads leading to the border-crossing: in the Zanzir area, near Qala-ye Rashid and further north, from where a road leads to the Pakistani city of Zhob. Taliban militants cross the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan using these routes and the Taliban collect taxes on goods there. Also, the Taliban collect taxes from the illegal trade in lumber from Paktika province’s forests that are illegally exported to Pakistan through Zabul’s border. However, the central government did not manage to establish any custom facility although such plans had existed.3673

According to the UNODC data obtained by AAN, poppy cultivation in Zabul province decreased by 38% in 2019, compared to 2018.3674 The opium trade represents one of the main sources of income for the insurgency.3675

The province tried to impose lockdown in the spring of 2020 when 20 cases of Covid-19 were registered but it was widely ignored by the population for economic reasons.3676

2.35.2 Conflict background and actors in Zabul

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Ghazni province is under the responsibility of the 203rd ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces.3677 The government’s control is however limited to the fortress in Qalat3678 and to some military outposts in the seven southern districts.3679 Police chiefs and district governors are often linked to the MPs or senators from the region and many of them have served on these posts for many years. In July 2019 President Ghani ordered the transfer or termination of duties some of them. It did not improve the

3667 Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul’s capital under threat, AAN, 05 November 2019, url
3668 Telegraph (The), Kabul-Kandahar highway is a symbol of what’s gone wrong in Afghanistan, 9 September 2012, url
3669 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Zabul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
3670 Telegraph (The), Kabul-Kandahar highway is a symbol of what’s gone wrong in Afghanistan, 9 September 2012, url;
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3671 Tolonews, Seven Police Killed In Kabul-Kandahar Highway Attack, 15 August 2018, url; Khaama Press, Explosion on Kandahar-Zabul highway leaves 3 civilians dead, 7 July 2018, url
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3674 Bjelica J., New World Drug Report: Opium production in Afghanistan remained the same in 2019, AAN, 25 June 2020, url
3675 RFE/RL, The Forgotten Afghan Province That Is A Key Taliban Stronghold, 16 December 2018, url
3676 The Guardian, Civil war, poverty and now the virus: Afghanistan stands on the brink, 2 May 2020, url
3677 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, 1 June 2020, url, p. 13
3678 RFE/RL, The Forgotten Afghan Province That Is A Key Taliban Stronghold, 16 December 2018, url
3679 Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul’s capital under threat, 05 November 2019, url
security situation in the area because some of the dismissed influential figures started to cooperate with Taliban and the number of attacks on soldiers and government employees increased.  

In October 2019, the government started the military operation called Gen. Abdul Razeq (former Kandahar Police chef killed by the Taliban in 2018), aimed at clearing the Kabul-Kandahar Highway around Zabul.

Zabul province has a historical significance for the Taliban, who started their battle over the control of the country in the 1990s from there. Mullah Mohammad Omar, the founder of the Taliban movement, was from the Hotak tribe and there are many Zabulis in the Taliban’s higher ranks including Mullah Amir Khan Haqqani. Taliban recruitment is also very popular among Zabulis. Moreover, the ‘feeling of being forgotten by the government’ is reportedly one of the reasons for the considerable Taliban presence in the area.

The Taliban contest or control most of Zabul, where government forces are under constant attack. In the end of 2019, Taliban controlled most northern districts. The government was only militarily present in seven districts on the south of the province, with no possibility to deliver any civil services to population. Apart from Qalat, only Shahr-e Safa district was mainly under governmental control. In July 2019 Taliban attacked military outposts in Shah JoI district where Highway One passes through.

In July 2019, at least in three administrative units: Naw Bahar, Arghandab and Kakar, Afghan government was operating outside the premises of the district’s headquarters, or the administration has been relocated to military bases. According to AAN, also Mizana district centre was relocated near Qalat City later in the summer.

Besides local Taliban insurgents, ISKP is purportedly present in several districts of the province, however probably it is not military active. The United Nations also reported that Zabul is one of three provinces ‘with the most significant numbers’ of al Qaeda operatives present.

2.35.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.35.3.1 General

In 2019, UNAMA documented 496 civilian casualties (142 deaths and 354 injured) in Zabul province. This represents an increase of 69 % compared to 2018. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, suicide IEDs and air strikes. Resolute Support recorded between 0 and 25 civilian
casualties in Zabul in the first quarter of 2020, reporting an increase in the number of civilian casualties in the second quarter of the year, with 26-50 casualties recorded (from 1 April to 30 June 2020).\textsuperscript{3693} In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED reported a total of 722 incidents related to security in Zabul province, of which 479 were coded as battles, 221 as remote violence, 22 as violence against civilians. Since the first months of 2020, the number of incidents and fatalities significantly dropped.\textsuperscript{3694}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure37.png}
\caption{Zabul - Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, based on ACLED data.\textsuperscript{3695}}
\end{figure}

During the reporting period, Taliban fighters were able to target civilians in Qalat City. Taliban or unidentified fighters killed a technician at the national TV in June 2019, four members of one family while raiding their home in August 2019. On 28 May 2020, a human rights defender was killed, reportedly by the Taliban.\textsuperscript{3696}

During summer 2019, the Taliban warned people that they should evacuate because they were planning an attack on Qalat. On 19 September 2019, the Taliban blew up the provincial hospital in Qalat, killing at least 15 and wounding 66 others, most of them patients, one doctor, six cooks and cleaner and two of the hospital’s police guards. The Taliban claimed that they had targeted an office of the National Directorate for Security (NDS), which is situated right opposite the hospital.\textsuperscript{3697} The main hospital in the province was completely destroyed and abandoned. The only part still standing is a paediatric ward which has been recently adapted as an isolation centre for patients with COVID-19.\textsuperscript{3698}

The police and military checkpoints along Highway One continued to be the main target of Taliban attacks in the reporting periods, mainly in Shah Joi district. Some of them were captured by the Taliban and recaptured by government later. Taliban insurgents have been carrying out activities related to terrorism such as shootings, suicide attacks and planting IED bombs resulting in casualties among civilians, the Afghan security forces and the insurgents themselves.\textsuperscript{3699} On 19 May 2020, IED planted in Mizan district killed four civilians and wounded another eight, including children.\textsuperscript{3700}

\textsuperscript{3693} SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 April 2020, url, p. 69; SIGAR, Quarterly Report To The United States Congress, 30 July 2020, url, p. 72
\textsuperscript{3694} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus – Afghanistan; Zabul; Event types: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, url)
\textsuperscript{3695} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus - Afghanistan; Zabul; Event types: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, url)
\textsuperscript{3696} EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, (Filters applied: Central Asia & the Caucasus – Afghanistan; Zabul; Event types: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians; 1 March 2019 - 30 June 2020, url)
\textsuperscript{3697} Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul’s capital under threat, AAN, 05 November 2019, url
\textsuperscript{3698} Guardian (The), Civil war, poverty and now the virus: Afghanistan stands on the brink, 2 May 2020, url
\textsuperscript{3699} Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul’s capital under threat, 5 November 2019, url; Salaam Times, Taliban lose over 100 fighters in joint security operations in Zabul, 26 November 2019, url
\textsuperscript{3700} Khaama News, Children, women among 12 killed, wounded in Taliban IED attack in Zabul 19 May 2020, url
Furthermore, airstrikes by Afghan and US forces continued to take place in 2019 and 2020. On 4 August 2019, a mortar shell hit a house in Shah Joi district, killing a mother and three children. According to government sources, the mortar was fired by the Taliban. On 13 November 2019, a mortar fired by ANA killed a woman and wounded a child, when the army tried to target AGEs hidden in civilian houses in Shinkay/Seori district. The Afghan army tried to blame the Taliban for the casualties. Most victims of the conflict, however, are security personnel and fighters. According to Afghan authorities, from 8 September to 11 November 2019, over 100 Taliban fighters were killed, and 50 others wounded during the operation called Gen. Abdul Razeq. Afghan security forces allegedly were able to evict Taliban fighters from more than 40 villages in Shah Joi, Shinkay and Naw Bahar districts in Zabul.

There was also at least one large-scale insider attack reported in Zabul province, when on 20 March 2020 a group of Taliban-linked policemen opened fire on sleeping troops at a joint police and army headquarters near Qalat, killing at least 37 army and police personnel.

2.35.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 March 2019 – 30 June 2020, reporting 4,417 persons displaced within Zabul province. They were displaced from different districts of the province such as Arghandab, Daichopan, Kakar, Qalat, Shah Joi and Tarnak Wa Jaldak. Most of them moved to provincial capital Qalat. The biggest group of 1,270 persons left their houses in Arghandab in November 2019, but the group stayed within the district.

3701 Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul’s capital under threat, 5 November 2019, url
3702 Salaam Times, Taliban lose over 100 fighters in joint security operations in Zabul, 26 November 2019, url
3703 Sabawoon A., Government Rule Confined to District and Provincial Centres: Zabul’s capital under threat, 5 November 2019, url
3704 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2019, 22 February 2020, url, p. 51
3705 Salaam Times, Taliban lose over 100 fighters in joint security operations in Zabul, 26 November 2019, url
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Annex 2: Terms of Reference

The goal of this report is to provide security-related information relevant for international protection status determination.

An important goal of this report is to provide details on a regional, provincial or even district level. The reporting period for incidents and events illustrating the general trends of the conflict is 1 January 2018 until 28 February 2019.

The content of the report should contain information on the following topics:

- **General description of the security situation**
  - Conflict background
    - Overview of recent conflicts in Afghanistan
    - Political landscape
    - Peace talks
    - International context
  - Actors in the conflict
    - Pro-government forces
      - Tasks/roles/numbers
      - Components
      - Civilian casualties’ attribution
    - Anti-government elements
      - Level of organisation
      - Civilian casualties’ attribution
  - Recent security trends and armed confrontations
    - Trends, nature of violence and methods primarily used
  - Impact of the violence on the civilian population
    - Civilian casualties
    - State ability to secure law and order
    - Socio-economic situation
    - Refugees, IDPs, returnees
    - Children
  - Geographical overview
    - Broad regional differences
    - Insurgent control
    - Conflict severity
  - Mobility
    - security aspects of travelling (roads, flights)

- **Regional description: per province**
  - General description (districts, population, geography, economy)
  - Conflict background (description on presence and general activity of actors, Taliban control/presence)
  - Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population
    - Civilian casualties
- Conflict severity
- Incident numbers
- Description of representative incidents
- Displacement
Annex 3: Addenda and Corrigenda

Please note that on 9 October 2020, this report was re-published in order to correct some factual errors and to add some relevant information which was missing in the original version. The following corrections and additions were made:

Page 76:
Addition: While according to information contained in a LWJ map, Ghorma, Muqur and Bala Murghab districts of Badghis province were under the Taliban control [...]
Original: While according to information contained in a LWJ map, Muqur and Bala Murghab districts of Badghis province were under the Taliban control [...]

Page 117:
Addition: According to information by LWJ collected and presented in a map, Gulistan, Bala Buluk, Saheb Koh, Anar Dara and Khak-e Safed districts of Farah province were under Taliban control, Qala-i Kah, Posht-e Rod, Bakwa, Pur Chaman districts as well as Farah City were contested, while Lash-e Juwayn district was under government control.
Original: According to information by LWJ collected and presented in a map, Gulistan, Bala Buluk, Saheb Koh, Anar Dara and Khak-e Safed districts of Farah province were under Taliban control, and Qala-i Kah, Posht-e Rod, Bakwa districts and as well as Farah City were contested.

Page 166:
Correction: In the second quarter of 2020, Resolute Support indicated Kabul as one out of three provinces, together with Nangarhar and Ghazni, that experienced the highest number of civilian casualties countrywide, with an average of 204 civilian casualties each, among the three provinces.
Original: In the second quarter of 2020, Resolute Support recorded an average of 204 civilian casualties in Kabul province, indicating Kabul as one out of three provinces (together with Nangarhar and Ghazni) that experienced the highest number of civilian casualties countrywide.

Page 232:
Correction: As for Resolute Support, it recorded between 101 and 125 civilian casualties in Nangarhar in the first quarter of 2020. In the second quarter of 2020, RS indicated Nangarhar as the province that experienced the highest number of civilian casualties countrywide, with 259 civilian casualties recorded. This represents a 236 % increase compared to the previous quarter.
Original: As for Resolute Support, it recorded between 101 and over 251 civilian casualties in Nangarhar in the first half of 2020, reporting an increase during the second quarter compared to the first.

Page 240:
Correction: In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED reported a total 142 incidents related to security in Nimroz province, of which 109 were coded as battles, 30 as remote violence, 3 as violence against civilians.
Original: In the period from 1 March 2019 to 30 June 2020, ACLED reported a total 142 incidents related to security in Nimroz province, of which 109 were coded as battles, 11 as remote violence, 2 as violence against civilians.

Page 318:
Correction: In 2019, UNAMA documented 496 civilian casualties (142 deaths and 354 injured) in Zabul province. This represents an increase of 69 % compared to 2018.
Original: In 2019, UNAMA documented 496 civilian casualties (142 deaths and 354 injured) in Zabul province. This represents an increase of 3 % compared to 2018.