Afghanistan
Security situation

Country of Origin Information Report

June 2019
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A 83rd Expeditionary Rescue Squadron Airman observes a U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook at an undisclosed location in Afghanistan. The 83rd ERQS is the Air Force Central Command’s first dedicated joint personnel recovery team, utilizing Air Force Guardian Angel teams and Army CH-47 Chinook crews.
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)

The following national asylum and migration departments reviewed this report:

Norway, Landinfo, Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre
Slovakia, Migration Office, Department of Documentation and Foreign Cooperation

The following external organisations reviewed parts of this report:

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

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 does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of EASO.
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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (2012).\(^1\) 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 claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

‘Refugee’, ‘risk’ and similar terminology are used as a generic terminology and not as legally defined in the EU Asylum Acquis and the Geneva Convention.

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 30 May 2019. 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.

\(^1\) The EASO methodology is largely based on the Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information (COI), 2008, and can be downloaded from the EASO website: url
Glossary and Abbreviations

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>AAN</td>
<td>Afghanistan Analyst Network</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>Afghan Citizen Card</td>
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<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>
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<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</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
and are protected against direct attacks unless and for such time as they directly participate in hostilities.\textsuperscript{6}

CTC
US Combating Terrorism Center

DFR
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.\textsuperscript{7}

Eid ul-Fitr
‘Festival of breaking the fast’ that marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan

ETIM
East Turkestan Islamic Movement

FATA
Federally Administered Tribal Areas

GIRoA
Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Ground engagements
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.\textsuperscript{8}

HIG
Hezb-e Islami/Gulbuddin Hekmatyar

IEC
Independent Election Commission

IED
Improvised Explosive Device. A bomb constructed and deployed in ways other than in conventional military action. IEDs can broadly be divided into four categories:

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

\textsuperscript{6} UNAMA Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 62

\textsuperscript{7} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, url, p. 43

\textsuperscript{8} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 63
detonation of a BB-IED by the driver or a passenger while inside the vehicle.9

IEHCA  Islamic Emirate High Council of Afghanistan
IMF  International Military Forces
IMU  Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IS, ISKP  Islamic State, also called ISIS, ISIL or Daesh. Islamic State in Afghanistan is referred to as Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP).
Khost Protection Force  A ‘campaign force’ that was established after 2001 under international (CIA/US special forces) control. There are longstanding allegations against the Khost Protection Force of extrajudicial killings, torture, beating and unlawful detentions.10
KIA  Killed in Action11
LeJ  Lashkar-e-Jhangvi
LeT  Lashkar-e-Tayyiba
Loya Paktia  ‘Greater Paktya’, an area encompassing the provinces of Paktya, Paktika and Khost
MoD  Ministry of Defense
MoI  Ministry of Interior
NGO  Non-Governmental Organisation
NUG  National Unity Government
ODI  Overseas Development Institute
OFS  Operation Freedom’s Sentinel
PGF  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 Afghanistan12
PRT  Provincial Reconstruction Team
Red Unit/Red Brigade  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
RFE/RL  Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
RS  Resolute Support
SIGAR  Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
TAAC  Train, Advise, and Assist Command

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
10 Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, 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
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<td>TTP</td>
<td>Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNAMA</td>
<td>United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>USDOD</td>
<td>United States Department of Defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USDoS</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>
<tr>
<td>USIP</td>
<td>United States Institute of Peace</td>
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Introduction

This report was co-drafted by EASO and Country of Origin Information (COI) 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 international protection status determination (PSD; refugee status and subsidiary protection). 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 in January 2016, November 2016, December 2017 and May 2018. For the assessment of the need for international protection, especially taking into account article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive (QD), the following are key elements:

- a real risk of serious harm;
- an internal or international armed conflict;
- indiscriminate violence;
- the term ‘civilian’; and
- a serious and individual threat to life or person.

Based on various sources consulted by EASO, 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.

Members of the EASO COI Specialist Network on Afghanistan and UNHCR gave input on the terms of reference that were finalised by the co-drafters in September 2014 taking all the inputs into account. In March 2015, EASO held a practical cooperation meeting on Afghanistan in Brussels, in which the participating EU+ countries gave feedback on the first EASO COI Report - Afghanistan Security Situation of January 2015.

The terms of reference were further consulted with EU+ countries and UNHCR during the process for developing and updating country guidance notes on Afghanistan (2016-2019), for which this report is produced.

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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.
The reference period for describing events was from January 2018 until February 2019. A number of specialised paper-based and electronic sources were consulted.

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. This quality process led to the inclusion of some additional information, in response to feedback received during the respective reviews, until 30 May 2019. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report.

Sources

As a co-drafter of the report, the Austrian Country of Origin Information Department (Bundesamt für Fremdenwesen und Asyl [BFA] Staatendokumentation) provided a map of airports with scheduled passenger service as of 25 March 2019 and another map of security incidents from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019 along with data on incidents using the following sources:

Administrative units (districts and provinces of Afghanistan):


International borders (neighbouring states):


Roads, airports, railway lines, cities:


Security-related incidents:


Relying on internet-based global news media reports, Global Incident Map collects security-related incidents connected to terrorism worldwide and provides a geo-referenced display of such incidents, broken down by types, on an online map, accessible upon payment. Any such incident listed always comes with a citation. The original classification by incident type was retained, except for the two categories ‘Other suspicious activity’ and ‘General terrorism news’, which was clustered into the broader category ‘other, undefined’, as they did not fit into any of the more specific categories.

Incidents listed in this database were qualified as security-relevant. Double entries were removed manually. The information provided includes the coordinates (latitude, longitude) of the village or the nearest town or city, not the actual location of the incident.
Further sources were used for cross-checking:


As a rule, set by Global Incident Map, security-related incidents do not include criminal incidents, but incidents which it ascribes to or associates with insurgents, including bomb attacks (successful or attempted), targeted assassinations or assassination attempts, abductions, arson attacks, attacks with firearms and gunfights. Activities performed by state actors are subsumed under the category ‘arrests, captures, kills’.

Furthermore, this report relies extensively on data 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. According to analysts, this stringent verification standard also means ‘there may be many more casualties than UNAMA is able to confirm’.

**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 January 2018 until 28 February 2019. Finally, conflict-induced displacements are described in a separate section.

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. Nor is it clear whether the district of Gormach belongs to Badghis or Faryab province.

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17 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](http://www.unama.org), pp. i-ii

18 Bjelica, J. and Ruttig, T., UNAMA Mid-Year Report 2017: Number of civilian casualties still at “record level”, 18 July 2017, [url](http://www.unama.org)


20 Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, 22 February 2017, [url](http://www.landinfo.no)
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

‘[t]here 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’.\(^{21}\)

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.\(^{22}\)

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\(^{21}\) Brittan, R., Managing Director Alcis, e-mail, 16 August 2017.

\(^{22}\) All their relevant maps can be found at: [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/infographics](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/infographics)
Map

Map 1: Afghanistan - administrative divisions © UNOCHA
1. General description of the security situation in Afghanistan

1.1 Conflict background

1.1.1 Overview of recent conflicts in Afghanistan

The so-called Saur Revolution on 27 April 1978 brought the Afghan communists to power.\(^{23}\) 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.\(^{24}\)

After this collapse, a period generally referred to as ‘Civil War’ saw different mujahideen groups who had formed new alliances and fronts fighting for control of Afghanistan.\(^{25}\) War between the competing mujahideen factions and militias was characterised by severe human rights breaches.\(^{26}\) 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.\(^{27}\) 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.\(^{28}\) The US gave its support to the mujahideen front opposing the Taliban, at that time known as Northern Alliance or Northern coalition.\(^{29}\)

On 22 December 2001, based on the Bonn Agreement, an Afghan interim government was formed, led by Hamid Karzai,\(^{30}\) a Pashtun, who also won the first presidential elections in October 2004.\(^{31}\) The Taliban had reorganised and increased their presence substantially by 2006 in Wardak, Logar, Kabul and Uruzgan provinces and began expanding along the western edge of Kabul province.\(^{32}\) Other anti-government elements (AGEs) operating in Afghanistan included Hezb-e Islami/Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (HIG), the Haqqani network\(^{33}\) 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).\(^{34}\) This

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\(^{23}\) Clark, K., An April Day that Changed Afghanistan 2: Afghans remember the ‘Saur Revolution’, AAN, 27 April 2018, [url]


\(^{28}\) CFR, The Taliban in Afghanistan, 4 July 2014, [url]

\(^{29}\) International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 17 June 2011, [url], p. 5


\(^{31}\) Guardian (The), The Afghan interim government: who’s who, 6 December 2001, [url]; New York Times (The), Election of Karzai is Declared Official, 4 November 2004, [url]

\(^{32}\) International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 17 June 2011, [url], p. 7

\(^{33}\) International Crisis Group, The Insurgency in Afghanistan’s Heartland, 17 June 2011, [url], pp. 14-15

\(^{34}\) 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 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.36

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.37

From 2010 onwards, the Taliban-led insurgency spread into all regions of Afghanistan.38 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”)’.39

After the 2014 international military withdrawal, the Taliban have fastly expanded their presence countrywide.40 The report of the UN Secretary General in August 2017 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.41

According to UNAMA, in 2018 fighting intensified particularly in the east, southeast 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’.42 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.43

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.44 According to the Kabul-based Afghanistan Analyst Network (AAN) in January 2017, ‘its complex power-sharing arrangements [have] paralysed governance in Afghanistan’.45

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 Jamiaat-e Islami party.46 The crisis also resulted in the consolidation of power within the NUG47 and

35 See Glossary.
38 UN Secretary-General, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, url, p. 2.
39 NATO, Inteqal: Transition to Afghan lead, updated on: 7 January 2015, url
40 International Crisis Group, Afghanistan: Growing Challenges, 30 April 2017, url
41 UN Secretary-General, Special report on the strategic review of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 10 August 2017, url, p. 3.
42 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 8
44 Foreign Policy, NUG One Year On: Struggling to Govern, 29 September 2015, url
45 AAN, What to Watch? Key issues to follow in Afghanistan in 2017, 27 January 2017, url
46 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, url, p. 2
47 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, url, p. 2
in the first eight months of 2017, the government made progress on high-level appointments, which had previously been a source of tension.\textsuperscript{48}

The Independent Election Commission (IEC) set a date for the next parliamentary and district council elections in July 2018. In September 2017, the UN Secretary General called this timeline ‘ambitious’ but ‘achievable’.\textsuperscript{49} However, as a result of security challenges and voter registration reforms the long-delayed parliamentary elections were rescheduled again to October 2018.\textsuperscript{50} Parliamentary elections were held in 32 provinces on 20-21 October 2018.\textsuperscript{51} 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.\textsuperscript{52} Voting in Ghazni was postponed indefinitely due to security issues and disagreements around constituencies and will be held at the same time as the presidential election.\textsuperscript{53}

Although voter turnout in Kabul and other urban centres was reportedly high, technical and organisational problems occurred at some of the 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.\textsuperscript{54}

From the beginning of the voter registration period until the day before the elections UNAMA verified 152 election-related security incidents that resulted in 496 civilian casualties (156 deaths, 340 injured). Similar to the trends observed during the presidential election of 2014, in the 2018 election ‘UNAMA verified reports of the Taliban warning citizens not to register to vote in the elections, fining citizens and/or confiscating the national identity cards (tazkiras) of those who did register and threatening to punish election-related staff if they continued their work, including with death’.\textsuperscript{55}

In December 2018 the IEC announced a three-month delay for the presidential election which was originally scheduled for 20 April 2019. Provincial and district council elections were planned for 20 July 2019, along with the previously postponed parliamentary vote in Ghazni province. Reasons for the postponement included winter weather conditions across much of the country in April and also the expense of holding four elections separately.\textsuperscript{56} In March 2019 the elections have been postponed again, this time to 28 September 2019 in an attempt to ‘to iron out problems with the voting process’.\textsuperscript{57} IEC has published the preliminary list of presidential candidates that includes incumbent Ashraf Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, former national security adviser, Muhammad Hanif Atmar and also Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.\textsuperscript{58} Interior Minister Amrullah Saleh, once a devoted critic of the president stepped down from his position to join Ghani’s team as a candidate for the post of vice president.\textsuperscript{59} Appointing Saleh was an effort from the ethnic Pashtun Ghani to neutralize a political opponent and to get the support of the Tajiks, among whom Saleh has a strong backing.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{48} 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
\textsuperscript{49} UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, url, p. 13
\textsuperscript{50} Al Jazeera, Afghanistan’s elections: All you need to know, 19 October 2018, url
\textsuperscript{51} Tolo News, Ghazni Elections Could Be Held With Presidential Elections, 27 October 2018, url
\textsuperscript{52} CNN, Kandahar goes to the polls in Afghan parliamentary vote delayed by violence, 27 October 2018, url
\textsuperscript{53} Tolo News, Ghazni Elections Could Be Held With Presidential Elections, 27 October 2018, url
\textsuperscript{54} Diplomat (The), Afghan Parliamentary Elections Marred by Technical Troubles and Insecurity, 21 October 2018, url
\textsuperscript{55} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report: 2018 Elections Violence, November 2018, url, p. 3
\textsuperscript{56} France24, Afghan presidential election delayed until July 20, 30 December 2018, url
\textsuperscript{57} Reuters, Afghanistan presidential election postponed to September, 20 March 2019, url
\textsuperscript{58} Adili, A.Y., Afghanistan’s 2019 elections (2): Who is running to become the next president?, AAN, 11 February 2019, url
\textsuperscript{59} New York Times (The), Afghan Presidential Race Takes Shape as Ghani’s Challengers Emerge, 18 January 2019, url
\textsuperscript{60} Reuters, Afghanistan’s Ghani launches bid for second presidential term, 20 January 2019, url
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.\(^{61}\) 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.\(^{62}\) 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.\(^{63}\)

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.\(^{64}\) In 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’.\(^{65}\)

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’.\(^{66}\) However, according to a September 2017 report of the UN Secretary-General ‘[n]o discernible progress has been made in fostering negotiations between the Government and the Taliban’.\(^{67}\)

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.\(^{68}\)

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.\(^{69}\) However, the Taliban rejected the President’s idea of extending the ceasefire and continued to refuse official negotiations with the Afghan government.\(^{70}\)

International diplomatic efforts intensified towards peace with the appointment of Zalmay Khalilzad as the US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation in September 2018\(^{71}\) and with Russia hosting a meeting in November 2018 on the peace process that was attended by 11 countries and the Taliban as well.\(^{72}\)

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

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\(^{61}\) Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017, url, p. 3

\(^{62}\) UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 27 February 2015, url, p. 3

\(^{63}\) Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017, url, p. 4

\(^{64}\) Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017, url, p. 3

\(^{65}\) Osman, B., Peace With Hekmatyar: What does it mean for battlefield and politics?, AAN, 29 September 2016, url

\(^{66}\) DW, Ashraf Ghani offers Taliban ‘last chance’ for peace, 6 June 2017, url

\(^{67}\) UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 September 2017, url, p. 4

\(^{68}\) Ruttig, T. and Bjelica, J., Who shall cease the fire first? Afghanistan’s peace offer to the Taleban, AAN, 1 March 2018, url

\(^{69}\) Clark, K., The Eid Ceasefire: Allowing Afghans to imagine their country at peace, AAN, 19 June 2018, url

\(^{70}\) Ruttig, T., Getting to the Steering Wheel: President Ghani’s new set of peace proposals, AAN, 4 December 2018, url

\(^{71}\) USDOS, Zalmay Khalilzad - Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, n.d., url

\(^{72}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 9
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 AAN co-director and senior analyst Thomas Ruttig, 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. Although his presence could improve the chances of making progress, it is not clear how a deal could be reached given the absence of discussion between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

A consultative Loya Jirga 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 gathering of Afghan politicians and tribal, ethnic and religious leaders was supposed to discuss negotiations with the Taliban along with the government’s ‘values and red lines’, however it was postponed.

1.1.4 International context

In 2017, the US decided to slow down its troop withdrawal and, in August, 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 are part of the Resolute Support Mission, a 17 000-strong international NATO force that is training and advising the Afghan military. The timing and extent of the potential withdrawal of US troops remained uncertain as of February 2019, although US acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan stated that any potential withdrawal from Afghanistan would be ‘coordinated’ with other NATO members.

In 2016-2017 Afghanistan’s relations with Pakistan were tense and remained tenuous in 2018. Both countries have been blaming each other for sheltering terrorists and escalating border tensions resulted in Pakistan building a fence on the border to prevent the movement of militants. 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.

Following Imran Khan’s inauguration as Prime Minister of Pakistan in August 2018, the two countries continued efforts to improve their relations. As part of a ‘confidence-building measure’ and showing

73 New York Times (The), In Moscow, Afghan Peace Talks Without the Afghan Government, 4 February 2019, url
74 Ruttig, T., “Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”: First steps in Afghan peace negotiations, AAN, 4 February 2019, url
75 New York Times (The), U.S. and Taliban Begin Highest-Level Talks Yet on Ending Afghan War, 25 February 2019, url
76 BBC News, Afghan peace talks: Taliban co-founder meets top White House envoy, 25 February 2019, url
77 RFE/RL, Afghan Loya Jirga Aimed At Discussing Peace Talks Delayed, 3 March 2019, url
78 New York Times (The), U.S. and Taliban Begin Highest-Level Talks Yet on Ending Afghan War, 25 February 2019, url
79 New York Times (The), U.S. Says It Has 11,000 Troops in Afghanistan, More Than Formerly Disclosed, 30 August 2017, url
80 RFE/RL, What Would A U.S. Troop Reduction In Afghanistan Mean?, 21 December 2018, url
81 CNN, US military ordered to begin planning to withdraw about half the troops in Afghanistan, 21 December 2018, url
82 NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, February 2019, url, p. 2
83 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 3 March 2017, url, p. 4
84 USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, url, p. 23
85 Daily Pakistan, Pakistan desires peace, stability in Afghanistan: Khawaja Asif, 2 September 2017, url
86 Dawn, Pakistan holds ‘keys to war’, says Afghan president, 31 January 2019, url
87 USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, url, p. 24
88 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, url, p. 7
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.\(^{89}\) 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’.\(^{90}\)

In 2017, there were several accounts of Russia and Iran actively supporting the Taliban.\(^{91}\) According to USDOD, Iran is trying to grow ties with the Afghan government through trade and economic investments while providing support to the Taliban without alienating Kabul.\(^{92}\) Tehran viewed the Taliban as a useful tool to resist US influence on its border. Providing military equipment to them puts enough pressure on the United States without the risk of military retaliation.\(^{93}\)

Although Russia denied organising talks between Taliban representatives and an Afghan delegation 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’.\(^{94}\)

**1.2 Actors in the conflict**

**1.2.1 Pro-government forces**

The Pro-Government Forces (PGF) include the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) other forces and groups acting in military or paramilitary counter-insurgency operations directly or indirectly under the control of the Government of Afghanistan and also include International Military Forces (IMF) and other foreign intelligence and security forces.\(^{95}\)

In 2018, UNAMA attributed 24% of civilian casualties to Pro-Government Forces documenting 2 612 civilian casualties (1 185 deaths and 1 427 injured) that PGF were responsible for. Compared to 2017, this shows a 24% increase in civilian casualties attributed to PGF that was mainly driven by a considerable increase in civilian casualties from aerial operations by IMF and from search operations by ANSF and pro-Government armed groups.\(^{96}\)

**Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)**

The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) or Afghan National Defense And Security Forces (ANDSF) is an a ‘umbrella’ term that includes the Afghan Border Force, Afghan Local Police, Afghan National Army, Afghan Air Force, Afghan National Police, Afghan National Civil Order Force, Afghan Special Forces, Afghan Territorial Army, and the National Directorate of Security.\(^{97}\)

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90 Dawn, Pakistan holds ‘keys to war’, says Afghan president, 31 January 2019, [url]
91 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, 5 December 2016 [url]; RFE/RL, Afghan Governor Accuses Iran Of Supporting Taliban, 31 July 2017 [url]; Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s organization and structure, 23 August 2017 [url], p. 9. Some observers are more sceptical about Russia’s direct involvement. See: Atlantic (The), Is Russia Really Arming the Taliban?, 25 August 2017, [url]
92 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url], p. 27
93 USIP, Iran and Afghanistan’s Long, Complicated History, 14 June 2018, [url]
94 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]
95 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url], pp. 59, 65
96 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url], pp. 4-5
According to USDOD the ANDSF’s total authorised force level remained 352,000 personnel as of December 2018. This includes 227,374 ANA and 124,626 ANP personnel, but excludes 30,000 Afghan Local Police (ALP), who are under the command of the Ministry of Interior (MoI). However, according to the US military’s Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), the actual personnel strength of the ANDSF as of 31 October 2018 was 308,693 personnel which is considered the lowest since the Resolute Support (RS) mission started in January 2015.

Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Washington’s top priority was to build up new security forces but low morale, corruption and desertion are plaguing this process. USDOD noted that attrition remained a problem for both the ANA and the ANP. Reasons for attrition included fatalities, soldiers going AWOL or declining to re-enlist. In January 2019, President Ghani stated that more than 45,000 members of the Afghan security forces have been killed since he took office in 2014. According to SIGAR, ‘green-on-green’ insider attacks (ANDSF personnel being attacked from within their own ranks, sometimes by an insurgent infiltrator) remain a significant problem for the ANDSF.

In December 2018, USDOD attributed the greatest portion of ANA and ANP attrition rates to the number of personnel ‘dropped from the rolls’ (DFR) but also noted that DFR rates for both the ANA and the ANP are at the lowest they have been during Resolute Support Mission. DFRs occur for a number of reasons, including low pay, delays in pay, harsh living conditions, denial of leave, intimidation by insurgents and seasonality. USDOD found poor leadership to be the single greatest contributor to DFRs with soldiers and police growing ‘disillusioned with leaders who fail to take care of them with leave, promotion, and pay in accordance with standing policies’. Although both the ANA and the ANP have policies to prevent personnel from being absent without leave, enforcement of these policies and accountability remained inconsistent.

In 2017, the Afghan government started implementing a four-year ‘Road Map’ to streamline and bolster the ANSF. The aim of the plan is to ensure the government’s control over population centres by tackling leadership issues, resource management and rampant corruption, and by doubling the size and combat power of the Special Forces, strengthening the air component, and moving the police away from a combat missions to civil policing.

According to USDOD, the ANDSF’s 2018 Annual Campaign Plan ‘marked the transition from a defensive, reactive posture to a deliberate offensive posture’. Although the ANDSF is making efforts to become more offensive, ANDSF intelligence failed to detect preparation prior to the attacks on provincial centres in Farah (May 2018) and Ghazni (August 2018), which suggests intelligence capabilities require significant improvement.

UNAMA attributed 1,535 civilian casualties (606 deaths and 929 injured) to ANSF in 2018.
Afghan National Army (ANA)

The ANA reports to the Ministry of Defense (MoD) and is part of the armed forces of Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{112} The ANA General Staff controls all of Afghanistan’s ground and air forces, including the ANA conventional forces, the Afghan Air Force (AAF), the Special Mission Wing (SMW), the Afghan National Army Special Operations Command (ANASOC), the Afghan National Civil Order Force (ANCOF) and the Afghan Border Force (ABF).\textsuperscript{113}

According to USDOD, the authorised strength of ANA was 227 374 as of December 2018,\textsuperscript{114} while SIGAR reported that the actual strength of ANA and AAF as of October 2018 was 190 753 personnel (not including civilians). This represents a 24 415-person increase from the same period in 2017, although the figures are skewed due to the transfer of 30 689 personnel from two MoI force elements (ANCOP and Afghan Border Police) to MoD. The ANA’s 190 753 personnel consisted of 83 534 soldiers, 72 456 non-commissioned officers and 34 763 officers. The majority of attrition was experienced by ANA’s soldier ranks (1 827), followed by non-commissioned officers (908), and officers (529).\textsuperscript{115}

The ANA is organised into one division and six regional corps, as well as Special Forces units and the Air Force. Each corps typically comprises three to four infantry brigades and various specialty battalions.\textsuperscript{116} The 201\textsuperscript{st} Corps, 203\textsuperscript{rd} Corps, 205\textsuperscript{th} Corps, 207\textsuperscript{th} Corps, 209\textsuperscript{th} Corps, and 215\textsuperscript{th} Corps are responsible for different geographic regions, while the 111\textsuperscript{st} Capital Division is independent and is responsible for security in Kabul.\textsuperscript{117}

As part of the government’s ‘Road Map’ the Afghan Border Police and Afghan National Civil Order Police were transferred to the ANA.\textsuperscript{118} The Afghan Border Force, previously known as the Afghan Border Police transferred from the MoI to the MoD in December 2017 with the aim of creating seven ABF Brigades under the operational control of ANA corps commanders. The ABF’s mission is to maintain security in border zones and support ANA operations.\textsuperscript{119}

The reorganization of the Afghan National Civil Order Police was completed in March 2018 with the transfer of the majority of the 13 000 personnel to the MoD.\textsuperscript{120} Despite the reorganization the renamed Afghan National Civil Order Force’s (ANCOF) mission did not change: they deal with civil unrest, react to insurgent activities in remote and high-threat areas, conduct civil order presence patrols, and provide crisis response to public unrest and terrorist attacks in urban and metropolitan areas.\textsuperscript{121}

President Ghani announced the establishment of the Afghan National Army Territorial Force (ANA TF) in April 2018.\textsuperscript{122} The goal was to create a local security force that is more effective, professional, sustainable and led by MoD. Contrary to the ALP, the MoD will command and control locally recruited, but nationally trained ANA TF personnel.\textsuperscript{123} Each company (tolai) recruits soldiers from a particular district but is led by officers from outside that district, already serving in the regular ANA or being in the ANA reserves. The aim is for the ANA TF is to be 36 000 strong.\textsuperscript{124} The first three companies

\textsuperscript{112} USDAOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017, url, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{113} USDAOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, url, p. 69
\textsuperscript{114} USDAOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, url, p. 69
\textsuperscript{115} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 January 2019, url, p. 83
\textsuperscript{117} USDAOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, url, p. 70
\textsuperscript{118} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017, url, pp. 94, 106-107; USDAOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2017, url, pp. 2-3
\textsuperscript{119} USDAOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, url, pp. 70-71
\textsuperscript{120} NATO, Ministry of Defense takes command of police unit, 27 March 2018, url
\textsuperscript{121} GlobalSecurity, Afghan National Civil Order Force (ANCOF), n.d., url
\textsuperscript{122} Clark, K., The Afghan Territorial Force: Learning from the lessons of the past?, AAN, 15 January 2019, url
\textsuperscript{123} USDAOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, url, p. 39
\textsuperscript{124} Clark, K., The Afghan Territorial Force: Learning from the lessons of the past?, AAN, 15 January 2019, url
completed training in September 2018 and are functioning in their home districts under the leadership of ANA. 125

The Afghan Air Force (AAF) is ‘the primary air enabler for the ANA ground forces by providing aerial fires and lift support to ground forces across Afghanistan’ with their headquarters in Kabul. As USDOD noted, human capital limitations are one of the largest challenges that AAF has to face with only a limited number of Afghans meeting the needed qualifications.126

UNAMA documented a steady increase in civilian casualties caused by aerial operations of PGF in 2018. 1 015 civilian casualties (536 deaths and 479 injured) were recorded from 173 aerial operations conducted by Pro-Government Forces, marking a 61% increase in civilian casualties caused by this tactic compared to 2017. While in 2016 and 2017 the AAF was responsible for most of the civilian casualties caused by aerial operations, in 2018 with the majority of casualties were attributed to international military forces.127

**Afghan National Police (ANP)**

According to USDOD, the ANP’s mission is ‘to maintain civil order; reduce corruption; prevent the cultivation, production, and smuggling of illegal narcotics; provide security for individuals and the community; and safeguard legal rights and freedoms’.128 The ANP’s total authorised strength as of December 2018 was at 124 626.129 The actual strength of the ANP, as of October 2018, was 117 940 personnel. This figure represents a 28 398-person decrease since October 2017, which was mostly due to the transfer of 30 689 ANCOP and ABP personnel to MoD.130

While the ANP focuses on working alongside the ANA to fight the insurgency, the long-term goal of the ANDSF Road map is to transition the ANP to a more traditional community police force.131

The Afghan National Police’s geographical zones approximately match those of the ANA Corps boundaries, but not entirely.132

**Afghan Local Police (ALP)**

In August 2010, the Afghan Local Police (ALP) was created as a security initiative led by the Ministry of Interior and funded by the US government.133 Officially, the ALP reports to the MoI at national level but, in practice, since June 2015, it has been subordinated to the Afghan Uniform Police,134 however it is not counted as part of the ANSF’s authorised end strength.135 The ALP provide security within villages and rural areas to protect the population and the facilities from insurgent attacks. Members of ALP are recruited in agreement with local elders and employed within villages.136

According to SIGAR, ALP district leaders and checkpoint leaders coordinate the ALP’s daily activities. The ‘guardians’, the lowest rank, make up the overwhelming majority of ALP personnel.137

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126 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](https://example.com), p. 72
130 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](https://example.com), pp. 96-97
133 LA Times, Afghanistan tries to clean up its militias, 31 October 2016, [url](https://example.com)
134 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 April 2016, [url](https://example.com), p. 107
135 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 July 2017, [url](https://example.com), p. 104; Clark, K., Update on the Afghan Local Police, AAN, 5 July 2017, [url](https://example.com)
136 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, [url](https://example.com), pp. 100-101
As of November 2018, the ALP had around 28,000 guardians, of whom 23,000 were fully trained.\(^{138}\)

Their training is a four-week course that includes ‘instruction in the use of weapons, checkpoint defence, human rights, avoiding civilian casualties, dealing with detainees and hygiene’.\(^{139}\)

According to LA Times ‘ALP members often supply their own weapons and are paid salaries of about 100 USD or more per month’, a much smaller amount than the salaries of soldiers and police. Some are not paid on time and according to allegations, some ALP units supplement incomes through illegal means. ALP members have sustained disproportionately heavy casualties because they are often deployed in remote areas.\(^{140}\)

They are particularly targeted by the Taliban which, according to to the co-director of the Afghanistan Analyst Network, Kate Clark, ‘suggests that in some places at least, they are a difficult enemy for the insurgents to deal with’\(^{141}\) since they have ‘intimate knowledge of the enemy’ and are prepared to stand and defend territory.\(^{142}\)

The goal of the US initiative to create ALP was to mobilise local communities to substitute government forces that had been failing according to US military. However, with the expansion of the programme, ALP units were increasingly captured by local powerbrokers and/or local ethnic, tribal or factional interests and were abusive against the local population. In Ghazni province’s Andar district for example, uprising forces and ALP managed to drive out the Taliban of much of the district, but later lost the community support due to their abusive behaviour.\(^{143}\) According to SIGAR, as of September 2018, 70 ALP personnel were determined to be under the influence of power brokers across nine provinces. This marks a significant decrease from 219 personnel in July 2018 across 12 provinces. Furthermore, 63 % of ALP personnel determined to be under the influence of power brokers were in Nangarhar, Takhar and Kunar.\(^{144}\)

Based on an overview of different studies on the ALP, some ALP-groups are considered to have brought stability and security and have been welcomed by communities. Other ALP units, especially those who are imposed on communities, have been more problematic. This is especially the case in the northern provinces of Badakhshan, Takhar, Faryab, Baglan and Kunduz and in certain districts in Uruzgan, Ghazni and Wardak.\(^{145}\)

AAN gave the example of Yahyakhel district of Paktika province, where the ALP operates in an inclusive, accountable way. Here the ALP stays under the control of the tribes who work together, in a partnership instead of having the force monopolised by only one ethnic or tribal group.\(^{146}\)

UNAMA attributed a total of 38 civilian casualties (14 deaths and 24 injured) to the Afghan Local Police in 2018, adding that recruitment and use of children remained a problem in the force.\(^{147}\)

**Pro-Government Militias**

UNAMA defines a pro-government armed group as:

> ‘an organized armed non-State actor engaged in conflict and distinct from Government Forces, rebels 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

138 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 100

139 Clark, K., Update on the Afghan Local Police: Making sure they are armed, trained, paid and exist, AAN, 5 July 2017, [url](#)

140 LA Times, Afghanistan tries to clean up its militias, 31 October 2016, [url](#)

141 Clark, K., Update on the Afghan Local Police: Making sure they are armed, trained, paid and exist, AAN, 5 July 2017, [url](#)

142 Osman, B. and Clark, K., Enemy Number One: How the Taleban deal with the ALP and uprising groups, AAN, 19 July 2018, [url](#)

143 Muzhary, F. and Clark, K., How to Set up a ‘Good ALP’: The experience of Yahyakhel district, Paktika and how it became more peaceful, AAN, 11 December 2018, [url](#)

144 SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 January 2019, [url](#), p. 101

145 Clark, K., Update on the Afghan Local Police, AAN, 5 July 2017, [url](#)

146 Muzhary, F. and Clark, K., How to Set up a ‘Good ALP’: The experience of Yahyakhel district, Paktika and how it became more peaceful, AAN, 11 December 2018, [url](#)

147 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), pp. 34, 14
armed groups have no legal basis under the laws of Afghanistan. Armed groups have the capacity to employ arms in the use of force to achieve political, ideological or other objectives; are not within the formal military structures of States, State-alliances or intergovernmental organizations; and are not under the control of the State(s) in which they operate. In some cases, armed groups receive direct/indirect support of the host Government 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 (when such groups are clearly not under State control).\(^{148}\)

A specific local security structure that has existed in Afghan society for hundreds of years is the *arbaki*, community or tribal armies.\(^{149}\) 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 (see section on ALP), now operating within the official security structures.\(^{150}\)

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.\(^{151}\) 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.\(^{152}\)

In 2017, UNAMA documented abuses by pro-Government armed groups especially in Faryab, but also in Jawzjan, Samangan, Daykundi, Khost, Kunduz, Paktya, Helmand and Balkh provinces.\(^{153}\) Because of the links these local militia often have to local or national powerbrokers, their human rights abuses often occur in an atmosphere of impunity.\(^{154}\)

Pro-Government armed groups caused 180 civilian casualties (99 deaths and 81 injured) in 53 incidents, and were responsible for 12 conflict-related abductions throughout 2018. This represents a 94 % increase in civilian casualties caused by pro-Government armed groups compared to 2017. Civilian casualties caused by Pro-Government armed groups mainly occurred during ground engagements (43 %) and search operations (28 %), with the latter becoming a main concern. The majority of these casualties were caused by the Khost Protection Force in Khost, Paktya, and Paktika provinces, while the remaining civilian casualties mainly occurred in Faryab and Takhar provinces.\(^{155}\)

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.\(^{156}\) UNAMA added that the

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\(^{149}\) 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.

\(^{150}\) HRW, Just Don’t Call It a Militia, September 2011, [url](#), pp. 1-2; Habib, E., The Morphing of the Andar Uprising: transition to Afghan Local Police, AAN, 2 April 2013, [url](#).


\(^{152}\) LA Times, Afghanistan tries to clean up its militias, 31 October 2016, [url](#).


\(^{156}\) Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2013, [url](#)
Khost Protection Force functions outside of the regular military command and control structures and its operations are often not coordinated with the local authorities.\textsuperscript{157}

In 2018, UNAMA verified 22 incidents involving 107 civilian casualties (70 deaths and 37 injured) as a result of operations by the Khost Protection Force. This shows a significant increase compared to 2017, when UNAMA attributed five civilian casualties (three deaths and two injured) to the Khost Protection Force.\textsuperscript{158}

The majority of civilian deaths attributed to the Khost Protection Force were caused by intentional shooting, mostly during search operations.\textsuperscript{159}

**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 other foreign intelligence and security forces’.\textsuperscript{160}

From 2010 on, the process of gradual transition of security responsibilities from international forces to ANSF was implemented, to be completed by the end of 2014.\textsuperscript{161} 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.\textsuperscript{162}

According to NATO, the total Resolute Support Mission strength was around 17 000 in February 2019, with the goal to train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces.\textsuperscript{163} In total, 39 countries contribute to RS with the US, Germany and the UK as the largest contributors.\textsuperscript{164} As of December 2018, nearly 14 000 US military personnel were serving in Afghanistan as part of the US Operation Freedom’s Sentinel (OFS) mission. Around 8 500 of them are assigned to the NATO RS mission, while remaining US military personnel ‘serve the OFS mission in support roles or in conducting air operations, training the Afghan special forces, and conducting counterterror operations’.\textsuperscript{165}

In 2018, UNAMA attributed 674 civilian casualties (406 deaths and 268 injured) to international military forces with 94 % of those casualties resulting from aerial operations.\textsuperscript{166}

**1.2.2 Anti-Government Elements (AGEs)**

UNAMA defines ‘Anti-Government Elements’ (also referred to as ‘insurgents’) as follows:

> “Anti-Government Elements” encompass all individuals and armed groups involved in armed conflict with or armed opposition against the Government of Afghanistan and/or international military forces. They include those who identify as “Taliban” as well as individuals and non-State organised armed groups taking a direct part in hostilities and assuming a variety of labels

\textsuperscript{157} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, \url{url}, p. 36

\textsuperscript{158} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, \url{url}, p. 36

\textsuperscript{159} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, \url{url}, p. 37

\textsuperscript{160} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, \url{url}, p. 65

\textsuperscript{161} NATO, Inteqal: Transition to Afghan lead, updated on: 7 January 2015, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{162} NATO, Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, updated on: 27 February 2015, \url{url}; UN Secretary-General, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Afghanistan, 15 May 2015, \url{url}, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{163} NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, February 2019, \url{url}, p. 2

\textsuperscript{164} NATO, Resolute Support Mission RSM: Key Facts and Figures, February 2019, \url{url}, p. 2

\textsuperscript{165} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, 30 January 2019, \url{url}, p. 77

\textsuperscript{166} UNAMA, Afghanistan, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, February 2019, \url{url}, p. 35
including the Haqqani Network, Hezb-e-Islami, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic Jihad Union, Lashkari Tayyiba, Jaysh Muhammed, groups identifying themselves as “Daesh”, Islamic State and other militia and armed groups pursuing political, ideological or economic objectives including armed criminal groups directly engaged in hostile acts on behalf a party to the conflict.167

Besides the main AGE forces (Taliban, including the Haqqani network), several smaller groups have (re)appeared which are sometimes even more radical than the Taliban. Examples of such groups are: the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP),168 the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU),169 East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM),170 Jundullah,171 Lashkar-e-Islam,172 Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (mainly based in India, but according to USDOS also active in Afghanistan)173 and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).174 USDOD noted in December 2018 that ‘collectively, terrorist and insurgent groups continue to present a formidable challenge to Afghan, U.S., and coalition forces. The presence of more than 20 terrorist organisations in the region creates the largest concentration of terrorist and extremist organisations in the world.’175

According to an article by the International Business Times (IBT), ISKP and the Taliban share the goal of overthrowing the Afghan government, though ‘the former views itself as part of a global movement, while the latter confines its operations to Afghanistan’.176

Hezb-e Islami, a group led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, made an agreement with the Afghan government in 2016.177 Hezb-e Islami, which is sometimes referred to as Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HIG), had been called the ‘second-largest insurgent group in Afghanistan’ in the past.178 According to the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), ‘in return for Hezb’s renunciation of violence, the government promised to free Hezb prisoners, incorporate former insurgents into the security services, and resettle thousands of Afghan refugees living in Hezb-affiliated camps inside Pakistan.’179 Moreover, Hekmatyar was allowed to return to Kabul after two decades in exile. USIP found no evidence that Hezb-e Islami commanders joined other insurgent groups such as the Taliban or ISKP after the agreement. Instead, commanders opposed to it reportedly stayed in Pakistan.180

In its 2018 annual report on civilian casualties, UNAMA states that

167 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Special Report, October 2018, url, p. 10
168 UN Secretary General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implication for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, url, p. 7; Jadoon, A., Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan’s Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, CTC Sentinel 3 December 2018, url, p. IV-VI; AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017, url
169 Middle East Institute, Uzbekistan ups its involvement in Afghanistan, 31 January 2018, url; USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, url, p. 23
170 AAN experts however doubt a significant ETIM presence in Badakhshan. Callahan, T. and Marty, F.J., Tilting at Windmills: Dubious US claims of targeting Chinese Uyghur militants in Badakhshan, AAN, 19 March 2018, url
172 USDOS, Rewards for Justice - Reward Offer for Information on Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and Factions Key Leaders, 8 March 2018, url
175 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, url, p. 29
176 IBT, Isis letter reveals tribal rifts in Afghanistan faction amid war with Taliban and US, 7 June 2017, url
177 USIP, The Political Deal with Hezb-e Islami, 6 July 2018, url
178 Diplomat (The), What Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s Return Means for Afghanistan, 3 May 2017, url
179 USIP, The Political Deal with Hezb-e Islami, 6 July 2018, url
180 USIP, The Political Deal with Hezb-e Islami, 6 July 2018, url
'In 2018, UNAMA attributed 6,980 civilian casualties (2,243 deaths and 4,737 injured) to Anti-Government Elements, a three per cent increase compared with 2017. [...] UNAMA attributed the majority of civilian casualties – 63 per cent – to Anti-Government Elements, with 37 per cent attributed to Taliban, 20 per cent to Daesh/ISKP, and six per cent to undetermined and other Anti-Government Elements.'

Most of the insurgent groups have their roots in prior phases of Afghanistan’s conflict history, some even dating back to the first mujahideen period in the 1970s, others to the 1990s. A more detailed account of their respective backgrounds remains, however, beyond the scope of this report.

**Taliban**

Thomas Ruttig, co-founder and director of AAN, stated in August 2017 that the Taliban remain ‘[... the strongest component among the insurgents by far.’ The Taliban leadership ruled Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001 and regrouped after its removal from power. According to Antonio Giustozzi, scholar and author of several books on the Taliban, the Taliban ‘[...] does not have a unified shadow government.’ The Taliban have several commissions, among them a military commission and a command structure with, at the lowest level, field commanders overseeing individual groups of fighters. The governing structure and military command is defined in the Taliban’s Layha or Code of Conduct. The Taliban issued their first Layha in 2006; the most recent one was published in 2010.

The present leader of the movement is former Taliban chief justice Haibatullah Akhundzada. He is reportedly a member of the Noorzai tribe from Kandahar. Serajuddin Haqqani and Mullah Mohammad Yaqub, son of Mullah Omar, have been announced as deputies. The Taliban refer to themselves as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

After the announcement of the death of Taliban leader Mullah Omar in 2015, a group of Taliban led by Mullah Mohammad Rasoul split away from the mainstream Taliban. This faction, known as the Islamic Emirate High Council of Afghanistan (IEHCA), is reportedly active in western Afghanistan. Mullah Rasool was arrested by Pakistani authorities in 2016. His group clashed several times with the Akhundzada-led Taliban in the last years, e.g. in the province of Herat in 2018. In June 2018, the Rasool Taliban reportedly agreed to a truce with government forces. According to the US military news website Stars and Stripes, ‘in announcing its cease-fire, it acknowledged it was reciprocating the

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181 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 4
182 Gopal, A. and Strick van Linschoten, A., Ideology in the Afghan Taliban, AAN, 29 June 2017, url; Ruttig, T., How It All Began, AAN, 2013, url
183 CSIS, From the Ferghana Valley to South Waziristan, March 2010, url, p. 5-7
184 Ruttig, T., Conflict Portrait: Afghanistan, 1 November 2017, url
186 Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s organization and structure, Landinfo, 23 August 2017, url, pp. 14
188 UN Security Council, Letter dated 18 August 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 26 August 2015, url, pp. 19-21
189 Clark, K., The Layha: Calling the Taleban to Account, AAN, 4 July 2011, url
190 Bjelica, J., and Clark, K., One Land, Two Rules (1): Service delivery in insurgent-affected areas, an introduction, AAN, 6 December 2018, url
191 Foreign Affairs, Why the Taliban Isn’t Winning in Afghanistan, 3 January 2018, url
193 See the Taliban’s website: http://www.alemarah-english.org/
194 Osman, B., Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taleban, AAN, 24 November 2015, url
196 Stars and Stripes, Talibain vs. Talibain clash in Afghanistan’s west leaves 40 dead, 2 November 2018, url; Ariana News, Infighting Leaves 45 Talibain Militants Killed or Wounded in Herat, 30 November 2018, url
government’s eight-day truce, unlike the main Taliban group, which had earlier announced a three-day cease-fire during the Eid holiday without mention of Kabul’s peaceful gesture. According to the Pakistani newspaper Daily Times, IEHCA might disintegrate as two of its key figures left the group to join the main faction of the Taliban in late 2018.

In a report on recruitment to the Taliban, Landinfo, the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, categorised Taliban fighters into two types: full-time professional fighters, often recruited in the madrassas, and part-time local fighters, loyal to a local commander and embedded in the local society. Giustozzi estimated the total manpower of the Taliban to exceed 200,000 in 2017, of which 150,000 were reportedly fighters. Approximately 60,000 of these were members of full-time mobile units, while the remaining were part of local militias. Giustozzi however estimated that the number of full-time fighters active at one and the same time within Afghanistan rarely exceeds 40,000. In January 2018, an unnamed US defence official cited in the media estimated the total Taliban strength in Afghanistan to be 60,000, though the same article cites the Long War Journal (LWJ) stating this was a ‘low-end estimate’. According to Giustozzi, fighting is mostly carried out by full-time fighters of the mobile units.

In 2015, the Taliban established a ‘special forces’ unit named Red Unit or Red Brigade (‘sra qet’a’ in Pashto). The fighters of the Red Unit are better equipped and trained. They are generally used as a ‘rapid reaction force’ for quick interventions and special operations. At the end of 2017, the strength of the Red Unit was approximately about 7,500 fighters.

The large majority of the Taliban are still Pashtuns, ‘although there is a growing minority of Tajiks, Uzbeks, Baloch, and even several hundred Hazara members (including Shias).’ In some northern areas, the Taliban are reportedly already predominantly non-Pashtun, as they draw recruits from the local population.

For further information on the structure, leadership, force strength, aims and objectives of the Taliban, please refer to the EASO Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan - Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict. For more information on the local Taliban fronts and recruitment practices, please refer to Landinfo’s Report titled Afghanistan: Recruitment to Taliban, dated 29 June 2017.

The 2018 spring offensive of the Taliban was named ‘al-Khandaq’, referring to a seventh century battle in which the forces of the Prophet Mohammed prevailed over a month-long siege of Medina by Arab and Jewish tribes. Prior to the start of the Taliban’s spring offensive, the government forces conducted a pre-emptive strike against various insurgent groups throughout Afghanistan termed Nasrat (meaning victory in Arabic). In the wake of the ‘al-Khandaq’ operation, the Taliban launched attacks

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197 Stars and Stripes, Taliban splinter group declares open-ended truce with Kabul, 10 June 2018, url
198 Daily Times, Taliban splinter group fights for survival after two leaders quit, 26 November 2018, url
199 Norway, Landinfo, Afghanistan: Recruitment to Taliban, 29 June 2017, url, pp. 8-9
201 NBC News, The Taliban is gaining strength and territory in Afghanistan, 30 January 2018, url
203 Times (The), Helmand teeters after Taliban storm in with British tactics, 21 August 2016, url
204 Times (The), Helmand teeters after Taliban storm in with British tactics, 21 August 2016, url; Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, AAN, 11 March 2016, url; LWJ, Taliban touts “Special Forces Unit”, 6 November 2017, url; National Interest (The), How the Taliban Would Take Over Afghanistan, 10 February 2019, url
in the provinces of Badakhshan, Ghazni, Kunduz, Paktika and Zabul, as well as in Badghis, Farah, Faryab, Helmand, Kandahar, and Logar.208

According to UNAMA, between January and September 2018, civilian casualties from ground engagements reached their lowest level since 2013. Among other reasons, this might be attributed to a shift of strategy by the insurgents towards an increased usage of suicide Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). UNAMA however noted that the decreasing number of civilian casualties ‘[…] also suggests that parties undertook measures to protect civilians from harm during ground operations.’209

In August 2018, the Taliban launched a major attack against Ghazni city. While the insurgents purportedly mainly targeted government forces’ security checkposts and government offices, the fighting caused over 200 civilian casualties (69 deaths and 141 injured), as well as intentional damage on civilian property, according to UNAMA.210 In the wake of the 2018 parliamentary election, the Taliban warned the population throughout Afghanistan not to get involved in the election process, as it would potentially target all polling stations. UNAMA verified 388 civilian casualties in total (52 deaths and 336 injured) on election day, of which all but 59 casualties (14 deaths, 45 injured) can be attributed to AGEs, according to UNAMA.211

For further information on the peace process please see 1.1.3 Peace talks.

Haqqani network

The Haqqani network is an insurgent network with origins in the 1970s mujahideen groups.212 Its founder, Jalaluddin Haqqani,213 has been attacking Afghan government officials since the early 1970s.214 In September 2018, Jalaluddin Haqqani reportedly died aged 71. His son Serajuddin Haqqani had already taken over the leadership of the group at an earlier point of time.215 Although the network has maintained an autonomous position it is considered part of the Taliban.216 Serajuddin Haqqani was appointed deputy leader of the Taliban in July 2015.217 Regarding the Haqqani network’s strength, the USDOS stated that it ‘[…] is believed to have several hundred core members, but it is estimated that the organization is able to draw upon a pool of upwards of 10 000 fighters.’218 According to USDOS, the Haqqani network ‘[…] is active along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and across much of south-eastern Afghanistan, particularly in Loya Paktia, and has repeatedly targeted Kabul in its attacks.’219 The group’s leadership has historically maintained a power base around Pakistan’s tribal areas.220

208 Jamestown Foundation (The), Taliban Demonstrates Resilience With Afghan Spring Offensive, 2 June 2018, url
209 UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2018, 10 October 2018, p. 5
210 UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2018, 10 October 2018, p. 7
211 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Special Report: 2018 Elections Violence, November 2018, url, p. 4
212 Ruttig, T., Talking Haqqani, AAN, 1 July 2010, url
214 AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, url
215 Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s organization and structure, 23 August 2017, url, pp. 8-9
216 DuPée, M., Red on Red: Analyzing Afghanistan’s Intra-Insurgent Violence, CTC Sentinel, January 2018, url, p. 27
217 USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, September 2018, url, p. 294
218 USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, September 2018, url, p. 294
219 USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, September 2018, url, p. 294
220 VOA, What Is the Haqqani Network?, 1 June 2017, url; Economic Times (The), US asks Pakistan to act against Haqqani network, other terror groups, 27 February 2018, url
Al Qaeda and affiliated groups

In June 2014, the UN Secretary-General reported incidents linked to Al Qaeda and its affiliated groups, mainly operating from Pakistan in the east of Afghanistan. 221 Al Qaeda-affiliated groups were reportedly not organised under a coordinated leadership, but they contributed to security problems in border regions with Pakistan. 222 In August 2015, the leader of Al Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, pledged allegiance to the Taliban. 223 Al Qaeda was the main target of US drone strikes until 2016. By 2018, Al Qaeda reportedly ‘[…] has shrunk to relative obscurity […] supplanted by newer threats such as a local branch of the Islamic State.’ 224 USDOS however stated in 2018 that ‘although al-Qa’ida (AQ) in Afghanistan and Pakistan has been seriously degraded, remnants of AQ’s global leadership, as well as its regional affiliate al-Qa’ida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), continued to operate from remote locations in the region that historically have been exploited as safe havens. Afghan and Pakistani forces continued to contest AQ’s presence in the region […]’ 225

During peace talks with US officials, the Taliban reportedly agreed in January 2019 to bar international terror groups such as Al Qaeda from Afghanistan. 226

Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)/Jundullah

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is an insurgent network consisting of Uzbek adherents to a Salafist-jihadist ideology operating in Afghanistan since the 1990s. IMU allied with the Taliban against the Northern Alliance and later the coalition forces in Operation Enduring Freedom. In 2001, some IMU fighters followed the defeated Taliban into exile in Pakistan. 227 After publicly admitting Mullah Omar’s death, IMU purportedly switched allegiance to the Islamic State in 2015. 228 Subsequently, violent clashes between IMU and the Taliban took place in the province of Zabul in 2015. 229 In October 2015, the Taliban reportedly established a special unit to fight against IMU/ISKP and by December 2015, it had ‘[…] killed hundreds of IMU fighters in Zabul, including its emir, Uthman Ghazi.’ 230 In 2016, a faction of IMU loyal to the Taliban split away from the IS-affiliated part of IMU, according to USDOS. 231 In November 2015, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reported fractures in the ranks of IMU. 232 Alliances and motives of different dispersed IMU groups became hard to assess 233 and some of its fighters have been active in Syria and Iraq. 234

A northern group called Jundullah separated from IMU in 2009. The group consists of non-Pashtun Afghans and was said to operate under the umbrella of the Taliban in the north-east of Afghanistan in 2016, even though it had independent command structures. According to AAN, some Jundullah

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221 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 18 June 2014, url, p. 6
222 UN Security Council, Letter dated 18 August 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 26 August 2015, url, pp. 10-11
223 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 1 September 2015, url, p. 2
224 Político, Whatever happened to Al Qaeda in Afghanistan?, 15 August 2018, url
225 USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, September 2018, url, p. 165
226 Telegraph (The), Taliban agree Isil and Al-Qaeda will be barred from Afghanistan in major concession during talks with US, 24 January 2019, url
227 CSIS, From the Ferghana Valley to South Waziristan, March 2010, url, pp. 5-8
228 Osman, B., Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taleban, AAN, 24 November 2015, url
229 Osman, B., Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taleban, AAN, 24 November 2015, url
230 ICT, Central Asian Jihadists in the Front Line, 4 September 2017, url
231 USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, September 2018, url, p. 302
232 RFE/RL, The Islamic Movement Of Uzbekistan Comes Unraveled, 28 November 2015, url
233 Jadoon, A., Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan’s Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, December 2018, url, p. 38; RFE/RL, The Islamic Movement Of Uzbekistan Comes Unraveled, 28 November 2015, url
234 RFE/RL, The Islamic Movement Of Uzbekistan Comes Unraveled, 28 November 2015, url
fighters pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) in 2015.\textsuperscript{235} This led to armed resistance by the Taliban, causing several Jundullah fighters to flee Kunduz and Takhar.\textsuperscript{236}

According to AAN’s Obaid Ali, the Pashtun Taliban found it ‘a challenge to bring the non-Taliban militant groups (IMU and Jundullah) under their banner [in northern Afghanistan]. When they managed to, temporarily, both groups continued to run autonomous fronts and kept separate command structures.’\textsuperscript{237}

USDOS estimated IMU’s strength at 200-300 members.\textsuperscript{238} Jundullah and IMU are mainly active in Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz, Balkh, Baghlan, Sar-e Pul, as well as Faryab and Jawzjan.\textsuperscript{239}

**Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP)**

The first reports about a branch of IS (also called ISIS, ISIL or Daesh) in Afghanistan date back to the summer of 2014.\textsuperscript{240} Initially, the recruited commanders often included discontented Afghan and Pakistani Taliban.\textsuperscript{241} According to AAN, they have been ‘quickly decimated in five of the six provinces where they emerged and most of their leaders were killed – mainly by the Taliban who tried to prevent a home-grown rival insurgency group from gaining a foothold on what they considered their own battleground.’\textsuperscript{242}

Eventually, the group based in Nangarhar won recognition as the head of IS’ ‘provincial’ chapter for Khorasan in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{243} The Nangarhar group envisions global expansion of the caliphate and designates the region of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and the Central Asian republics as the Wilayat Khorasan (ISKP – Islamic State Khorasan Province).\textsuperscript{244}

ISKP has its stronghold in certain southern districts of Nangarhar,\textsuperscript{245} where they are fighting with the Taliban for control.\textsuperscript{246} At its peak in 2015, ISKP was the dominant insurgent group in eight districts of Nangarhar. However, according to AAN,

‘ISKP territory had shrunk to four districts by the end of 2015, with territory mainly re-taken by the Taliban. ISKP then dug in through 2016 in all its remaining districts, that is, Achin, Kot and Nazyan in the south-eastern districts (Bati Kot had returned to Taliban control), as well as Deh Bala in the south-west. ISKP’s hold over these districts looked firm until mid-March, or the beginning of the Afghan spring 2017, when US and Afghan special forces stepped up their attacks against it. [...] What has added to the pressure on ISKP’s Mamand stronghold is not only the penetration of US and Afghan forces into Pekha to the east, but also the group’s loss of Kot district to the west.’\textsuperscript{247}

\textsuperscript{235} Ali, O., The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), AAN, 15 July 2016, \url{url}\n\textsuperscript{236} Ali, O., Precarious Consolidation: Qari Hekmat’s IS-affiliated ‘island’ survives another Taleban onslaught, AAN, 4 March 2018, \url{url}\n\textsuperscript{237} Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, \url{url}\n\textsuperscript{238} USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, September 2018, \url{url}, p. 302\n\textsuperscript{239} BBC Monitoring South Asia, Afghan MP says Uzbek rebel group recruiting fighters in Afghan north, 10 April 2017, \url{url}\n\textsuperscript{240} Osman, B., Messages in Chalk: ‘Islamic State’ haunting Afghanistan?, AAN, 17 November 2014, \url{url}; LWJ, Mapping the emergence of the Islamic State in Afghanistan, 5 March 2015, \url{url}\n\textsuperscript{241} AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017, \url{url}; LWJ, Taliban touts defection of Islamic State ‘deputy’, 4 December 2017, \url{url}\n\textsuperscript{242} AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017, \url{url}\n\textsuperscript{243} Osmani, B., The Islamic State in ‘Khorasan’: How it began and where it stands now in Nangarhar, AAN, 27 July 2016, \url{url}; AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017, \url{url}\n\textsuperscript{244} Jamestown Foundation, Islamic State in Afghanistan Ready to Capitalize on Mullah Omar’s Death, 3 September 2015, \url{url}\n\textsuperscript{245} Osmani, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, \url{url}; Reuters, Islamic State beheads 15 of its own fighters: Afghan official, 23 November 2017, \url{url}; Clark, K., and Osman, B., More Militias? Part 2: The proposed Afghan Territorial Army in the fight against ISKP, AAN, 23 September 2017, \url{url}\n\textsuperscript{246} RFE/RL, Taliban, IS Face Off in Afghanistan, 30 October 2017, \url{url}; Quilty, A. “Faint lights twinkling against the dark”: Reportage from the fight against ISKP in Nangarhar, AAN, 19 February 2019, \url{url}\n\textsuperscript{247} Osman, B., The Battle for Mamand: ISKP under strain, but not yet defeated, 23 May 2017, \url{url}
ISKP presence reportedly spread to the neighbouring provinces of Kunar and, according to government sources, Laghman. In July 2018, the UN reported that ISKP attempted to expand its territory and was at the time mainly present in Nangarhar, Nuristan, and Kunar. Furthermore, UN mentioned activities of (self-proclaimed) IS fighters in Jawzjan, Faryab, Sar-e Pul and Badakhshan. Another source stated that ISKP is present in Kunar, Paktika, Paktya, Logar, and Khost in eastern and north-eastern Afghanistan, while it has also been active in the provinces of Jawzjan, Faryab, Sar-e Pul, Samangan, Badghis, Baghlan, Kunduz, and Badakhshan.

According to an analysis published by the US Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point, ISKP ‘[…] has been successful in reinforcing its organizational capacity in both Afghanistan and Pakistan by fostering partnerships with regional militant groups.’ Since 2014, several groups have pledged allegiance to IS or ISKP in Afghanistan, e.g. TTP factions or IMU, while others cooperated with ISKP without a formal pledge of allegiance, e.g. the Jundullah faction of TTP or Lashkar-e Islam. AAN noted in 2017 that a pledge to ISKP offered an alternative to disgruntled Taliban leaders, though it remained unclear how deep the cooperation between the ‘official’ Nangarhar-based ISKP branch and self-proclaimed IS groups (e.g. in Jawzjan, Ghor and Herat) has been. Thomas Ruttig labelled these former Taliban factions in northern Afghanistan ‘opportunistic pro-IS groups.’ Casualty numbers attributed to ISKP might vary depending on whether ISKP activities are counted separately from ‘self-proclaimed IS group’ activities. Without further elaborating on definitions, UNAMA differentiates between casualties from ISKP and ‘self-proclaimed ISKP’. Accounts on self-proclaimed IS or ISKP presence might however also be inflated, as warnings about ISKP or self-proclaimed IS are ‘a useful fund-raising tool’: according to Ruttig, ISKP ‘[…] presence is hyped up by the Afghan government in order to keep Afghanistan in the minds of the West before all foreign aid dries up.’

ISKP and self-proclaimed IS groups have been under attack from the Taliban, as well as government and international forces. According to the magazine Politico, ISKP insurgents became a main target of US drone strikes in 2016.

ISKP-internal sources claimed the strength of ISKP between 2015 and 2017 at 4,500 to 20,000 members. While Giustozzi stated that the numbers varying between 4,500 and 9,500 correspond with

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248 LWJ, US military kills Islamic State Khorasan province leader in Kunar, 13 August 2017, url; UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, url, pp. 6-7
249 1TV News, Five killed in Taliban-Daesh clash in Laghman, 23 June 2018, url
250 UN Secretary-General, Twenty-second report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaeda and associated individuals and entities, 27 July 2018, url, p. 16
251 IPP Review, The Islamic State of Khorasan Expands in Afghanistan, 3 January 2019, url
252 Jadoon, A., Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan’s Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, December 2018, url, p. IV
253 Jadoon, A., Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan’s Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, December 2018, url, p. 34
254 Jadoon, A., Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan’s Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, December 2018, url, pp. 39-42
255 Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Talibean of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, url; Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, AAN, 23 November 2016, url; Giustozzi, A., The Islamic State in Khorasan, 2018, p. 142
256 Ruttig, T., Conflict Portrait: Afghanistan, 1 November 2017, url
257 UNAMA, Quarterly Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2018, 10 October 2018, url, p. 2
258 National (The), Did ISIL, the Taliban or the Haqqani Network carry out the Kandahar attack?, 12 January 2017, url
259 Giustozzi, A., The Islamic State in Khorasan, 2018, pp. 175-182; UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, url, pp. 6-7; Guardian (The), ‘US mother of all bombs’ killed 92 Isis militants, say Afghan officials, 15 April 2017, url; 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; Ali, O., Qari Hekmat’s Island Overrun: Taleban defeat ‘ISKP’ in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, url
260 Politico, Whatever happened to Al Qaeda in Afghanistan?, 15 August 2018, url
intelligence information, he stated that ‘[…] the claim of 20,000 members […] appears to be quite propagandistic and out of line with previous IS-K claims.’\textsuperscript{261} USDOS estimated the ISKP strength in 2017 at 1,500 to 3,000 fighters,\textsuperscript{262} while another source stated that ISKP had approximately 4,000 to 6,000 members in 2018.\textsuperscript{263} Anatol Lieven, a regional expert at Georgetown University’s Qatar campus, claimed in June 2017 that Central Asian fighters form ‘a key pillar of support’ for the ISKP.\textsuperscript{264}

ISKP claimed several deadly attacks in Kabul\textsuperscript{265} and to a lesser extent Herat\textsuperscript{266} aimed at Shias\textsuperscript{267} and the Hazara minority,\textsuperscript{268} as well as other targets in 2016-2018.\textsuperscript{269} AAN noted in August 2017 that ISKP’s relative lack of success in gaining ground might have fostered a change in strategy: ISKP ‘[…] which has recently suffered significant loss of territory and the killing of three consecutive amirs in coalition air strikes, and has failed to profit from the Taleban split in 2015, appears to increasingly use urban terrorism as a means to show its continued presence’.\textsuperscript{270} The majority of ISKP attacks on religious sites reportedly targeted Shia communities.\textsuperscript{271} Please refer to the EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict for more information on the targeting of Hazara and other Shia by ISKP in Afghanistan.

According to a report published by CTC, ISKP attacks grew considerably in their lethality between 2015 and 2018: while the average number of killed persons per ISKP attack in Afghanistan was 3.9 in 2015, it increased to 13.4 in 2018.\textsuperscript{272} UNAMA stated in 2018 that ‘Daesh/ISKP increased the frequency and intensity of its attacks throughout 2018, particularly in the eastern region. From 1 January to 31 December 2018, UNAMA attributed 138 incidents countrywide resulting in 2,181 civilian casualties (681 deaths and 1,500 injured) to Daesh/ISKP, which represents a 118 per cent increase from 2017. The vast majority of these incidents – 102 – occurred across numerous districts in Nangarhar province, causing 991 civilian casualties, while 20 incidents took place in Kabul province (all in Kabul city) resulting in 1,027 civilian casualties, and reflecting a high level of civilian harm caused by each attack in the densely populated city.’\textsuperscript{273}

AAN co-director Kate Clark already commented in 2017 that the number of casualties caused by ‘[…] ISKP is huge, considering their limited territorial footprint, but is a consequence of their willingness to

\textsuperscript{261} Giustozzi, A., The Islamic State in Khorasan, 2018, pp. 141-142
\textsuperscript{262} USDOS, Country Reports on Terrorism 2018, September 2018, \url{url}, p. 305
\textsuperscript{263} IPP Review, The Islamic State of Khorasan Expands in Afghanistan, 3 January 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{264} IBT, Isis letter reveals tribal rifts in Afghanistan faction amid war with Taleban and US, 7 June 2017, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{265} Jadoon, A., Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan’s Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, December 2018, \url{url}, p. 11; UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, \url{url}, pp. 6
\textsuperscript{266} taz, 29 Tote nach Anschlag auf Moschee in Herat [29 Dead After Attack on Mosque in Herat], 3 August 2017, \url{url}; Reuters, At least one dead in blast near mosque in Afghan city of Herat, 25 March 2018, \url{url}; Jadoon, A., Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan’s Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, December 2018, \url{url}, p. 11; UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, \url{url}, pp. 6
\textsuperscript{267} taz, 29 Tote nach Anschlag auf Moschee in Herat [29 Dead After Attack on Mosque in Herat], 3 August 2017, \url{url}; Reuters, At least one dead in blast near mosque in Afghan city of Herat, 25 March 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{268} Reuters, At least one dead in blast near mosque in Afghan city of Herat, 25 March 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{269} taz, 29 Tote nach Anschlag auf Moschee in Herat [29 Dead After Attack on Mosque in Herat], 3 August 2017, \url{url}; Reuters, At least one dead in blast near mosque in Afghan city of Herat, 25 March 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{270} AAN, Thematic Dossier XV: Daesh in Afghanistan, 1 August 2017, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{271} Jadoon, A., Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan’s Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, December 2018, \url{url}, p. V; 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{url}, p. 6
\textsuperscript{272} Jadoon, A., Allied & Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan’s Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, December 2018, \url{url}, p. 22
\textsuperscript{273} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, \url{url}, pp. 20-21
attack unprotected gatherings of civilians for sectarian reasons’. In early 2019, she stated that ‘meanwhile, ISKP’s transformation into a sectarian, terrorist outfit bent on carrying out large-scale, deliberate attacks on civilians in cities has meant calamitous casualties in horrific single attacks.’

1.3 Recent security trends and armed confrontations

Several sources consider the situation in Afghanistan to be a non-international armed conflict.

The UN noted in December 2018 that

‘The security situation remained volatile, with incidents continuing at consistently high levels. While the number of security incidents in some categories decreased slightly, the overall number of casualties rose owing to an increase in the severity of certain attacks. [...] The southern region saw the highest number of incidents followed by the eastern and south-eastern regions.’

According to the US Department of Defense, writing in December 2018,

‘[t]he Afghan government maintained control of Kabul, main population centers, most key transit routes, provincial capitals, and a majority of district centers. In this reporting period, the Taliban capitalized on the freedom of manoeuvre they maintain in rural areas to mass combat power against poorly defended district centers and checkpoints. Despite the Taliban’s proclaimed intent to adopt a more asymmetric approach, the group continued to mass and conduct raids on checkpoints, district centers, and threaten population centers. These types of attacks did not result in significant expansion of Taliban-controlled territory; however, it did test the ability of the ANDSF to respond, resulting in over-extension of the ANA in certain areas.’

On 7 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, even if they did not refer to the government’s announcement. This three-day ceasefire from 15 to 17 June 2018 marked ‘the first real cessation of hostilities’ in the last 17 years and allowed Afghans to go into areas that they had not been able to reach due to the Taliban’s control for years. According to UNAMA, only one pressure-plate IED incident attributed to the Taliban was documented during the ceasefire and the device was believed to have been planted before. While no civilian casualties attributed to Pro-Government Forces were registered during the ceasefire, two major attacks were conducted by ISKP in Nangarhar against Taliban and civilian gatherings that resulted in 181 civilian casualties (48 deaths and 133 injured).

Strategic posts along main roads were temporarily captured by the Taliban in several regions, like in Daymirdad and Sayyidabad districts in Wardak Province, allowing them to successfully restrict movement between provinces. In the northern region, on the Mazar-Shirbingham and Maimana-
Andkhoy main roads and in the west, along the Herat-Qala-e Naw road, the Taliban also carried out frequent attacks that resulted in complicating government access and limited the movement of residents.\textsuperscript{282}

Following the takeover of Kunduz in 2015 and 2016, the Taliban conducted two major assaults on provincial centres in 2018: a one-day attack against Farah City and a five-day assault on Ghazni City.\textsuperscript{283}

The Taliban indicated their intention to disrupt the parliamentary elections scheduled for October 2018 through public statements issued in the weeks before election day. Similar to the trend seen during the 2014 presidential poll, UNAMA verified reports of the Taliban warning Afghans not to register to vote, imposing fines and/or confiscating the national identity cards of those who did register and threatening election-related staff if they continued to work, including with death.\textsuperscript{284} On 18 October 2018 Kandahar police chief General Abdul Raziq was killed along with the province’s intelligence chief, when a bodyguard opened fire after a meeting. The Taliban-claimed attack was major setback for the Afghan government ahead of the elections.\textsuperscript{285}

From the start of voter registration on 14 April 2018 through the end of the year, UNAMA verified 1 007 election related civilian casualties (226 deaths and 781 injured) along with 310 election-related abductions. The majority of election-related incidents and more than half of the civilian casualties were attributed to Taliban, while ISKP was responsible for seven election-related incidents of suicide and non-suicide IED attacks causing 338 civilian casualties (94 deaths and 244 injured).\textsuperscript{286}

The ISKP presence remained significant in the eastern part of the country with reports of clashes between the group and Taliban fighters in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces.\textsuperscript{287} The group increased the frequency and intensity of its attacks in 2018, particularly in the eastern region. UNAMA found that the substantial increase in civilian casualties attributed to ISKP was mostly due to the increase in suicide and complex attacks, which were mostly carried out against civilians or in civilian-populated areas.\textsuperscript{288}

According to UNAMA, in direct violation of international humanitarian law, Anti-Government Elements relied more on suicide and complex attacks and shifted their intended targets more and more towards the civilian population in 2018.\textsuperscript{289}

1.3.1 Armed clashes and assaults

Since the start of the withdrawal of foreign troops (2012), closure of IMF bases and transition of security responsibilities into the hands of the ANSF (2013), the dynamics in the conflict have changed. AGEs have increasingly attacked and challenged ANSF, operating in larger units (up to several hundreds of fighters, using small arms fire, rockets, mortars and grenades). They increasingly took control over larger territories outside the urban centres and became more successful in capturing district administrative centres. Mostly, the ANSF has been able to regain control quickly but certain district centres fell under the sustained control of Taliban forces.\textsuperscript{290} These developments triggered a...
number of ANSF counter-offensives and clearance operations in several provinces. According to the UN Secretary General, more than half of the recorded security incidents in 2016 and 2017 were armed clashes.

UNAMA found that ground engagements, mostly between PGF and AGEs, ‘remained the second leading cause of civilian casualties’ in 2018, accounting for 31% (3,382 civilian casualties: 814 deaths and 2,568 injured). UNAMA documented a significant reduction in this cause of civilian casualties in 2017 which seemed to continue in 2018 with a 3% decrease. The continuous drop in ground engagement casualties was driven by reductions in civilian casualties caused by Pro-Government Forces, while casualties attributed to AGEs remained on par with 2017. Most of the civilian casualties from ground engagements in 2018 (1,394 civilian casualties: 291 deaths and 1,103 injured) were attributed to AGEs, accounting for 41% of civilian casualties from ground fighting throughout the year.

According to UNAMA,

‘factors for sustained reductions in civilian casualties appeared to include relative decreases in attacks by Anti-Government Elements on densely-populated civilian areas, […] warnings by parties prior to fighting and displacement of civilians from areas regularly impacted by heavy conflict, and actions taken by Afghan national security forces related to the implementation of the National Policy on Civilian Casualty Mitigation and Prevention’.

However, Taliban fighters attacked Farah City in May 2018, overran several checkpoints and took control of the main square before Afghan special forces backed by US airpower could drive them out.

Ghazni City was attacked on 10 August 2018 by Taliban fighters, closing in on the city from their positions in nearby districts, villages and the city’s suburb ‘that they had systematically occupied in the previous months’. The insurgents disabled the telecommunication network and blocked the main highway in Maidan Wardak and Zabul provinces, and also the main easterly road in Andar district, leading east to Paktika province. As a result, neither the Afghan government nor the public could follow what was happening in the city and the road closure prevented the government from sending in reinforcements. According to UNAMA, the fighting caused significant harm to the civilian population not only in terms of casualties (262 civilian casualties verified: 79 deaths, 183 injured) but also because of the infrastructural damage. After the attack concerns remained about the possibility of another large-scale assault in the south-east, including against Ghazni City. Although that...
did not occur, the Taliban continued to pressure Government forces in the outskirts of the city, surrounding districts and along the main Highway 1, and eventually captured Andar district on 14 October 2018.299

UNAMA found that the level of ‘civilian casualties from ground engagements varied by region and province’. In 2018 Helmand, Kandahar and Uruzgan ‘continued to drive the decrease in overall civilian casualties from ground engagements,’ while UNAMA registered a significant increase in civilian casualties resulting from ground engagements in Ghazni province, mostly due to the attack in August 2018, and in Baghlan, Balkh, Kunar and Paktya provinces as well.300

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.301 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 on the other hand detonate when a person or vehicle triggers the initiator or switch (pressure plate or pressure release mechanism, trip wire or another device). Another category is Suicide IEDs where either the attacker wears an explosive vest or belt or a vehicle is rigged with explosives by a driver or passenger inside.302

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’.303 In 2018, Anti-Government Elements’ use of IEDs ‘remained the leading cause of civilian casualties’, accounting for 42 per cent of the total. Suicide and complex attacks resulted in 2 809 civilian casualties (886 deaths and 1 923 injured) in 2018, which is not only a 22 % increase compared to 2017 but also ‘the highest number of civilian casualties from such attacks in a single year’ since 2009 when UNAMA began the systematic documentation.304

AAN noted that this increase was largely driven by ISKP which was responsible for 87 % of the civilian casualties caused by these types of incidents.305 Out of 65 suicide and complex attacks carried out by AGEs in 2018, UNAMA attributed 21 attacks to the Taliban (642 civilian casualties: 216 deaths, 426 injured) and 36 attacks to ISKP (1 892 civilian casualties: 557 deaths, 1 335 injured).306 Despite being a significantly smaller fighting force than the Taliban and operating from a much smaller territorial base in Nangarhar province than before, ISKP was responsible for one fifth of all civilian casualties in the Afghan conflict.307 According to UNAMA, the number of suicide and complex attacks and the harm they caused radically increased in Nangarhar province due to the heightened activities of ISKP.308

Out of 65 suicide and complex attacks carried out by AGEs in 2018, 28 occurred in Kabul city resulting in 1 686 civilian casualties (554 deaths, 1 132 injuries) and marking a 5 % increase in the number of casualties compared to 2017. According to UNAMA, the attacks in Kabul mostly targeted civilians: the

299 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, p. 6
301 NATO, Improvised explosive devices, 12 December 2018, url
302 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, p. 10
303 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, p. 8
305 Clark, K., Record Numbers of Civilian Casualties Overall, from Suicide Attacks and Air Strikes: UNAMA reports on the conflict in 2018, AAN, 24 February 2019, url
307 Clark, K., Record Numbers of Civilian Casualties Overall, from Suicide Attacks and Air Strikes: UNAMA reports on the conflict in 2018, AAN, 24 February 2019, url
civilian Government administration, places of worship, education facilities, election-related sites and other ‘soft’ targets.³⁰⁹

UNAMA documented 1,818 civilian casualties (475 deaths and 1,343 injured) caused by non-suicide IED devices in 2018, accounting for 17% of overall civilian casualties. Of those, 72% of these attacks were attributed to the Taliban, 10% to ISKP and 18% to undetermined AGEs. Civilian casualties caused by victim-activated pressure-plate IEDs decreased by 26% in 2018 (753 civilian casualties: 269 deaths, 484 injured), with half of them recorded in the Southern provinces of Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan and Zabul.³¹⁰

1.3.3 High-profile attacks

According to the USDOD, the Taliban along with other militant groups continued to carry out high-profile attacks, mostly in the capital region, to attract media attention, undermine the legitimacy of the Afghan government and to create the perception of widespread insecurity. From 1 June 2018 to 30 November 2018, there were 59 high-profile attacks in Kabul, compared to 73 during the same period in 2017.³¹¹

UNAMA found that out of 65 suicide and complex attacks across the country in 2018, 28 occurred in Kabul city resulting in 1,686 civilian casualties (554 deaths and 1,132 injuries), representing a 5% increase in compared to 2017. The attacks in Kabul mostly targeted civilians, including the civilian Government administration, places of worship, education facilities, election-related sites and other ‘soft’ targets.³¹²

In January 2018, attackers drove an explosive-laden ambulance into a crowded street in Kabul during ‘one of the most violent stretches of the war’,³¹³ killing 114 people and injuring 229. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack.³¹⁴

Other high-profile attacks during the reporting period include:

- Taliban militants attacked the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul City in January 2018, killing 24 and injuring 15 civilians. There were 15 foreign nationals among the victims.³¹⁵
- ISKP claimed responsibility for a bombing in Kabul in March 2018, close to a shrine where Shia Muslims gathered to celebrate Nowruz. The attack killed 35 and injured 65 civilians.³¹⁶
- A suicide bomber detonated a body-borne IED outside a voter registration centre in a Shia populated neighbourhood of Kabul, killing 60 and injuring 138 civilians. ISKP claimed responsibility for the incident.³¹⁷
- Another ISKP-claimed attack occurred in August 2018, in Kabul’s Shia-dominated Dasht-i-Barchi area where a suicide bomber detonated explosives inside a classroom of an educational centre, killing 40 and injuring 67 civilians.³¹⁸

³¹¹ USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, url, p. 25
³¹³ New York Times (The), ‘It’s a Massacre’: Blast in Kabul Deepens Toll of a Long War, 27 January 2018, url
³¹⁷ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 29; France24, Suicide blast at voter registration centre kills more than 50 in Kabul, 22 April 2018, url
³¹⁸ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 29; RFE/RL, UN Raises Death Toll From Kabul Suicide Attack To 40, 18 August 2018, url
• In September 2018, a double suicide attack killed at least 20 people and injured 70 at a wrestling club in Kabul. After the suicide bomber detonated the device in the club, a second bomber attacked first responders in a car.  

• In October 2018 a member of the Kandahar Provincial Governor’s security team opened fire during a meeting between Afghan representatives and US personnel in Kandahar at the governor’s compound. General Raziq, Kandahar Chief of Police was killed and several others were injured.

### 1.3.4 Targeted killings and conflict-related abduction

Besides suicide attacks and using non-suicide IEDs to deliberately target civilians or civilian objects, AGEs also carried out ‘targeted killings’ of civilians, mostly by shooting. UNAMA documented 295 such incidents in 2018 that caused 589 civilian casualties (395 deaths and 194 injured), showing a 17% decrease compared to 2017. However, this decrease in civilian casualties resulting from targeted killings by AGEs was offset by the considerable rise in casualties from suicide IED attacks, particularly those attributed to ISKP, which more than doubled.

According to UNAMA, the targeted civilians ‘were individuals perceived as supporting or otherwise connected to the Government or pro-Government armed groups, whether through current or former employment or family ties’. Although the number of attacks against tribal elders decreased from 59 in 2017 to 30 in 2018, there was only a minor decrease in the number of civilians killed (34) and injured (31). UNAMA also documented 13 incidents of targeting religious scholars and leaders, resulting in 15 deaths and 20 injured.

When Ghazni was attacked in August 2018 by the Taliban, UNAMA found that the insurgents allegedly had a list of names and addresses of government employees and ANSF members to target along with their families. An Afghan National Police commander’s brother, a district prosecutor and a parliamentary candidate had been victims of targeted killings.

In 2018, UNAMA recorded 271 incidents of conflict-related abductions affecting 1,857 civilians. 53 incidents resulted in death and 33 in injuries. AGEs were responsible for all incidents, except one involving a Pro-Government Armed Group and three abductions by the ALP. Although the number of civilian casualties from conflict-related abductions remained at similar levels to 2017, the number of abducted civilians increased by 85% which was mostly driven by incidents related to the election process.

For more information on the rationale and modus operandi of the Taliban targeting campaign, please refer to the [EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict](#).

### 1.3.5 Aerial attacks and bombings

In 2015, the number of civilian casualties caused by airstrikes rose by 85% reversing to the previous years’ 2012-2014 declining trend. In September 2018, UNAMA voiced its concern about the increasing number of civilian casualties from airstrikes adding that in the first 6 months of 2018 353

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319 BBC News, Afghanistan conflict: Bombers kill 20 at Kabul sports club, 5 September 2018, url
320 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, December 2018, url, p. 25
322 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 18
civilian casualties (149 deaths and 204 injured) were documented which, showing a 52 % increase compared to the same period in 2017. 327

From 1 January to 31 December 2018 UNAMA documented 1,015 civilian casualties (536 deaths and 479 injured) from 173 aerial operations conducted by PGF, showing a 61 % increase in civilian casualties from this tactic compared to 2017. The fact civilian deaths caused by aerial operations increased by 82 % from the previous year is of particular concern according to UNAMA. 328 AAN co-director Kate Clark noted that the US military realised the harm that civilian casualties were doing to its military mission and introduced new tactical measures in late 2011 on the use of air power in order to reduce civilian casualties. 329 However, the rules of engagement for airstrikes by US Forces in Afghanistan were relaxed at the end of 2017. 330 Instead of allowing US forces to strike the Taliban if they are threatening American or Afghan forces, US aircraft could seek out and attack militants based simply on their affiliation to the group. 331

In 2018, aerial operations accounted for 9 % of all civilian casualties in Afghanistan, compared to 6 % in 2017. Contrary to the trends in 2016-2017 when the Afghan Air Force was responsible for the majority of civilian casualties, victims in 2018 were mostly attributed to IMF. 332

1.3.6 Search operations

In 2018, UNAMA documented a considerable rise in civilian casualties caused by Afghan National Security Forces and pro-Government armed groups, particularly by the National Directorate of Security (NDS) Special Forces and the Khost Protection Force. The same source reports that there were 353 civilian casualties (284 deaths and 69 injured) were recorded from search operations, most of them caused by NDS Special Forces and the Khost Protection Force. UNAMA recorded 64 search operations by ANSF, causing a total of 273 civilian casualties (222 deaths and 51 injured). This represents a sharp increase compared to 2017 when UNAMA verified 92 civilian casualties (63 deaths and 29 injured) resulting from 26 search operations by ANSF. 333

The majority of casualties (240 civilian casualties: 203 deaths, 37 injured) were caused by the NDS Special Forces, either acting alone or in joint operations with IMF, mostly in central, eastern and southern regions. 334 AAN co-director Kate Clark added that while Afghan army special forces also carry out search operations, they do that reportedly without causing any civilian harm. Afghan army special forces are generally supported by US Special Forces while the NDS and the Khost Protection Force gets support from the CIA. 335

UNAMA attributed 51 civilian casualties (41 deaths, 10 injured) during 13 search operations to the Khost Protection Force which it considers as a Pro-Government Armed Group. UNAMA expressed its concern about the significant increase in harm to civilians caused by search operations, particularly by NDS Special Forces and the Khost Protection Force, adding that the high number of fatalities compared to the number of injured suggests the indiscriminate use of force. 336

327 UNAMA, Concern About Rising Number Of Civilian Casualties From Airstrikes, 25 September 2018, url
329 Clark, K., Record Numbers of Civilian Casualties Overall, from Suicide Attacks and Air Strikes: UNAMA reports on the conflict in 2018, AAN, 24 February 2019, url
331 New York Times (The), Mattis Discloses Part of Afghanistan Battle Plan, but It Hasn’t Yet Been Carried Out, 6 October 2017, url
333 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, pp. 41
335 Clark, K., Record Numbers of Civilian Casualties Overall, from Suicide Attacks and Air Strikes: UNAMA reports on the conflict in 2018, AAN, 24 February 2019, url
1.4 Impact of the violence on the civilian population

1.4.1 Civilian casualties

In 2018 the number of civilian deaths has reached a record high level since UNAMA started to document conflict related civilian casualties in 2009:337

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Civilians killed</th>
<th>Civilians injured</th>
<th>Total civilian casualties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>3 804</td>
<td>7 189</td>
<td>10 993</td>
</tr>
<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>
<td>2 969</td>
<td>5 669</td>
<td>8 638</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2 769</td>
<td>4 821</td>
<td>7 590</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>

UNAMA recorded 10 993 civilian casualties (3 804 deaths, 7 189 injured) as a result of the armed conflict in 2018. This represents a 5 % increase in overall civilian casualties and also an 11 % increase in civilian deaths compared to the previous year.338

Anti-Government Elements, including the Taliban and the ISKP were responsible for 63 % of civilian casualties.339 IEDs used by AGEs in both suicide and non-suicide attacks remained the leading cause of civilian casualties in 2018 at 42 %.340 UNAMA recorded a considerable rise in civilian casualties from aerial operations by Pro-Government Forces with a 61 % increase compared to 2017 and the majority attributed to international military forces.341

The appearance of ISKP in Afghanistan after 2014 presented a new threat to civilians.342 As AAN highlighted, despite representing a smaller fighting force than the Taliban, ISKP was responsible for one fifth of all civilian casualties. The number of its civilian casualties more than doubled in 2018 compared to the previous year (from 843 to 1 871). According to AAN, on the pro-government side the rise in civilian casualties from aerial operations, especially by international forces and civilian casualties caused by the NDS Special Forces and the Khost Protection Force were of particular concern.343

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339 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 4
343 Clark, K., Record Numbers of Civilian Casualties Overall, from Suicide Attacks and Air Strikes: UNAMA reports on the conflict in 2018, AAN, 24 February 2019, url
1.4.2 State ability to secure law and order

The Afghan Central Statistics Organization (CSO) noted an annual rise in crime statistics from 6,768 in 2008 to 28,026 in 2015-2016, although the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) stated in 2012 that there are no reliable crime statistics in Afghanistan. According to the Asia Foundation’s 2018 survey, 18.6% of respondents reported having suffered from an act of violence or criminality. Similar to previous year’s findings, the most reported violent or criminal acts were beatings and physical attacks (41.3%).

Kidnapping, robberies and drug-related crimes were reported in several provinces including Farah, Kabul, Kunduz and Balkh. Law enforcers are themselves often the victim of attacks.

According to UNODC, ‘Afghanistan faces tremendous drugs and crime challenges [...]. While around 80% of the world’s opiates comes from Afghanistan, only around 2% is seized in country’. The US Department of State noted in its report by the Bureau of Diplomatic Security that criminal activity is widespread in Afghanistan with transnational organised crime (related to the drug trade) remaining a serious concern. The report added that ‘local law enforcement authorities are generally ineffective in deterring crime and responding to distress calls and alarms’ and response time is considerably longer than Western norms. Bribery is present at all levels of local law enforcement and in some cases officers commit crimes themselves which lead to a lack of confidence in local law enforcement by the civilian population.

According to the Asia Foundation, the confidence amongst Afghans in reporting crimes to the ANA or the ANP decreased in 2018. 45.7% of respondents reported crimes to ANP marking a 5 percentage point decline and reporting crimes to ANA also decreased by 1.5 percentage point to 16.5%.

In its Eligibility Guidelines published in August 2018 UNHCR stated the following on the Afghan state’s ability to protect civilians:

‘Even where the legal framework provides for the protection of human rights, the implementation of Afghanistan’s commitments under national and international law to promote and protect these rights in practice frequently remains a challenge. Afghan governance and the adherence to the rule of law are perceived as particularly weak.

The capability of the Government to protect human rights is undermined in many districts by insecurity and the high number of attacks by AGEs. Rural and unstable areas reportedly suffer from a generally weak formal justice system that is unable to effectively and reliably adjudicate civil and criminal disputes. Government-appointed judges and prosecutors are reportedly frequently unable to remain in such communities, due to insecurity. [...]”

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346 Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2012-2014, 28 May 2012, url, p. 52
347 Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2018, December 2018, url, p. 53
348 Pajhwok Afghan News, Crimes on the increase in Farah, say residents, 3 March 2018, url
349 Pajhwok Afghan News, Rise in drug-related crimes worries ‘Powder Street’ dwellers, 18 November 2018, url
351 Pajhwok Afghan News, 33 crime suspects detained in Balkh raids, url
352 BBC News, Top Afghan commander Razik killed in Kandahar gun attack, 19 October 2018, url; Al Jazeera, Taliban attacks kill police in northern Afghanistan, 1 January 2019, url; RFE/RL, At Least 11 Afghan Police Officers Killed In Taliban Attacks, 3 January 2019, url
353 UNODC, Law Enforcement, n.d., url
354 USDOS, OSAC, Afghanistan 2018 Crime & Safety Report, 16 February 2018, url
355 Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2018, December 2018, url, pp. 53-54
High levels of corruption, challenges to effective governance and a climate of impunity are all reported by observers as factors that weaken the rule of law and undermine the ability of the State to provide protection from human rights violations.1356

In the World Justice Project’s Rule of Law Index 2019, Afghanistan ranked 123 on a list of 126 countries in the world on overall rule-of-law scores.357

For more information on the different segments of the Afghan security apparatus and their ability to act as an actor of protection, please refer to the April 2019 EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Key socio-economic indicators. Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City. For more information on the Afghan state as a possible actor of persecution, please refer to the EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict.

1.4.3 Socio-economic conditions

The Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS) 2016-17 found that ‘the overall macro-economic and security context in the country since 2007 can be broken into two distinct phases, before and after the 2014 security transition’. While the phase before the transition showed ‘higher economic growth and a relatively stable security situation’, after 2014 the growth rate slowed and the security deteriorated.358 Although after 2015 the economy started to show signs of stabilization with a 2.3 % growth in 2016, followed by 2.7 % in 2017,359 the World Bank considered the recovery ‘increasingly vulnerable’.360 Possible disruptions during the presidential and provincial council elections scheduled for 2019 could have negative impact on confidence, investment and growth.361

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), 54 % of the Afghan population is of legal working age (15-64 years), while 44 % is below the age of 15.362 The World Bank stated that nearly three-quarters of the population are younger than 30 years and around 25 % is between 15-30 years.363 As a result, young Afghans enter the labour market in large numbers every year, but employment opportunities cannot keep up with the population growth because of inadequate development resources and poor security.364

According to ALCS 2016-17, 2 million Afghans – 23.9 % of the total labour force – can be classified as unemployed, meaning they do not work or seek employment or work less than eight hours per week.365 Access to productive or remunerative employment is limited, 80 % of employment is considered vulnerable and insecure in the form of self- or own-account employment, day labour or unpaid work.366 Poor job quality and insecure employment are widespread and the World Bank noted that ‘neither education nor employment are a guarantee out of poverty’.367

As a reflection to the slowing growth, poverty increased considerably: 38.3 % of the population was living below the national poverty line in 2012-2013 and this increased to 54.5 % in 2016-2017.368 Afghanistan faced a sharp increase in poverty since 2011-12 with a rise in both urban and rural poverty.

1356 UNHCR, Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan, 30 August 2018, url, pp. 29-30
1357 World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index 2019, url, p. 6
1358 Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, url, p. 2
1359 World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, url, p. 2
1360 World Bank (The), Afghanistan - Overview, 28 October 2018, url
1361 World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, url, pp. 1, 15
1362 ILO, Afghanistan - Employment and Environmental Sustainability Fact Sheets 2017, 2 April 2018, url, p. 1
1363 World Bank (The), Afghanistan - Overview, 28 October 2018, url
1364 World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, url, p. 29
1365 Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, url, p. 59
1366 World Bank (The), Afghanistan Overview, 28 October 2018, url
1367 World Bank (The), Afghanistan Development Update, August 2018, url, p. 30
1368 Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, url, p. 100
rates. Even though the decline in welfare was widespread, urban poverty rates were lower than rural.369

Various education indicators such as attendance and literacy rates, school-life expectancy and gender-equity indicators, showed great progress in Afghanistan in the first decade after the fall of the Taliban but the improvements slowed down and even ‘come to a complete halt’ according to ALCS 2016-17.370

In a 2018 report the World Bank concluded that over 2004-2010 healthcare services showed major improvements in Afghanistan, while in the period of 2011-2016 improvements continued at a slower pace.371 Despite these improvements, Afghanistan’s public health care system, neglected during the years of conflict, continues to face challenges, such as damaged infrastructure, a lack of trained healthcare providers and under-resourced healthcare facilities. The situation is ‘further complicated by a lack of security and pervasive poverty’.372 According to ALCS 2016-17, 93 % of the population lived within a range of two hours from a public clinic, 82.4 % lived less than two hours from a district or provincial hospital and 94.8 % were less than two hours away from a pharmacy.373 Many people in Afghanistan lack access to health care due to the conflict, and trauma-care is regarded as one of the most critical gaps remaining in Afghanistan’s public health care.374

According to ALCS data from 2007-08 until 2016-17, access to clean water and adequate sanitation and hygiene has improved significantly.375 However, sanitation still continues to be poor compared to other countries in the region,376 and access to drinking water still remains a problem for many Afghans.377

For a more extensive assessment of key socio-economic issues at stake in Afghanistan, such as economic growth, employment, poverty and food security, please refer to the April 2019 EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Key socio-economic indicators. Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City.

1.4.4 Refugees, IDPs, returnees

Asia Foundation’s 2018 survey found mobility was a coping mechanism for Afghan households responding to ‘insecurity, uncertainty, and external shocks’.378

Afghanistan has a long history of protracted international displacement. Reportedly a third of the population were displaced in the aftermath of 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.379 The toppling of the Taliban regime in 2001 marked the beginning of a massive wave of returning Afghans. Between 2001 and 2015, UNHCR assisted the return of 4.8 million Afghans, and many more returned without official assistance.380

Afghanistan is the source country of the second largest group of refugees in the world, around 2.6 million, the vast majority of whom are hosted by neighbouring Pakistan and Iran. In addition to the

369 World Bank (The), Afghanistan, Poverty in Afghanistan, Results based on ALCS 2016-17. July 2018, url, p. 8
370 Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, url, p. 139
371 World Bank (The), Progress in the face of insecurity: Improving health outcomes in Afghanistan, 6 March 2018, url, p. 18
372 WHO, From Trauma to Recovery: Addressing Emergency Care in Afghanistan, April 2018, url
373 Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, url, p. 169
374 WHO, From Trauma to Recovery: Addressing Emergency Care in Afghanistan, April 2018, url
375 Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, url, p. 207
376 Afghanistan, CSO, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, 23 September 2018, url, p. 207
377 Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2017, November 2017, url, p. 29
378 Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan people 2017, November 2017, url, p. 29
379 Middle East Research and Information Project, Afghanistan’s Refugee Crisis, 24 September 2001, url
380 World Bank (The), Fragility and population movement in Afghanistan, 3 October 2016, url, p. 1.
registered Afghan refugees, there were 1.5-2 million undocumented Afghans in Iran and 350 000-550 000 in Pakistan.\textsuperscript{381}

Globally, Afghan nationals filed the highest number of asylum claims in 2017 (124 900 claims in 80 different countries), although there was a considerable decrease compared to 2016 (237 800) or 2015 (271 100).\textsuperscript{382} In 2016, more than 190 250 Afghans applied for asylum in EU+ states, while 2017 showed a significant decrease with only 49 135 applications.\textsuperscript{383} In 2018 45 300 asylum applications were in lodged in the EU+ by Afghan nationals.\textsuperscript{384}

According to UNHCR, over six million Afghans returned since 2002, including over 5.2 million registered refugees assisted by UNHCR. In 2016, over 600 000 Afghans returned from the neighbouring Pakistan and Iran, including more than 370 000 refugees, marking a ‘renewed surge in repatriation’. In 2017, Afghan refugee returns decreased to nearly 60 000 and in 2018 the number of refugees returning to Afghanistan dropped below 16 000.\textsuperscript{385} Throughout 2018, IOM responded to the return of 805 850 undocumented Afghans from Iran and Pakistan.\textsuperscript{386}

Internal displacements

According to UNHCR, Afghanistan has seen significant internal displacement caused by conflict and natural disasters. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reported over 600 000 new conflict induced IDPs in 2017 and more than 200 000 Afghans have been displaced by drought, mainly in the western part of the country in 2018. Based on estimations by UNHCR there were two million conflict induced and drought affected IDPs across Afghanistan in 2018.\textsuperscript{387} In 2018, 343 341 individuals have been newly displaced by the conflict and profiled by UNOCHA as IDPs in need of protection and assistance.\textsuperscript{388}

UNOCHA found that greater levels of violence did not necessarily mean greater levels of displacement in 2018. With insurgents mostly engaging in a ‘war of attrition’ and focusing more on surprise assaults instead of efforts to seize and hold population centres, displacement was ‘confined to relatively small-scale and temporal movement in 2018’. With the exception of the assaults against Farah and Ghazni, displacement was limited in duration and less likely reported. In 2017 Nangarhar, Kunduz and Badghis recorded the highest rates of conflict-related displacement, while in 2018 Ghazni, Faryab and Kunduz documented the highest numbers.\textsuperscript{389}

Afghanistan experienced an extended period of dryness in the winter planting season during December 2017 – February 2018. There was a precipitation deficit of more than 70 % in most parts of the country, which had a devastating impact on crops and livestock with the winter wet season being considered critical for successful agricultural production.\textsuperscript{390}

UNOCHA noted in October 2018 that the drought displaced more than 260 000 people in Badghis, Daykundi, Herat and Ghor provinces in the previous six months. Most displaced families stayed in displacement sites either in Herat City, Herat or in displacement sites in and around Qala-e-Naw, the provincial capital of Badghis.\textsuperscript{391}

\textsuperscript{381} UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, url, p. 4
\textsuperscript{382} UNHCR, Global Trends, Forced displacement in 2017, 19 June 2018, url, p. 42
\textsuperscript{383} EASO, Annual report on the situation of asylum in the EU 2017, 18 June 2018, url, p. 37
\textsuperscript{384} EASO, EU+ Asylum Trends, 2018 Overview, 13 February 2019, url, p. 5
\textsuperscript{385} UNHCR, Afghanistan Multi-Year Protection and Solutions Strategy 2019-2021, 31 January 2019, url, p. 3
\textsuperscript{386} IOM, Return of undocumented Afghans, Weekly Situation Report, Jan-Dec 2018/1-5 Jan 2019, url, p. 1
\textsuperscript{387} UNHCR, Afghanistan Multi-Year Protection and Solutions Strategy 2019-2021, 31 January 2019, url, p. 4
\textsuperscript{388} UNHCR, Afghanistan – Operational Fact Sheet, 31 December 2018, url, p. 1
\textsuperscript{389} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 9
\textsuperscript{390} FAO, Afghanistan – Drought response, 23 November 2018, url, p. 2
\textsuperscript{391} UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin – Afghanistan, Issue 78 (1 July – 30 September 2018), 20 October 2018, url, p. 1
For more information on the socio-economic status of IDPs and returnees in Afghanistan’s major cities, please refer to the April 2019 EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Key socio-economic indicators. Focus on Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif and Herat City.

Deportations and voluntary returns

Pakistan hosted around 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees and remained the world’s second largest refugee hosting country after Turkey. The majority of these refugees live in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (58 %) and Balochistan (23 %) provinces bordering Afghanistan. Furthermore, 68 % of Afghan refugees live in urban or rural areas, while 32 % reside in 54 refugee villages across the country.

Proof of Registration (PoR) cards are issued by the Government of Pakistan for the registered Afghan refugees, providing temporary legal stay and freedom of movement for them. According to AAN, the extension policy for PoR cards became ‘more ad-hoc and erratic in 2016’ when the Pakistani government began to extend the cards for shorter periods of time. In October 2018 the PoR cards have been extended by the government until 30 June 2019.

Between August 2017 and February 2018, the Pakistani government, in close collaboration with the Government of Afghanistan and with the 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 and 380 000 of them have already received their Afghan Citizen Cards (ACCs). 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.

In response to several deadly security incidents and deteriorating political relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch stated that the Pakistani authorities mounted a concerted campaign in 2016 to drive Afghans out of the country. In the second half of 2016, a combination of deportation threats and police abuses, including detention, forced evictions, police raids and harassment pushed out nearly 365 000 of the country’s 1.5 million registered Afghan refugees, as well as just over 200 000 undocumented Afghans. In total, in 2016, 620 000 Afghans had returned from Pakistan.

Throughout 2018 a total of 15 699 Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan with the assistance of UNHCR. There were 13 584 returns from Pakistan followed by 1 964 from Iran. Due to the improved protection environment for Afghan refugees and also to the deteriorating security in Afghanistan, the return trend from Pakistan significantly decreased.

According to IOM, a total of 805 850 returns were registered from Iran and Pakistan between 1 January and 31 December 2018, while the total number of returns from Iran was 773 125. IOM

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392 UNHCR, Registered Afghan Refugees in Pakistan, 4 February 2019, url
393 UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, url, p. 6
394 UNHCR, Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees 2018-2019, October 2018, url, p. 6
395 UNHCR, Pakistan: Afghan Refugees Registration Update, 31 October 2018, url
396 Bjelica, J. and Sabawoon, M.A., Still Caught in Regional Tensions? The uncertain destiny of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, AAN, 31 January 2018, url
397 UNHCR, UNHCR welcomes Pakistan’s decision to extend stay of Afghan refugees, 5 October 2018, url
399 IOM, UN Migration Agency Supports Pakistan’s Documented of Undocumented Afghans, 24 May 2018, url
401 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Flash Appeal: One Million People on the Move (Covering Sep-Dec 2016), 7 September 2016, url, p. 3
403 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Dashboard (as of 31 Dec 2016), 22 March 2017, url
404 UNHCR, Afghanistan, Voluntary Repatriation Update, January 2019, url, p. 2
reported in January 2019 that compared to 2017, there has been a massive increase of returns from Iran that is mostly driven by the recent political and economic issues of the country. In May 2018 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 is weakened and unemployment rose. Since Afghans mostly work in Iran’s informal economy, the demand for their work declined drastically.

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 February 2019, Save The Children listed Afghanistan as one of the ten worst conflict-affected countries to be a child.

The armed conflict in Afghanistan has had a serious impact on children who accounted for 28% of all civilian casualties in 2018. UNAMA documented 3,062 child casualties in 2018 (927 deaths and 2,135 injured), representing a slight decrease compared to 2017. Although AGEs were responsible for the majority of child casualties in 2018 (44% of all child casualties, 3% decrease compared to 2017), child casualties attributed to Pro-Government Forces showed an increase as well (34% of all child casualties, 15% increase compared to 2017). UNAMA identified ground engagements between AGEs and PGF as the leading cause for child casualties which resulted in 1,192 child casualties in 2018, representing a 17% decrease compared to 2017.

Nevertheless, the increase in child casualties caused by aerial operations and suicide and complex attacks was particularly concerning. Aerial operations by Pro-Government Forces were responsible for 492 child casualties showing an 85% increase compared to 2017. UNAMA verified 275 child casualties (67 deaths and 208 injured) from suicide and complex attacks throughout 2018. This represents a 33% increase compared to 2017 and a 116% surge in the number of children killed. UNAMA attributed 152 such child casualties (40 deaths and 112 injured) to ISKP, marking a 158% increase compared to the previous year. The Taliban were responsible for 83 such casualties (24 killed and 59 injured), a decline of 35% compared to 2017.

According to the UN Secretary General’s report covering the period January-December 2017, children were recruited to assist in intelligence gathering, to plant IEDs, carry out suicide attacks or were used for combat. In 2018, the recruitment and use of 38 children (37 boys and one girl) was documented, the majority in the eastern region. UNAMA attributed the recruitment and use of 17 children to Tehrik-e Talib Pakistan, five to the Taliban, two to ISKP, one to undetermined AGEs, five to ANSF (four to ALP and one to ANP) and eight to pro-Government armed groups.

According to the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), Afghanistan was one of the countries ‘heavily affected’ by attacks on education and military use of schools from 2013 to

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405 IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans, Weekly Situation Report, Jan-Dec 2018/1-5 Jan 2019, p. 1
406 RFE/RL, Things Are So Bad In Iran That Afghan Migrants Are Going Home, 1 August 2018, url
407 IOM, Return of Undocumented Afghans, Weekly Situation Report, Jan-Dec 2018/1-5 Jan 2019, p. 1
409 Save The Children, Stop the War on Children: Protecting Children in 21st Century Conflict, 14 February 2019, p. 10
415 UN Secretary-General, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, 16 May 2018, p. 5
2017.\(^{417}\) GCPEA’s November 2018 briefing paper on Afghanistan added that attacks on education accelerated again in 2018.\(^{418}\)

Throughout 2018 UNAMA recorded 191 incidents, almost three times the number of incidents in 2017, affecting education, including attacks against schools; the killing, injury and abduction of education personnel; and threats against education facilities and personnel. The increase is attributed mostly to attacks by AGEs on schools that had been used as voter registration centres and polling centres for the parliamentary elections in October 2018.\(^{419}\)

Approximately 50% of the 5,000 polling centres, which also served as voter-registration sites, were located in schools. During the voter registration period, AGEs targeted schools and IEC staff registering voters through IED and suicide attacks, with one incident where the Taliban set fire to a school building. These attacks, combined with threats against teachers, resulted in the closure of schools in some areas. Even the open schools experienced attendance rates decreasing due to the heightened risk of attack.\(^{420}\)

For more information on the Taliban’s attitude towards education and in particular girls’ education, please refer to the EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Individuals targeted by armed actors in the conflict.

According to USDOS, there were reports about members of the security forces sexually abusing and exploiting children along with multiple reports of ‘bacha bazi’.\(^{421}\)

In 2018, UNAMA recorded four incidents of sexual violence against children, three by the ANP and one by the ALP. UNAMA added that since these cases are considered extremely sensitive and are widely underreported, these figures do not reflect the problem in its entirety. Although in February 2018 the revised Penal Code, which explicitly criminalises the practice of bacha bazi, entered into force, accountability for these crimes remains a challenge.\(^{422}\)

For more child specific issues in the context of the conflict of Afghanistan, such as the harmful practice of Bacha Bazi and the recruitment of children by the armed actors in the conflict, please refer to the EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms and the EASO Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan: Recruitment by armed groups from September 2016.

1.5 Geographical Overview

1.5.1 Urban-rural divide

Afghanistan’s history is characterised by a structural urban-rural divide. Urban centres have been hubs for administration, market-driven methods of production, taxation, education, judiciary and reforms. This led to resentment among the rural population, which did not benefit from these developments.\(^{423}\)

On the other hand, AAN’s expert Thomas Ruttig stated in 2011 that the rural-urban divide was not ‘so hermetic’ anymore due to a wave of reforms which date back to the beginning of the 20th century. Moreover, migration from the provinces towards bigger cities, the constant exchange between villages and towns and the distribution of modern means of communications around the country have

\(^{417}\) GCPEA, Education under Attack 2018, May 2018, [url](http://example.com), pp. 32-33

\(^{418}\) GCPEA, Attacks on Education in Afghanistan, Briefing Paper, November 2018, [url](http://example.com), p. 3

\(^{419}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](http://example.com), p. 15


contributed to the mitigation of this still existing gap. According to the Asia Foundation’s Survey of 2018, rural respondents cited foreign intervention almost twice as often as urban respondents as a reason for pessimism. Insecurity in general was mentioned as a reason for pessimism by 76% of the urban interviewees and by 71% of the rural population. Furthermore, urban respondents were more likely to fear for their personal safety than interviewees living in rural areas. Respondents from rural areas, on the other hand, more frequently mentioned ‘some groups’ as being responsible for posing security threats. Respondents from rural areas, on the other hand, more frequently mentioned ‘some groups’ as being responsible for posing security threats. In August 2018 Taliban insurgents carried out a large-scale attack on Ghazni city, spreading concerns about the possibility of another major attack in the south-east. According to the Afghan news-agency Tolonews in late August 2018, residents of Gardez in Paktya, Kunduz city, Ghazni city, Farah city and Maimana expressed their concerns over the possible collapse of these areas due to Taliban threat. Moreover, in November 2018 security deteriorated in Hazara dominated areas of western Ghazni and eastern Uruzgan provinces, causing the displacement of Hazara families. Still, according to US military sources quoted by SIGAR, the provincial centres of all of Afghanistan’s provinces were under Afghan government control or influence, as of December 2018. As reported by the UN Secretary-General in his February 2019 report, ‘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’. According to the UN Secretary-General’s report of February 2019, suicide attacks decreased by 61% between mid-November 2018 and early February 2019 compared with the same period in 2017, probably because of effective interdiction efforts in Kabul city and Jalalabad. On the other hand ‘[a]nti-Government Elements increased their reliance on suicide and complex attacks and shifted their intended targets more and more towards the civilian population [throughout 2018]’, and ‘suicide and complex attacks remained the leading cause of civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements’. Between mid-November 2018 and February 2019 the city of Kabul witnessed several high-profile attacks despite ‘an overall lower tempo of suicide and complex attacks nationwide’. Further, in Kabul province suicide and complex attacks caused 95% of all civilian casualties, with more

424 Ruttig, T., Afghanistan’s not so-hermetic rural-urban divide, AAN, 26 May 2011, url
425 Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2018, 4 December 2018, url, p. 26
426 Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2018, 4 December 2018, url, p. 3
427 Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2018, 4 December 2018, url, p. 4
428 Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2018, 4 December 2018, url, p. 5
429 BBC News, Why are the Taliban resurgent in Afghanistan?, 5 January 2016, url
430 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, url, p. 6
431 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, url, p. 6
433 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, url, p. 6
434 SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, url, p. 71
435 UN Secretary General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, url, p. 6
436 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, url, p. 6
438 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, url, p. 6
than half of them caused by incidents claimed by ISKP. According to the Landinfo [informal translation] in September 2018, a significant amount of reported incidents in Kabul city related to the use of IEDs. During parliamentary elections in October 2018, the cities of Kunduz and Kabul recorded the highest numbers of incidents, claimed by Taliban insurgents and ISKP. Moreover, even though the Taliban prevented voters from participating in the election process in regions under their influence or control, the election could not be significantly disrupted in urban areas - despite the high number of security incidents.

Displacement patterns due to conflict shifted in 2018: whilst in 2017 the provinces with the highest displacement rates were Nangarhar, Kunduz and Badghis, in 2018 Ghazni, Faryab and Kunduz witnessed the highest numbers. In 2018 around 550,000 Afghans left their homes either due to conflict or drought and moved into district centres, seeking for better basic services and income-generating opportunities. As of September 2018, more than 250,000 people were displaced due to drought in the western region, alone between June and August 2018 263,000 people were displaced within Badghis and Herat. Qala-e-Naw in Badghis, for instance, hosted around 120,000 newly displaced IDPs, as of mid-September 2018. Furthermore, in 2018 Afghanistan witnessed the return of more than 800,000 undocumented Afghans from Iran and Pakistan. While returns from Pakistan decreased by 70% compared to 2017, the number of returnees from Iran rose from 462,000 in 2017 to 760,000 in 2018. Returnees from Iran entered Afghanistan through the border crossings of Milak in Nimroz and Islam Qala in Herat provinces; whereas Afghans returning from Pakistan passed through Torkham in Nangarhar and Spin Boldak in Kandahar provinces. Moreover, in Farah province, one out of four residents was either a returnee or an IDP as of September 2018.

Included below is the conflict severity map produced by UNOCHA. The conflict severity is derived from three indicators: armed clashes and airstrikes; civilian casualties, and conflict induced displacement. The shading on the map is based on an average ranking of all districts on these indicators.

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439 Norway, Landinfo, Respons, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sentrale regionen og i det sentrale høylandet-oppdatering, 5 September 2018, url, p. 4
440 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, url, p. 6
441 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 9
443 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Drought Response, Situation Report No. 2 (as of 16 September 2018), 16 September 2018, url, p. 1
445 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Drought Response, Situation Report No. 2 (as of 16 September 2018), 16 September 2018, url
448 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 2
1.5.2 Regional differences

According to the February 2019 report by the UN Secretary General, the southern region saw the highest number of incidents between November 2018 and February 2019, followed by the eastern and northern regions, which accounted for 67% of all incidents. Even if the amount of suicide attacks decreased, the number of airstrikes by the Afghan Air Force and international military forces increased by 51% compared to 2017. Security concerns increased in Kandahar after the provincial police chief and the provincial head NDS were killed in Kandahar city in October 2018. Moreover, as reported by US military sources, most of the security incidents initiated by anti-government groups recorded in the first ten months of 2018, occurred in the provinces of Badghis, Farah, Faryab, Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan and Herat; Herat and Badghis witnessed the greatest increase in these types of attacks since August 2018. From October to December 2018 however, the province with the highest rate of AGE offensives was Farah, followed by Helmand and Faryab. According to a dataset from August 2018 quoted by UNOCHA, 70% of men did not feel safe when travelling to work, the mosque, health and education facilities or the market, with this figures reaching a peak of 95% in Uruzgan and 92% in Helmand provinces. As reported by a military analyst specialised on issues relating to

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449 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 2
450 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, url, p. 6
451 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, url, p. 6
452 SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, url, pp. 73-74
Afghanistan, throughout 2018 battles took also place in provinces that were previously considered relatively calm.\textsuperscript{454}

ISKP remained present in the eastern region, notably in Nangarhar province, where its fighters claimed responsibility for suicide and complex attacks throughout 2018. Also, ISKP claimed attacks in Kabul city, ‘reflecting a high level of civilian harm caused by each attack in the densely populated city’.\textsuperscript{455} Furthermore, clashes between ISKP and the Taliban were reported in Nangarhar and in Kunar provinces.\textsuperscript{456}

According to a military analyst specialized on issues relating to Afghanistan, there are differences between the strategies of ISKP and the Taliban: whilst the latter focus their attacks mostly against security forces or Afghan government employees, trying to avoid ‘collateral damage’ among the civilian population, ISKP also targets Shias as well as non-cooperating civilians, aiming to reach high numbers of civilian casualties. It thus allows for a high number of ‘collateral damage’.\textsuperscript{457}

Map 3 was created by the Austrian COI Department and provides an overview of the security incidents from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019 per province based on Global Incident Map (GIM) data. In total, 5 232 security incidents were found in open media sources by the GIM website.\textsuperscript{458}

\textsuperscript{454} Military analyst, confidential communication, 14 January 2019
\textsuperscript{455} UNAMA, Afghanistan, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, February 2019, url, p. 21
\textsuperscript{456} UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, url, p. 7
\textsuperscript{457} Military analyst, confidential communication, 14 January 2019
\textsuperscript{458} Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Security Incidents [Map], 25 March 2019
Map 3: Overview of security incidents per province (1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019)

459 Global Incident Map collects data on security-related incidents connected to terrorism worldwide on the basis of global online news media reports and provides a geo-referenced display of such incidents, broken down by types, in an online map. See Methodology.
1.5.3 Government versus Taliban control

As stated by AAN’s co-director Kate Clark in May 2017, many assessments of territorial control in Afghanistan have been made in recent years. There have been debates over figures and also over the definition of the word ‘control’; moreover, assertions have been made about the meaning of ‘loss of government control’, partly linked to deliberate withdrawals to areas deemed to be of more strategical importance.460

This security report provides information from territorial assessments by both the US military and the Taliban. As both subjects are actors in the conflict, a certain degree of propaganda and ‘information operations’ must be taken into account.461 Therefore, assessments by the US war and terrorism blog Long War Journal (LWJ) and a military analyst specialized on issues relating to Afghanistan were also included. Furthermore, according to AAN’s expert Thomas Ruttig, there are differing counts of the number of districts, ranging from 379 to 407;462 this has to be considered when analysing assessments by different sources.

According to US military sources quoted by SIGAR, in October 2018 control over Afghanistan’s districts, population, and territory became more contested, Afghan government control or influence continued to decline, and insurgent control or influence increased slightly since July 2018.463 The Afghan government’s control or influence over its districts decreased by nearly two percentage points since July to 53.8 % and the number of contested districts rose to 33.9 %.464 The percentage of the population living in districts under Afghan government control or influence, which from May 2017 until July 2018 was largely stagnant at around 65 %, decreased to 63.5 % in October.465 The number of inhabitants of contested areas increased to 8.5 million people (25.6 % of the population), an increase by nearly two percentage-points compared to the same period in 2017.466 Sources quoted by SIGAR identified the provinces with the most insurgent-controlled or influenced districts as Kunduz, Uruzgan, and Helmand.467

SIGAR receives its data over territorial control from Resolute Support, the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan, which has the tasks of training, advising and assisting Afghan security forces.468 Whilst the indicators used by RS to assess territorial control are ‘government control’, ‘government influence’, ‘insurgent activity’ and ‘contested’, the Long War Journal does not assess ‘government influence’, as they consider it no more than a measure of ‘control’.469

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460 Clark, K., Looking at the ‘Nicholson plan’: A bid to tilt the Afghan war in the government’s favour, AAN, 24 May 2017, url
462 Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, url
463 SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, url, p. 68
464 SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, url, p. 69
465 SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, url, p. 65
466 SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, url, p. 69
467 SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, url, p. 71
468 SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, url, p. 76
469 LWJ, Analysis: US military downplays district control as Taliban gains ground in Afghanistan, 31 January 2019, url
The Taliban’s 2018 reporting claims that about 61 of Afghanistan’s districts along with their administrative centres were under complete control of insurgents. In the remaining districts, government control is purportedly limited to district administrative centres and a few are under the complete control of Afghan government.\textsuperscript{471}

\textsuperscript{470} SIGAR, Quarterly report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, \url{url}, p. 71
\textsuperscript{471} Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, \url{url}
As of 31 December 2018, the Taliban published the following territorial control map:

Map 5: Taliban territorial control map; source: Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan\(^{472}\) - Note: The acronym IEA in the legend means Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan [The Taliban].

LWJ reported in late January 2019 that the Afghan government controlled 35.1% of Afghanistan’s 407 districts, and the Taliban ruled over another 13% in 2018. The remaining 49.6% were contested, while seven districts (or 1.7%) could not be accurately assessed.\(^{473}\) The methodology of LWJ is described as follows:

‘The primary data and research behind this are based on open-source information, such as press reports and information provided by government agencies and the Taliban. This is a living map that LWJ frequently updates as verifiable research is conducted to support control changes. Any “Unconfirmed” district colored orange has some level of claim-of-control made by the Taliban, but either has not yet been—or can not 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. A “Controlled” district may mean the Taliban is openly administering a district, providing services and security, and also running the local courts.’\(^{474}\)

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\(^{472}\) Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url](#)

\(^{473}\) LWJ, Analysis: US military downplays district control as Taliban gains ground in Afghanistan, 31 January 2019, [url](#)

\(^{474}\) LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, as of 23 April 2019, [url](#)
A military analyst specialized in Afghanistan issues reported in January 2019 that around 39% of Afghan districts were under control of the Afghan government and 37% were controlled by Taliban; these areas were relatively calm and clashes were reported occasionally. Around 20% were highly contested and ISKP controlled around 4% of the districts.\footnote{Military analyst, confidential communication, 14 January 2019}

AAN expert Kate Clark stated in May 2017 that ‘regardless of all this [the various assessments of territorial control], the trend is clear – and not good: the government has been steadily losing territory since the end of 2014’.\footnote{Clark, K., Looking at the ‘Nicholson plan’: A bid to tilt the Afghan war in the government’s favour, AAN, 24 May 2017}
1.6 Mobility

Afghanistan’s most important road is Highway 1, often referred to as the ‘Ring Road’. Encircling the central parts of the country, Highway 1 connects Afghanistan’s main urban centres Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat and Kandahar.\(^{478}\) While President Ashraf Ghani reportedly pledged to complete the missing sections of the Ring Road within nine months in 2015,\(^{479}\) some parts allegedly still remain unpaved, e.g. about 200 kilometres between Badghis and Faryab.\(^{480}\) Additionally, the notoriously overcrowded and desolate Salang Tunnel at the Salang Pass between Parwan and Baghlan remains a bottleneck between Kabul and the northern parts of the country.\(^{481}\)

Besides bad road conditions, which reportedly did not improve substantially despite considerable funding of construction projects by foreign donors from 2001 onwards,\(^{482}\) the volatile security situation impedes safe passage in many parts of the country. Clashes between government forces and insurgents,\(^{483}\) as well as checkpoints established by insurgents,\(^{484}\) improvised explosive devices (IEDs),\(^{485}\) kidnappings\(^{486}\) and armed robberies by various groups\(^{487}\) reportedly caused casualties on many roads in Afghanistan in 2018 and early 2019.

Most notably, the Taliban were threatening strategic parts of the Ring Road in Ghazni, Baghlan, and on the highway linking Herat to Kandahar in the western province of Faryab in 2018.\(^{488}\) Already in 2013 AAN reported an upsurge in insurgent attacks on Highway 1 in Ghazni. This part of the Ring Road is pivotal for civilian and military transport, as it connects Kabul to Kandahar in southern Afghanistan.\(^{489}\) In August 2018, a major Taliban attack on Ghazni City destroyed parts of the road and contaminated it with IEDs.\(^{490}\) While the highway was cleared subsequently, UNOCHA warned that ‘[...] travel from Kabul to Ghazni via Highway 1 is possible but remains risky, notably due to sporadic fighting between Saidabad, Wardak, and Ghazni.’\(^{491}\) In December 2018, AAN reported that the Taliban continued to put pressure on the Kabul-Kandahar highway in Ghazni.\(^{492}\) Similarly, the Taliban began to make strategic inroads into Baghlan in 2014. A pivotal section of the Ring Road runs through this province, as it connects Kabul with the north of the country. According to AAN, the Taliban strategically blocked parts of the Baghlan-Balkh highway during large-scale attacks on Kunduz in

\(^{478}\) Diplomat (The), Kabul’s Plan to Realize Afghanistan’s Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, url; AAN, Going in Circles: The never-ending story of Afghanistan’s unfinished Ring Road, 16 January 2015, url

\(^{479}\) Suroush, Q., Going in Circles: The never-ending story of Afghanistan’s unfinished Ring Road, AAN, 16 January 2015, url

\(^{480}\) SIGAR, Afghanistan’s Ring Road from Qeysar to Laman: After more than 12 years and over $249 million spent, the project is only 15 percent complete, June 2018, url, p. 4

\(^{481}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Current Salang tunnel insufficient, says President Ghani, 15 October 2018, url; Diplomat (The), Fixing the Salang Pass Tunnel, 21 October 2015, url

\(^{482}\) SIGAR, Afghanistan’s Ring Road from Qeysar to Laman: After more than 12 years and over $249 million spent, the project is only 15 percent complete, June 2018, url, p. 4; Suroush, Q., Going in Circles: The never-ending story of Afghanistan’s unfinished Ring Road, AAN, 16 January 2015, url

\(^{483}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Commuters say insecurity worsens on Balkh-Jawzjan road, 18 November 2018, url

\(^{484}\) Salaam Times, Afghan forces move to secure highways against Taliban’s ‘customs tax’ extortion, 14 December 2018, url


\(^{486}\) CBS News, Taliban kidnaps more than 100 bus passengers in northern Afghanistan, 20 August 2018, url; Khaama Press, Taliban militants kidnap 170 passengers from Kunduz-Takhar highway, 20 August 2018, url; Bakhtar News, Taliban Abduct Commuters of Three Buses in Kunduz-Takhar Highway, 20 August 2018, url

\(^{487}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Herat truck drivers say intimidated for extortion by police, 5 January 2019, url

\(^{488}\) Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, url; Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting Intensifies on one of Afghanistan’s Major Frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 ANA soldiers killed in Kunduz attack, 26 April 2018, url

\(^{489}\) Osman, B., The Road to Ghazni: Bombs, battles and blockades, AAN, 13 July 2013, url

\(^{490}\) UNO, ‘No safe way’ into battle-scarred Afghan city of Ghazni to deliver aid as traumatized children search for parents, 17 August 2018, url

\(^{491}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Conflict Update No. 4, 20 August 2018, url

\(^{492}\) Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, url
Afghanistan’s north in 2015 and 2018 in order to disrupt troop movements by the government forces. AAN links the success of the Taliban in holding Kunduz for two weeks in 2015 to this strategy.  

According to the magazine Foreign Affairs, the Taliban set up checkpoints at strategic points on the Ring Road, in order to conduct identity checks and arrest or execute persons. According to Foreign Affairs this is a strategy that is much less costly and more sustainable for them than capturing urban centres. AAN noted in 2016 that this is a viable method to ‘[…] undermine the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), both psychologically and physically,’ as it renders travelling for government-affiliated persons very dangerous and blocks troop movements. Furthermore, collecting ‘customs duties’ along main roads is a source of revenue for the Taliban. 

Afghanistan’s major population centres can be reached either by road or by plane. According to the airport map produced by the Austrian Country of Origin Information unit, scheduled passenger services to domestic and international destinations exist from Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, and Mazar-e-Sharif. Hamid Karzai International Airport (KBL) is located at a distance of 16 kilometres from Kabul’s city centre. In July 2018, at least 14 persons reportedly died in a suicide attack near the airport’s main entrance. Herat International Airport (HEA) is situated at the Kandahar-Herat highway, approximately 20 kilometres south of the city centre of Herat. Mazar-e-Sharif International Airport (MZR) is located to the east of Mazar-e-Sharif’s city centre, next to the German army base Camp Marmal. Domestic airports with scheduled passenger services also exist in the provinces of Farah, Helmand, Nimroz, and Uruzgan, while scheduled flights to the provincial capitals of Badakhshan, Bamyan, and Ghor have been suspended since January 2018 after a considerable number of Kam Air staff members died in an attack in Kabul. This allegedly poses a problem to the local population as road travel to the provinces is reportedly unsafe due to insurgent activity, a lack of law enforcement and bad road conditions.

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494 Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, x

495 Salaam Times, Afghan forces move to secure highways against Taliban’s ‘customs tax’ extortion, 14 December 2018.

496 Austria, BFA-Staatsendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

497 Austria, BFA-Staatsendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

498 Hamid Karzai International Airport, Hamid Karzai International Airport, n.d.

499 Al Jazeera, Several dead in Kabul suicide blast as exiled VP Dostum returns, 23 July 2018.

500 Afghanistan, Civil Aviation Authority, Aeronautical Information Publication, 3 January 2019, p. 98

501 Afghanistan, Civil Aviation Authority, Aeronautical Information Publication, 3 January 2019, p. 238; Airportia, Mazar-I-Sharif International Airport MZR, n.d.

502 Austria, BFA-Staatsendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019

Map 7: Afghanistan – Airports

Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019
2. Regional description of the security situation in Afghanistan

In the following sections, security trends are explained in greater detail, per geographic subdivision (Kabul City and 34 provinces). In each provincial section a general description of the province contains information on the geography and population, on the conflict background, including the actors in the conflict and the Taliban presence in the province. A second part describes recent trends in the security situation, including the nature of the violence, frequency, targets, locations, and victims within a timeframe from 1 January 2018 until 28 February 2019. Finally, a separate part is dedicated to displacements. Under the sub-sections several incidents are described. These should be read as illustrations of trends in the security situation and not as an exhaustive list of incidents.

2.1 Kabul city

2.1.1 General description of the city

Kabul is the capital of Afghanistan, and also a district in Kabul province. It is the most populous city in Afghanistan, with an estimated population of 4,117,414 inhabitants for 2018/19. However, the population figure is disputed, with some sources claiming that it amounts to almost 6 million. According to a 2017 report by AAN expert Fabrizio Foschini for the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), the city, which before 2001 counted 12 wards (also referred to as Police Districts, PDs, or nahia), expanded to 22 PDs as a result of its significant demographic growth and horizontal expansion. Kabul city hosts an airport, which is served by international and domestic passenger flights as of March 2019.

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505 Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, p. 5
506 Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked, A geographical guide to a metropolis in the making, AAN, 19 March 2019, p. 1
507 Foschini, F., Kabul and the challenge of dwindling foreign aid, USIP, April 2017, pp. 7-8
508 Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked, A geographical guide to a metropolis in the making, AAN, 19 March 2019, p. 4
509 Foschini, F., Kabul and the challenge of dwindling foreign aid, USIP, April 2017, pp. 7-8
510 Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019
The city is composed 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, foreign 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, Karte Se, Karte Chahar, Karte Naw and the microraions (Soviet-style residential districts). Finally, the third ring, which sprouted after 2001, is mainly populated by ‘recent immigrants’ (Afghan immigrants from the provinces), except for some high-profile residential compounds for VIPs.

As for the ethnic distribution of the city’s population, Kabul is a melting pot for various ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, and each one of them settled in specific places, according to the geographical position of their home provinces: this applies to the ancient city, as well as to neighbourhoods further out, and it becomes more prominent in the unplanned areas. In the most recently settled areas residents depend mostly on qawmi (a social unit based on kinship, residence and occupation) networks in order to find shelter, jobs and collectively advance their settlement conditions. On the other hand, in the central areas of the city, the movement of residents and their change of residence have a disruptive effect on social networks, exemplified by the often-heard complaint “one does not know one’s neighbours anymore”.

Some examples of the ethnic distribution of the Kabul population are the following: Hazaras have settled mainly in the western neighbourhood of Chandawal in downtown Kabul and in Dasht-e-Barchi, as well as Karte Se in the outskirts; Tajiks populate Payan Chawk, Bala Chawk and Ali Mordan in the old city, and northern parts of the periphery like Khairkhana; Pashtuns are mostly present in the eastern part of down-town Kabul, Bala Hisar, and, further, east and south of the periphery like in Karte Naw and Binihisar, but also in the western neighbourhoods of Kota-e-Sangi and Bazaar-e-Company.

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511 Austria, BFA-Staatsendokumentation, Kabul Police Districts [Map], 13 February 2019
512 Foschini, F., Kabul and the challenge of dwindling foreign aid, USIP, April 2017, url, p. 6
513 Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked, A geographical guide to a metropolis in the making, AAN, 19 March 2019, url, p. 3
514 Foschini, F., Kabul and the challenge of dwindling foreign aid, USIP, April 2017, url, p. 6
515 Noori, W., A., Challenges of Traffic Development in Kabul City, University of Giessen, 2010, url, pp. 35-36
516 Foschini, F., Kabul and the challenge of dwindling foreign aid, USIP, April 2017, url, pp. 6-8
517 Foschini, F., Kabul Unpacked, A geographical guide to a metropolis in the making, AAN, 19 March 2019, url, p. 3
518 Noori, W., A., Challenges of Traffic Development in Kabul City, University of Giessen, 2010, url, pp. 35-36; Foschini, F., Kabul and the challenge of dwindling foreign aid, USIP, April 2017, url, p. 6
Hindus and Sikhs settled in the heart of the city in Hindu Gozar Street. In the neighbourhoods which are densely populated by recent immigrants sharing the same regional or ethnic background, 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. Moreover, transportation in each area was monopolised by the ethnic group which had the majority there, as of 2009.

Because of frequent high-profile attacks on the city throughout 2017, the Afghan government announced in August 2017 the development of a new security plan for Kabul, called ‘the Green Belt’ (also Zarghun Belt, in Pashtu), aimed at the implementation of new or improved security measures within the city, like setting up more checkpoints, installing vehicle barriers and metal gates, establishing scanners at the four gates to Kabul city in Pul-e Charkhi, Company, Tank-e Logar and Sar-e Kotal, deploying K9 units detecting explosives and illegal materials, and other measures. The plan was supposed to first cover the ‘diplomatic area’, also referred to as the Green Zone, and then be expanded to the north of Wazir Akbar Khan, Sherpur and an area along the road leading to the airport. Moreover, a special unit within the Afghan police called the Crisis Response Unit was created, in order to prevent and respond to attacks, as reported by Landinfo [informal translation].

2.1.2 Conflict background and actors in Kabul city

As reported by Landinfo [informal translation] in September 2018, there is reason to believe that a significant proportion of recorded incidents involving the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) have taken place in Kabul city. At the same time, IEDs are also frequently used in attacks on the road network in the province as a whole. In Kabul, there is rarely direct fighting, and even when exchanges of fire take place between conflict parties, they are not fighting over territorial control. The picture of conflict in Kabul city is characterised by asymmetric tactical warfare with suicide bombers and IEDs as weapons of attack.

The ISKP plays a relevant role in Kabul city, where it has perpetrated a significant amount of attacks. Moreover, according to AAN’s expert Thomas Ruttig, the capital city offers infrastructure, logistics and possible personnel that could be used by the Haqqani network, Taliban groups, splinter groups claiming its affiliation to the IS and Pakistani anti-Shia groups.

2.1.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.1.3.1 General

In 2018 UNAMA documented 1,686 civilian casualties (554 deaths and 1,132 injured) in Kabul city from suicide and complex attacks. ‘Out of 65 suicide and complex attacks across the country in 2018, 28 incidents occurred in Kabul city’. This represents an increase of 5% compared to 2017. UNAMA
reported that ‘[t]he attacks perpetrated in Kabul mainly targeted civilians, including the civilian Government administration, places of worship, education facilities, election-related sites and other “soft” targets’. 528 Though, between 16 November 2018 and 7 February 2019, suicide attacks decreased by 61%, compared with the same period the year before: ‘[…] possibly reflecting successful interdiction efforts by Afghan National Defence and Security Forces in the cities of Kabul and Jalalabad […]’. 529

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 288 incidents related to insurgents in Kabul city. 530 Throughout 2018, attacks targeting government offices, 531 Afghan security forces, 532 journalists, 533 a ceremony in front of the airport, 534 Muslim clerics, 535 Shia worshippers, 536 an educational centre, 537 protesters, 538 a sports’ club 539 and a voter registration centre 540 were claimed by 541 or attributed to ISKP. 542 Many of these attacks significantly affected the Hazara population, as the participants of the protest were mainly Hazara and the educational centre, the sports clubs as well as the registration centre are all located in the Hazara dominated Dasht-e-Barchi neighbourhood (located in Police District, PD, 6). 543 For instance, in April 2018, a suicide bomber attacked a voter registration centre in Dasht-e-Barchi, killing 57 people and injuring an additional 119. 544 Moreover, in early March 2019 a mortar attack killed at least eleven people and injured 95 near a gathering in Dasht-e-Barchi to mark the anniversary of the death of Abdul Ali Mazari, a prominent former leader of the Hazara community. 545

Further attacks affecting the Shia community occurred during Nowruz celebrations in another area of Kabul city: in March 2018, at least 31 people were killed and 65 were wounded in a suicide attack near the Karte Sakhi shrine, where hundreds – many of them Shia - had gathered to celebrate the start of

529 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, url
530 Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, url, accessed 1 March 2019
531 Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: At least twelve killed in Kabul suicide blast, 11 June 2018, url; CNN, ISIS claims attack on Afghan Interior Ministry, 30 May 2018, url
532 Pajhwok Afghan News, Police among 4 dead as blasts, clashes rock Kabul, 9 May 2018, url
533 Die Zeit, Mindestens 25 Tote nach Doppelschlag in Kabul, 30 April 2018, url
534 DW, Afghanistan: Deadly suicide attack at Kabul airport as exiled VP Dostum returns, 22 July 2018, url
535 Reuters, Afghan president backs suicide bomb fatwa after 14 killed, 5 June 2018, url
536 BBC News, Kabul Sakhi shrine: ‘Dozens dead’ in New Year attack, 21 March 2018, url
537 Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: ISIL Suicide bomber targets school in Kabul, 16 August 2018, url
538 Die Zeit, Mehrere Tote bei Anschlag nahe Anti-Taliban-Demo, 12 November 2018, url
539 Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Two journalists among 20 killed in Kabul blasts, 6 September 2018, url; BBC News, Afghanistan conflict: Bombers kill 20 at Kabul sports club, 5 September 2018, url
540 UNAMA, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Election-Related Attacks and Abuses during the Initial Voter Registration Period, 10 May 2018, url, pp. 2-3
541 CNN, ISIS claims attack on Afghan Interior Ministry, 30 May 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Police among 4 dead as blasts, crashes rock Kabul, 9 May 2018, url
542 DW, Afghanistan: Deadly suicide attack at Kabul airport as exiled VP Dostum returns, 22 July 2018, url
543 Reuters, Afghan president backs suicide bomb fatwa after 14 killed, 5 June 2018, url; UNAMA, Protection of civilians in armed conflict: Election-Related Attacks and Abuses during the Initial Voter Registration Period, 10 May 2018, url, pp. 2-3
544 Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Two journalists among 20 killed in Kabul blasts, 6 September 2018, url; BBC News, Afghanistan conflict: Bombers kill 20 at Kabul sports club, 5 September 2018, url
545 Die Zeit, Mehrere Tote bei Anschlag nahe Anti-Taliban-Demo, 12 November 2018, url; Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Two journalists among 20 killed in Kabul blasts, 6 September 2018, url; BBC News, Afghanistan conflict: Bombers kill 20 at Kabul sports club, 5 September 2018, url; UNAMA, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Election-Related Attacks and Abuses during the Initial Voter Registration Period, 10 May 2018, url; Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: ISIL Suicide bomber targets school in Kabul, 16 August 2018, url
546 BBC News, Afghanistan: Kabul voter centre suicide attack kills 57, 22 April 2018, url
547 Al Jazeera, Death toll rises to 11 in attack on Shia gathering in Kabul, 8 March 2019, url
Nowruz, the New Year festivity. The attack was claimed by ISKP. The same group carried out an attack through remote-controlled bombs during Nowruz celebrations in March 2019, killing at least six persons; this attack too, like the one of 2018, targeted an area close to the Karte Sakhi shrine. Moreover, further representative ISKP-related security incidents were recorded in Kabul city throughout 2018: at least 13 people were killed and 31 wounded in a suicide bombing at the Department of Rural Rehabilitation and Development in June 2018. Dual suicide bombings occurred in Kabul in the Shash Darak area in April 2018, close to NATO headquarters, several embassies, foreign offices and the Afghan intelligence service. The attack killed 25 and wounded 45 people.

The deadliest attack during parliamentary elections in October 2018 was carried out by ISKP outside a polling station in Kabul city killing 13 persons and injuring 40. IEC staff members and Afghan National Police officers performing civilian functions were among the fatalities.

The Taliban also claimed attacks throughout 2018: The most prominent security incident occurred in late January, when a 'van painted to look like an ambulance' exploded outside of a government compound in Kabul city, killing 114 and wounding 229 civilians. In early January, Taliban fighters stormed the Intercontinental Hotel (PD 4), killing at least 24 civilians and injuring 15. Moreover, Taliban members carried out an attack against a foreign security contractors’ compound in Pul-e-Charkhi (PD 9) in November, killing and wounding employees and other civilians. Furthermore, the insurgents claimed responsibility for a car bomb in mid January 2019 in front of the ‘heavily fortified’ Green Village compound, that killed security guards and wounded more than 100 people. The Taliban publicly announced its opposition to parliamentary elections, and they threatened voters and volunteers, attacked polling centres, fired mortar shells and detonated bombs all over the country. Although security in Kabul city was tight, more than a dozen explosions were reported.

In January 2018, AAN expert Thomas Ruttig described the difficulties of attributing security incidents to different anti-government groups. ISKP often claims attacks not carried out by its fighters, whereas the Taliban often deny their involvement in assaults causing high numbers of civilian casualties. For instance, when a suicide attack targeting a gathering of clerics at the Uranus wedding hall caused the
death of at least 50 people in November 2018, the Taliban denied their involvement in the incident and condemned it. Furthermore, there was no claim of responsibility by ISKP.

2.1.3.2 Displacement

As many as two-thirds of all Afghans displaced outside their province are moving towards the five regional capitals, and Kabul’s growth has been particularly significant. The total number of IDPs in Kabul is not known. Movement to and within the city is fluid and many return regularly to their area of origin during more peaceful periods. In September 2018, the Afghan Minister of Refugees and Repatriation estimated the total number of IDPs in Kabul to be from 70 000 to 80 000 people. Research carried out by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) on displacement in Kabul found that 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, localised 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.

IDPs in Kabul often settle in areas at the outskirts of the capital, such as Bagrami and PDs 8, 12, 13, 16 and 21. They do not necessarily live separated from the other urban dwellers and often mingle 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 one of the sixty to seventy informal and illegal settlements around the city. These are often referred to as ‘(Kabul) Informal Settlements’, ISETs or KIS (most of them not in accordance with the Kabul City Master Plan) and include some of the poorest and most vulnerable households in the city.

In December 2017, the Afghanistan Protection Cluster reported on worrying indications of rising poverty in Kabul’s KIS-sites, contributing to street begging, over-crowded accommodation, and heightened risks of gender-based violence. A study by the NGO IMPACT Initiatives, published in December 2017, indicated a low percentage of exchange between people residing within and outside ISET’s, revealing two distinct sub-communities within the broader community and a perceived isolation of the IDP families from surrounding host communities. The IDPs arriving and residing in Kabul add pressure on the community, basic services and social infrastructure, strongly affecting the
absorption capacity of the city. More than 80% of the Kabul IDP respondents of a Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) study published in January 2018 listed access to food and water as a major challenge in their daily lives. Afghanistan’s capital is facing a severe water shortage for some years now, seriously affecting already vulnerable groups like displaced people.

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 increased protection risks in their daily life and are often forced into secondary displacement and negative coping strategies like child labour, early marriage and reducing quality and quantity of food. Child labour appears particularly prevalent among the urban displaced in Kabul, due to the greater economic vulnerability of IDPs in the capital and the fact that the city’s relatively vibrant economy creates more demand for child labour. IDPs in Kabul are more likely than their counterparts in the general population to be underemployed. Their lack of marketable skills for urban markets restricts them to unstable work. They mostly work as unskilled day labourers, competing for low paid and precarious jobs in the construction sector and to a lesser extent in agriculture.

Apart from internal displacement due to the conflict in Afghanistan, Kabul city sees large flows of Afghan refugees returning from neighboring countries (Pakistan and Iran), putting further strain on the city’s services and its capacity to reintegrate these displaced people. A study by Oxfam among returnee populations in Kabul city found that most returnees depend on relatives for accommodation and other in-kind support. Those who have been in Kabul for several years reported a deterioration of the situation for returnees in the city. According to Oxfam the same general situation applies to both forced and voluntary returnees in Kabul: ‘few tensions but increased pressure on local resources, jobs, services, and facilities that feeds fears among both returnees and host communities’.

According to the World Bank around 80% of Kabul’s population, a mix of recent and long term IDPs, returnees, economic migrants and original inhabitants, lives in informal settlements. Not only newly displaced people or returnees, but also some older-generation IDPs and returnees still find it hard to integrate in the city and find stable employment, while they are often cut off from humanitarian help destined for recent arrivals. Within this context of massive and prolonged population movements, analyst Nassim Majidi, co-director of the research organisation Samuel Hall, quoted by the Guardian,

577 NRC et al., Going Home to Displacement: Afghanistan’s Returnee-IDPs, December 2017, url, pp. 6-7; NRC et al., Escaping War: Where to Next? A Research Study on the Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan, January 2018, url, pp. 32-33
579 Oxfam, Returning to Fragility. Exploring the Link Between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, url, pp. 23-24
refers to the humanitarian situation in Kabul as a ‘powder keg, with poverty, greater risks of natural disasters, disease and social instability’. 581

581 Guardian (The), Pressure Builds in ‘Powderkeg’ Kabul as Refugees Return Home, 15 March 2018, url
2.2 Badakhshan

2.2.1 General description of the province

The province of Badakhshan is located in the north-eastern region of Afghanistan and shares international borders with Tajikistan, China, and Pakistan. Within Afghanistan, Badakhshan borders the provinces of Takhar, Panjshir, and Nuristan. Badakhshan is divided into the following districts: Arjanjkhwah, Argo, Baharak, Darayem, Darwaz (Marmay), Darwaz-e-Balla (Nesay), Eshkshmesh, Fayzabad, Jorm, Keshem, Khash, Khwahan, Kofab, Kohestan, 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 of Badakhshan is Fayzabad.

According to estimates by the Afghan CSO, the population of Badakhshan is 1,017,499 in 2018/19. The province is composed of Tajiks, Pashtuns, Uzbeks, Hazara, Baloch and Kyrgyz.

Scheduled passenger service to Badakhshan’s regional airport was reportedly suspended in January 2018 after the death of several Kam Air staff members in a suicide attack. As of February 2019, scheduled passenger services between Fayzabad and Kabul are provided. A new road connecting

582 UNOCHA, Reference Map Badakhshan Province, 19 February 2014, url
584 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Badakhshan province, n.d., url
585 Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 3
586 Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Badakhshan, 1 February 2017, url
587 Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghor residents fume over suspension of flights, 19 March 2018, url
588 Sweden, Lifos, Inrikesflyg i Afghanistan, 7 February 2019, url
Badakhshan with neighbouring Takhar province is under construction; its extension to the Tajik-Afghan border in the east of the province is planned.589

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Badakhshan is a region for poppy cultivation in northern Afghanistan.590 The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) reported in 2014 stated that it is also a transit zone for drug trafficking.591 The province is rich in mineral resources.592 Badakhshan’s mines are allegedly exploited illegally by armed men and insurgents.593 Contracts to legally extract gold and copper in the province have reportedly been signed in October 2018.594

### 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. Nevertheless, sources in 2017 and 2018 reported that Taliban presence is on the rise in several districts of the province.595 According to an article published by the Afghan news portal Khaama Press in December 2018, Badakhshan is one of the relatively volatile provinces in north-eastern Afghanistan.596

An AAN report published in 2017 highlights that the Taliban have 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 insurgents’ recent successes in Badakhshan are political dynamics which have long been dominated by struggles between local powerbrokers.597

Besides local Taliban insurgents, Tajik, Uzbek, Uyghur,598 and to a lesser extent Russian and Turkmen nationals are reportedly fighting in several districts of the province.599 According to a working paper of 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 2014.600 Reportedly, they are likely to belong to smaller insurgent 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 insurgents.601 The same source indicates that the Badakhshan Taliban are a comparatively heterogeneous movement, facilitating ‘[…] a hybridization of the local insurgency in the name of the Taliban.’602 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.’603

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589 Diplomat (The), Kabul’s Plan to Realize Afghanistan’s Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, url
590 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, p. 19
591 AREU, Evolving Terrain: Opium Poppy Cultivation in Balkh and Badakhshan Provinces in 2013, February 2014, p. 24
592 Samuel Hall, Review of Country Strategy Badakhshan and Takhar, October 2010, url, p. 6
593 Pajhwok Afghan News, Illegal extraction of Badakhshan mines goes on, 7 January 2018, url
594 Pajhwok Afghan News, Badakhshan gold, copper mines contracts signed, 6 October 2018, url
596 Khaama Press, Militants suffer casualties in Badakhshan airstrike, 1 December 2018, url
597 Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (1): A case study from Badakhshan, AAN, 3 January 2017, url
598 Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, url, p. 27
599 Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, url, p. 27
600 Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, url, p. 27
602 Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, url, p. 27
603 Callahan, T. and Marty F.J., Tilting at Windmills: Dubious US claims of targeting Chinese Uyghur militants in Badakhshan, AAN, 19 March 2018, url
According to Afghan intelligence documents, IS is present in Badakhshan province.\textsuperscript{604} Afghan officials however dismissed Russian claims in 2018 about unknown helicopters landing in Afghanistan’s northern provinces – Badakhshan among them – in order to support IS fighters on the ground.\textsuperscript{605} A 2017 analysis of IS in Afghanistan indicates that IS presence is less intense in Badakhshan than in nearby Kunduz and Takhar provinces.\textsuperscript{606}

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Badakhshan is under the responsibility of the 209\textsuperscript{th} ANA Shaheen Corp.\textsuperscript{607}

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Badakhshan province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.\textsuperscript{608} When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

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<td>remote - not under anyone's control</td>
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<td>Eshkmesh</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
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<td>Contested</td>
<td>remote - not under anyone's control</td>
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<td>Jorm</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
<td>INS activity</td>
<td>INS activity</td>
<td>TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%</td>
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\textsuperscript{604} Press TV, Daesh leader in Afghanistan killed in airstrikes in Nangarhar: Government, 26 August 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{605} Afghanistan Times, Afghanistan dismisses Russia’s claims over unknown helicopters landing, 21 February 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{606} Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, \url{p. 26}
\textsuperscript{607} Afghanistan, MoD, 209 Shaheen Corps, n.d., \url{url}
\textsuperscript{609} LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
<table>
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<th>Name</th>
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<th>TB control</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagab</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teshkan</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Gov control: 50%; TB control: 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wakhan</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>remote - not under anyone's control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warduj</td>
<td>Taliban control</td>
<td>High INS activity</td>
<td>High INS activity</td>
<td>Taliban control</td>
<td>TB control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaftal-e-Sufla</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yawan</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
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<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>remote - not under anyone's control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yamgan</td>
<td>Taliban control</td>
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<td>High INS activity</td>
<td>Taliban control</td>
<td>TB control</td>
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<td>Zebak</td>
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<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

610 According to Pajhwok Afghan News’ division of Badakhshan in administrative divisions Nasai is an area/mini district within the district of Darwaz. (Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2018 - Badakhshan Administrative Units, n.d., url)
2.2.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.2.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 63 civilian casualties (18 deaths and 45 injured) in Badakhshan. This represents a decrease of 3% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by kidnapping/abduction and targeted killings.\(^{611}\)

In a map depicting ‘conflict severity’ in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Jorm in the second highest category and Kohistan, Raghestan, Teshkan and Warduj districts in the category below. Baharak, Tagab and Yamgan are in the fourth highest category and the remaining districts are in the two lowest categories.\(^{612}\)

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 89 incidents related to insurgents in Badakhshan province.\(^{613}\)

Fighting between government forces and insurgents took place in several districts in 2018 (i.e. in Arghanjkhwa,\(^{614}\) Jorm,\(^{615}\) Kohestan,\(^{616}\) Koran wa Monjan,\(^{617}\) Darwaz-e-Balla,\(^{618}\) and Zebak districts\(^{619}\)).

In January and February 2018, US\(^{620}\) and Afghan forces\(^{621}\) launched airstrikes targeted insurgents’ infrastructure in Badakhshan in order to curb terrorist activities near Chinese and Tajik borders. The air campaign reportedly targeted the Taliban stronghold Warduj for the first time in two years.\(^{622}\) In May 2018, the US air-force conducted an airstrike in the regional capital, which, according to residents, failed to hit militants.\(^{623}\) Further airstrikes were carried out by Afghan and US air forces in April, October, and November 2018.\(^{624}\)

While airstrikes have been conducted in Badakhshan province before, AAN experts termed the intensity of the February 2018 airstrikes unusual and ‘[...] USFOR-A touted them as a demonstration of the stepped-up US air campaign in Afghanistan and its expansion to the northern parts of the country.’\(^{625}\) The airstrikes purportedly targeted Taliban camps providing support to militant Turkic Muslim Uyghurs of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) seeking independence from China. Experts cited by AAN doubted that a large Uyghur extremist presence in Badakhshan, or that ETIM or other militant Uyghur groups such as the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) pose a credible cross-border

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\(^{611}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 68

\(^{612}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 2

\(^{613}\) Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, url, accessed 1 March 2019

\(^{614}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Conflict displaces around 300 Badakhshan families, 27 August 2018, url

\(^{615}\) Pasbanan, Taliban insurgents were heavily defeated in Jurm district of Badakhshan, 11 May 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 18 ANA soldiers killed in attack on Badakhshan post, 13 June 2018, url

\(^{616}\) Afghanistan Times, Commandos battle to regain Kohistan district, 4 May 2018, url; Gandhara, Suicide Bombers Attack Home Of Kandahar Police Chief, 6 May 2018, url

\(^{617}\) Xinhua News Agency, Over 2 dozen killed in 24 hours in Afghanistan, 25 October 2018, url

\(^{618}\) Tolonews, Badakhshan’s Nusay District Cleared Of Taliban, 5 September 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, ‘Badakhshan`s Nusay district on the verge of collapse’, 29 August 2018, url

\(^{619}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Badakhshan: 8 security personnel among 23 killed, 16 July 2018, url

\(^{620}\) Afghanistan Times, US forces air campaign expands to the north of Afghanistan, 6 February 2018, url

\(^{621}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 17 foreign rebels killed in Badakhshan airstrike, 16 January 2018, url

\(^{622}\) Xinhua News Agency, Afghan airstrikes against Taliban kill 8 in Badakhshan province, 4 February 2018, url

\(^{623}\) Tolonews, Foreign forces conduct airstrike in Faizabad city, 25 May 2018, url

\(^{624}\) Khaama Press, 8 militants killed in AAF airstrike in Badakhshan province: Gen. Radmanish, 8 April 2018, url; Khaama Press, Militants suffer casualties in separate clashes, airstrikes in Balkh and Badakhshan, 26 October 2018, url; Khaama Press, Militants suffer casualties in Badakhshan airstrike, 1 December 2018, url

\(^{625}\) Callahan, T. and Marty F.J., Tilting at Windmills: Dubious US claims of targeting Chinese Uyghur militants in Badakhshan, AAN, 19 March 2018, url
threat. However, a government official of Badakhshan claimed that Uyghur extremists plan to increase their force in Badakhshan in order to move into China through the Wakhan Corridor. According to a statement by the Afghan National Army, ETIM’s deputy leader was killed by Afghan security forces in April 2018 in Jorm district. Rumours about the establishment of a Chinese military base in Badakhshan have been refuted by the Afghan government, as well as by Chinese officials in February 2018.

2.2.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 16 940 persons displaced from Badakhshan province, mainly finding refuge within the province itself or in neighbouring provinces of Panjsher and Nuristan, and in Kabul province.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 1 330 persons displaced from Badakhshan province, all moving to Fayzabad district within the province itself.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 16 856 persons displaced to Badakhshan province, all displaced from within the province itself.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 1 330 persons displaced to Badakhshan province, all displaced from within the province itself.

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626 Callahan, T. and Marty F.J., Tilting at Windmills: Dubious US claims of targeting Chinese Uyghur militants in Badakhshan, AAN, 19 March 2018, [url](http://example.com)
627 Gandhara, Taliban Increasing Presence In Remote Afghan Region Bordering China, 12 February 2018, [url](http://example.com)
628 1TV News, Afghan forces kill No. 2 of anti-China militant group, 1 April 2018, [url](http://example.com)
629 Afghanistan Times, Afghanistan denies China is building military base in Badakhshan, 17 February 2018, [url](http://example.com); Pajhwok Afghan News, No deliberation on Chinese military base: NSC, 17 February 2018, [url](http://example.com)
630 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](http://example.com)
631 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, [url](http://example.com)
633 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, [url](http://example.com)
In January 2018, UNOCHA registered 3 200 people displaced due to conflict from four districts in Badakhshan to the provincial capital Fayzabad City. 634

A military operation at the end of March 2018 reportedly displaced 4 200 people in Baharak and Jorm districts. 635 Due to continued military operations in the area UNOCHA registered another 2 800 displaced people in April 2018 from remote villages of Jorm district to the district centre and to Fayzabad City. 636 An offensive by an armed group in Baharak district in April 2018 reportedly displaced 1 400 people to the district centre. 637

At end of April and in May 2018, UNOCHA reported 4 000 people displaced from Teshkan district to the center of the district, to Fayzabad city and to Darayem and Keshem districts, due to military operations and conflict. 638

Due to ongoing conflict, armed clashes and a Taliban invasion in several villages in the Shiva area of Arghanjikha district and in Argo district, from January to September 2018, 300 - 600 families (numbering more than 1 600 people) were reportedly displaced to Shighnan and Baharak districts and to Fayzabad city. 639

In the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2018 - 2021 and the Humanitarian Needs Overview for 2019 UNOCHA classifies Badakhshan as one of the eight/nine main provinces of both origin and displacement of conflict-affected communities. 640 The Afghanistan Protection Cluster mentioned Badakhshan as one of the six top hosting provinces for IDPs in May, June and August 2018. 641

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635 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 26 March - 1 April, 9 April 2018, url, p. 1
636 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 2 - 8 April 2018, 8 April 2018, url, p. 1
637 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 23 - 29 April 2018, 30 April 2018, url, p. 1
2.3 Badghis

2.3.1 General description of the province

The province of Badghis is situated in western Afghanistan. The provincial capital is Qala-e-Naw. Badghis borders the provinces of Herat to the west, Faryab to the east, and Ghor to the south. Furthermore, it shares an international border with Turkmenistan to the north. Badghis comprises the following districts: Ab Kamari, Bala Murghab, Ghormach, Jawand, Muqur, Qadis, and Qala-i-Naw. 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 in 2007, while the governor of Faryab did not consider Ghormach to be part of Faryab in 2010.

The Afghan CSO estimated the population of Badghis for 2018/19 at 530,574. According to the Office of the President of Afghanistan, Badghis is inhabited mainly by Tajiks, Pashtuns, Uzbeks, and Turkmens.

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642 Pajhwok Afghan News, Badghis administrative units, n.d., url
644 Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan’s major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, url; UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 15
645 Frontier Post (The), Ghormach falls to Taliban as ANA troops move to Maimana, 28 August 2018, url
646 Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, url
647 Afghanistan CSO, برآورد نفوس کشور ۱۳۹۷ [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 3
648 Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Badghis, 1 February 2017, url
The UNODC Opium Survey of 2018 identified Badghis as one of the main opium-poppy-cultivating provinces of Afghanistan. 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.

Badghis is reportedly rich in natural resources. Extraction is however impeded by a lack of security. According to the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), precious and semi-precious stones such as lapis lazuli are mined illegally in some districts of Badghis Province. Furthermore, Badghis has Afghanistan’s highest concentration of pistachio forests. While this used to be a source of income for all in former times, the spread of pistachio forests has been significantly reduced during the past four decades and residents now claim that insurgents increasingly profit from the sale of pistachio nuts.

The roads of Badghis have been reported to be of poor quality and mostly unsafe because of insurgent and criminal activity. According to a report by AAN, parts of the paved highway between Badghis and Faryab have been under Taliban control. An assessment by SIGAR found that only 15% of a projected 233-kilometre section of the Afghan Ring Road between the district of Qeysar in Faryab and the site of Laman in Badghis have been built as of September 2017 despite considerable funding since 2005. SIGAR linked the project’s failure mainly to security issues and estimated that the prospects for a timely completion are bleak due to increasing insecurity in the region.

### 2.3.2 Conflict background and actors in Badghis

According to the provincial profile of Bagdhis by the Naval Postgraduate School, 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.

Khaama Press stated in April 2018 that Badghis is one of the relatively calm provinces in north-western Afghanistan, noting however that anti-government forces are active in several of its districts and ‘often carry out insurgency activities’. According to the US Congress-financed Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, ‘Badghis Province has been a hotbed of fighting by Taliban and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) militants since 2014, and Afghan security forces have launched several offensives since then in an attempt to drive militants out of the province.’ According to the website Strategy Page, different Taliban factions (i.e. Taliban led by Mullah Mansour and Taliban led by Mullah Rasool) have also been fighting against each other in the western provinces of Afghanistan (i.e. in Badghis,
Farah, and Herat) since 2016, leaving hundreds of Taliban fighters dead and providing government forces with an opportunity to gain influence in formerly Taliban-controlled districts. 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 insurgents and government forces in Jawand and Qadis.

In autumn 2017, the Taliban leadership in western Afghanistan reportedly called on its commanders to fight against IS and eliminate its supporters. According to the same source, the Taliban announced that any collaboration, compromise or interaction between Taliban and IS insurgents will be punished severely – among other provinces especially in Badghis. Referring to NATO sources, the Spanish newspaper El Mundo stated in August 2017 that a small group of IS fighters emerged in Murghab district in Badghis and an 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. However, there were reportedly no IS-related attacks in Badghis between 2014 and 2018.

The 207 Zafar Corps is in charge of the Afghan National Army operations in the province of Badghis. The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Badghis province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban. When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

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<td>Qala-e-Naw (capital)</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
<td>GIRoA control</td>
<td>GIRoA control</td>
<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
<td>TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%</td>
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<td>Ab Kamari</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
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<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%</td>
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<td>Bala Murghab</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - Medium</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 97%; Gov control: 3%</td>
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</table>

664 ERM, Household Assessment Report, 1 November 2018, [url], p. 1
665 IFP, Taliban Calls ISIS “Crusader”, Affiliate of United States, 8 October 2017, [url]
666 El Mundo, Guerra civil talibán en la ‘provincia española’ de Afganistán, 29 August 2017, [url]
667 IPP Review, The Islamic State of Khorasan Expands in Afghanistan, 3 January 2019, [url]
668 Jadoon, A., Allied and Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan’s Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, CTC Sentinel, 3 December 2018, [url], p. 11
669 Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., [url]
671 LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
### Jawand
- **Open Taliban presence** - low
- **GIRoA influence**
- **Contested**
- **TB control**: 96%; **Gov control**: 4%

### Muqur
- **Open Taliban presence** - Medium
- **Contested**
- **TB control**: 94%; **Gov control**: 8%

### Qadis
- **Open Taliban presence** - Medium
- **Contested**
- **TB control**: 94%; **Gov control**: 8%

### Ghormach
- **Open Taliban presence** - Medium
- **INS activity**
- **High INS activity**
- **Contested**
- **TB control**

### Tagab Alam
- **TB control**

### Sang Atesh
- **TB control**: 95%; **Gov control**: 5%

### Daraboom
- **TB control**

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2.3.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.3.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 79 civilian casualties (21 deaths and 58 injured) in Badghis. This represents a decrease of 40% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by unexploded ordnance (UXO)/landmines and (non-suicide) IEDs.673

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts Bala Murghab, Muqur, Ab Kamari and Qadis in the second highest category and Qala-e-Naw and Jawand districts in the third highest category. Ghormach district is placed in the highest category.674

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 119 incidents related to insurgents in Badghis province.675

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672 ACCORD added during the review that Sang Atesh is the capital of Ab Kamari district. ACCORD, email, 15 March 2019

673 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url], p. 68

674 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url]

675 Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url], accessed 1 March 2019
The Afghan Ministry of Defense (MoD) conducted several clearing operations in 2018, e.g. in March, April, June, July, September, and December. Taliban attacks on pro-government forces took place throughout the year, e.g. in the districts of Qadis, Maqur, Ab-i-Kamari, Qala-i-Naw, including an attack on a check-post in the provincial capital, which left 16 members of the government forces dead. In May 2018, the Taliban overran an area in Maqur district after the security forces retreated from the area. Regarding the scope of casualties, the climax was reached on 20 June 2018 (a day after the end of the Eid ceasefire), when 20 to 30 ANA soldiers died after militants ambushed a check-point in Bala Murghab district. Afghan newsportal Tolonews reports that 24 Taliban fighters died in a clash with security forces in Ab Kamari district on the same day. In September 2018, the Maqur district police chief was killed in a roadside bombing.

In March 2018, 5 civilians were kidnapped when the Taliban stopped a passenger vehicle traveling from Herat to Badghis in Qala-i-Naw.

A bomb blast in Qala-i-Naw injured eleven people, including two children in July 2018. According to the governor’s spokesman, the explosives were attached to a motorcycle.

2.3.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 11 967 persons displaced from Badghis province, most of whom (9 667) were displaced within the province, mainly in the provincial capital district, Qala-e Naw.

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676 Pajhwok Afghan News, Nearly 100 militants killed in past 24 hours: MoD, 9 March 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 45 rebels killed in fresh operation: MoD, 16 March 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 71 militants killed in round-the-clock operations: MoD, 23 March 2018, url
677 Pajhwok Afghan News, 25 rebels killed, 20 injured in fresh operations: MoD, 6 April 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Above 100 rebels slain in past 24 hours, says MoD, 13 April 2018, url
681 Pajhwok Afghan News, Scores of rebels, security personnel killed in clashes, 14 December 2018, url
682 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture Badghis areas; police in denial, 24 April 2018, url; News Services Division, Afghan official: Taliban target police checkpoint, killing 5, 17 November 2018, url
683 Pajhwok Afghan News, 13 dead, many wounded in Farah, Badghis clashes, 10 July 2018, url
684 Pajhwok Afghan News, 15 members of uprising force killed in Taliban attacks, 22 June 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban's Red Unit commander among 12 killed in Badghis, 9 September 2018, url
685 Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 policemen, as many militants killed in Badghis clash, 4 September 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 policemen, 8 militants killed in Badghis clash, 17 September 2018, url
686 Khaama Press, 16 army and police soldiers martyred in Badghis attacks: official, 23 April 2018, url
687 Pajhwok Afghan News, Badghis: Taliban capture Maqur's village, 16 May 2018, url
688 El Mundo, Mueren 30 soldados afganos en el peor ataque talibán desde el fin de la tregua, 20 June 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 20 ANA soldiers, 5 rebels killed in Badghis clashes, 20 June 2018, url
689 Tolonews, 24 Taliban Killed In Badghis Clash, 20 June 2018, url
690 Pajhwok Afghan News, District police chief killed in Badghis roadside bombing, 5 September 2018, url
691 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kidnap 5 passengers in Badghis, 30 March 2018, url
692 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kidnap 5 passengers in Badghis, 14 July 2018, url
693 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, url
UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 1 921 persons displaced from Badghis province, more than the half of them displaced into Herat province and the rest were displaced within Badghis province itself.694

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 9 918 persons displaced to Badghis province.695

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 651 persons displaced to Badghis province, all coming from Badghis province’s districts.696

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<td>Abkamari</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qala-e Naw</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>8 709</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>651</td>
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</table>

In 2018, Badghis was considered as one of ‘the main provinces of both origin and displacement of conflict-affected communities’.697 UNOCHA reported in February,698 May,699 June,700 July 2018701 and January 2019702 displacements within or from Abkamari district to the provincial capital Qala-e naw or Herat province because of the conflict and the fightings. These have also caused displacements from Balamurghab, Jawand, Muqur, Qadis districts to the provincial capital in February 2018703 and from Jawand district in October 2018.704

The drought is another important cause of displacements within Abkamari district to the district centre and from other districts to distant provinces like Kandahar705 or to the provincial capital.706 In June, July and August 2018, 263 000 people were displaced within Badghis and Herat provinces because of the drought.707

Another natural cause of displacements are flash floods which affected 2 667 families in Muqur district and 496 families in Abkamari district in May 2018.708

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694 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, url
695 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, url
696 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, url
700 UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Badghis Province - Meeting Summary, 27 June 2018, url
702 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 8 - 14 January 2019, 15 January 2019, url
705 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 27 August – 2 September 2018, 4 September 2018, url
706 UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Badghis Province - Meeting Summary, 1 August 2018, url
707 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url
708 UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Badghis Province - Meeting Summary, 30 May 2018, url
In July 2018, UNOCHA mentioned displacements within Muqur district because of ‘inter-tribal disputes over agricultural land’. 709

2.4 Baghlan

2.4.1 General description of the province

Baghlan, which is located in north-eastern Afghanistan, borders the provinces of Bamyan, Samangan, Kunduz, Takhar, Panjshir, Parwan, and Balkh. Baghlan is divided into the following 15 districts: 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 capital of the province is Pul-e-Khumri.

The Afghan CSO estimates the population of Baghlan at 977,297 in 2018/19. According to the provincial profile published by the US Naval Postgraduate School, a slight majority of Baghlan’s residents are Tajiks, followed by Pashtuns and Hazaras as second and third largest ethnic groups respectively. Furthermore, ethnic Uzbeks and Tatars live in Baghlan.

Baghlan is known to be an economic hub connected to eight other provinces by the Kabul-North highway. This is the only trans-Hindukush highway in Afghanistan and the main transit route between Kabul and the north of the country. 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 2022 via the so-called Baghlan to Bamyan (B2B) road, according to plans by the World Bank.\textsuperscript{718}

According to AAN, the Kabul-North highway is pivotal for military success of government forces, as insurgents are able to hinder the movement of ammunition and troops by blocking the highway. 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.\textsuperscript{719} In 2018 the Taliban again attacked checkpoints on the highway connecting Baghlan with Kunduz before launching an attack in Kunduz.\textsuperscript{720} Furthermore, the Kabul-North highway has also been blocked repeatedly by protesters in 2018.\textsuperscript{721}

The security along the highway is pivotal for Kabul’s energy supply, as electricity transmission lines originating in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan run along the highway. In 2018, the Taliban caused several blackouts in the capital by cutting the energy supply to Kabul in the provinces of Kunduz and Baghlan in order to blackmail the government.\textsuperscript{722}

Insurgents reportedly draw revenue from Baghlan’s coal mines by extorting money from trucks carrying coal.\textsuperscript{723} According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Baghlan does not belong to the ten main opium-poppy-cultivating provinces of Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{724} Opium poppy cultivation in Baghlan remained approximately the same in 2018 compared to 2017.\textsuperscript{725}

2.4.2 Conflict background and actors in Baghlan

According to Khaama Press, writing in September 2018, ‘Baghlan has been among the relatively calm provinces in northern parts of the country but the security situation of the province has deteriorated during the recent years.’\textsuperscript{726} The security situation reportedly worsened in 2016 after the Taliban launched concerted actions against key districts near the provincial centre of Pul-e-Khumri.\textsuperscript{727} In spring 2018, the Afghan Ministry of Defence (MoD) admitted that the provincial capital Pul-e-Khumri was threatened by the Taliban,\textsuperscript{728} and by December 2018 the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MoI) stated that Baghlan was among the provinces with a high Taliban presence and that Afghan forces have been engaged in deadly battles in parts of the province.\textsuperscript{729}

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.\textsuperscript{730} 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 of the and attempted to establish a permanent presence in the area. In response,
ANSF have conducted several clearance operations, which, according to AAN, were ‘inconsequential’ and hence unsuccessful in creating a coherent government presence in the area.\footnote{Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, \url{url}}

Besides Taliban insurgents, 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.\footnote{Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, \url{url}}

According to an AAN report from July 2016, Afghan ethnic Uzbeks have set up an insurgent group called Jundullah in 2009 by splitting away from IMU.\footnote{Ali, O., The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), AAN, 15 July 2016, \url{url}} 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 have 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.’\footnote{Ali, O., The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), AAN, 15 July 2016, \url{url}} 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.\footnote{Jadoon, A., Allied and Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan’s Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, CTC Sentinel, 3 December 2018, \url{url}, p. 11-15}

In terms of government security force presence, Baghlan is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen Corp.\footnote{Afghanistan, MoD, 209 Shaheen Corps, n.d., \url{url}}

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Baghlan province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal (LWJ) and the Taliban.\footnote{BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, \url{url}; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, \url{url}, pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, \url{url}, pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, 23 April 2019, \url{url}; Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, \url{url}} When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognized by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BAGHLAN</th>
<th>BBC (reporting period: August-November 2017)</th>
<th>US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)</th>
<th>US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)</th>
<th>LWJ (last accessed: \footnote{LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.} April 2019)</th>
<th>Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)</th>
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<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
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<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>/</td>
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<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%</td>
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\footnote{Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, \url{url}}

\footnote{Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, \url{url}}

\footnote{Ali, O., The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), AAN, 15 July 2016, \url{url}}

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\footnote{Jadoon, A., Allied and Lethal: Islamic State Khorasan’s Network and Organizational Capacity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, CTC Sentinel, 3 December 2018, \url{url}, p. 11-15}

\footnote{Afghanistan, MoD, 209 Shaheen Corps, n.d., \url{url}}

2.4.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.4.3.1 General

In 2018 UNAMA documented 261 civilian casualties (68 deaths and 193 injured) in Baghlan. This represents an increase of 17% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by (non-suicide) IEDs and targeted killings.\(^{739}\)

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Pul-e-Khumri in the highest category. Baghlan-e-Jadid and Burka districts are placed in the second highest category, and Tala wa Barfak and Doshi in the third highest category. The remaining districts are in the two lowest categories.\(^{740}\)

\(^{739}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 68

\(^{740}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url
In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 131 incidents related to insurgents in Baghlan province. 741

As of reporting from March 2018, the district of Dahana-e-Ghori has reportedly been under Taliban control over the past two years. 742 In May 2018, the Taliban reportedly sent letters asking for the payment of taxes in contested Baghlan-e-Markazi district. 743 In the past, the Taliban reportedly used to collect zakat and ushr taxes from Baghlan residents in districts under their control. 744

Throughout 2018 and early 2019, the Taliban attacked army and police check-points or patrols. 745 In May 2018, key district Tala wa Barfak, bordering Bamyan and Parwan provinces, reportedly fell to the Taliban for more than a week. 746 Additionally, the insurgents also conducted kidnappings and targeted killings. 747 Ahead of the 2018 parliamentary elections, Taliban militants caused casualties at voter registration centres, leaving six persons dead in an explosion in Pul-e-Khumri in April, 748 and killing one police officer in Baghlan-e-Markazi district in June. 749 On election day, eight people were killed and 45 injured in election-related incidents, including twin blasts in the provincial capital Pul-e-Khumri. 750

In 2018, ANSF conducted several clearing operations in the province. 751 Because of the ongoing insurgent activity in Baghlan, reinforcement troops have been sent to Dahana-e-Ghori district in November 2018. 752 According to Pajhwok Afghan News, at the end of 2018 security personnel stationed in insecure areas of the province had been left without pay for three months. 753

The fighting also caused fatalities among civilians, as well as damage of civilan property. In February 2018, residents of Pul-e-Khumri protested and sought compensation over homes destroyed by Afghan Air Force (AAF) airstrikes. 754 In August 2018, a person was killed and six of her family members injured

742 Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 ALP men killed, 3 wounded in Baghlan attack, 14 March 2018, url
743 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban ask Baghlan traders to pay them taxes, 14 May 2018, url
744 Hewad, G., The 2015 insurgency in the North (4): Surrounding the cities in Baghlan, AAN, 21 October 2015, url; Ali, O., Taliban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, AAN, 15 August 2016, url
746 Tolonews, Key District In Baghlan Reportedly Falls To Taliban, 8 May 2018, url; Khaama, Afghan armed forces retake control of Tala Barfak in Baghlan, 18 May 2018, url
747 Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 Taliban killed, 3 wounded in Baghlan clash, 5 February 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Lawmaker Qudratullah Zaki survives Taliban’s attack in Baghlan, 16 April 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kidnap 6 Indian engineers in Baghlan, 6 May 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, ALP commander killed by Taliban in Baghlan attack, 20 December 2018, url
748 Tolonews, Six Killed In Baghlan Explosion At Voter Registration Center, 22 April 2018, url
749 Tolonews, One Dead In Baghlan Voter Registration Center Explosion, 23 June 2018, url
750 Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 killed, 45 wounded in Baghlan election related incidents, 20 October 2018, url
752 Tolonews, MoD Sends In Extra Troops As Violence Grips Baghlan, Ghazni, 8 November 2018, url
753 Pajhwok Afghan News, Troops in Baghlan without salaries for 3 months, 2 December 2018, url
754 Pajhwok Afghan News, Dand-i-Shahabuddin residents seek compensation for destroyed homes, 3 February 2018, url
in a government mortar shell attack on a civilian house in the provincial capital carried out by security forces.\textsuperscript{755}

In January 2019, four Taliban fighters and one civilian reportedly died in an explosion during a volleyball match in a Taliban-controlled area of Tala wa Barfak.\textsuperscript{756}

2.4.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 13 421 persons displaced from Baghlan province, mainly within the province itself, in neighbouring provinces Parwan, Balkh, Panjsher and Bamyán, or in other provinces in the area such as Kabul, Kapisa and Khost.\textsuperscript{757}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 70 persons displaced from Baghlan province, all coming from Doshi district and displaced to Kabul district of Kabul province.\textsuperscript{758}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 11 928 persons displaced to Baghlan province, all coming from within the province itself.\textsuperscript{759}

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Baghlan province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.\textsuperscript{760}

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<tr>
<td>Tala Wa Barfak</td>
<td>681</td>
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From January to March 2018 more than 300 IDP families were registered in Pul-e-Khumri city, displaced from Dand-e-Dhahabuddin area due to armed conflict.\textsuperscript{761}

In May 2018, UNOCHA recorded 4 000 people displaced to Kabul, Bamyán and Kunduz provinces coming from Tala Wa Barfak and Doshi districts of Baghlan, after heavy fighting erupted in Tala Wa Barfak on 9 May.\textsuperscript{762} On 19 June 2018, humanitarian partners reported to UNOCHA that 1 200 of the IDPs that had fled Tala Wa Barfak in early May had already returned to their homes.\textsuperscript{763} Additionally 2 000 people were reportedly displaced from Khalazai area of Pul-e-Khumri city to the center in May 2018.\textsuperscript{764}

\textsuperscript{755} Pajhwok Afghan News, Girl killed, 6 family members injured in mortar shell attack, 11 August 2018, url
\textsuperscript{756} Tolonews, Five Killed In Baghlan Explosion, 26 January 2019, url
\textsuperscript{757} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, url
\textsuperscript{758} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, url
\textsuperscript{759} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, url
\textsuperscript{760} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, url
\textsuperscript{761} UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Baghlan Province - Meeting Summary, 14 March 2018, url, p. 1
\textsuperscript{762} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 14 - 20 May 2018, 22 May 2018, url, p. 1; Tolonews, UN Chef Urges Governments to Protect Civilians from Violence, 23 May 2018, url
\textsuperscript{763} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 11 - 17 June, 19 June 2018, url, p. 1
\textsuperscript{764} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 7 - 13 May 2018, 14 May 2018, url, p. 1
In August 2018, Afghan NGO Bakhtar Development Network (BDN) reported on military operations in Mangalha Khogyani area of Baghlan-e-Jadid district, which led to temporary displacements within the district itself and to Pul-e-Khumri city.765

In September and October 2018, UNOCHA recorded thousands of IDPs within Baghlan-e-Jadid district and from Dand-e-Ghori, Cheshma-e-Sher and Omarkhil villages of Pul-e-Khumri district to Pul-e-Khumri city.766

In December 2018 UNOCHA classified Baghlan as one of the 12 provinces with large concentrations of IDPs and returnees who are most affected by the ongoing conflict and drought.767 According to IOM’s Afghanistan’s Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Baseline Mobility Assessment, in 2018 one in six people is either a returnee or an IDP in Baghlan province.768 IOM ranked Baghlan-e-Jadid on the twelfth (January - March 2018) and fifteenth place (April - June 2018) of the top 20 districts hosting the most returnees and IDPs769 and on the nineteenth place of the top 25 districts hosting most returnees and IDPs from October to December 2018.770

765 UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Baghlan Province - Meeting Summary, 29 August 2018, url, p. 1
768 IOM, Displacement Survey Shows 3.5 Million Internally Displaced, Returnees from Abroad in 15 Afghan Provinces, 8 May 2018, url
770 IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results October - December 2018, 15 March 2019, url, p. 5
2.5 Balkh

2.5.1 General description of the province

Balkh is situated in the northern part of Afghanistan, bordering Uzbekistan to the north, Tajikistan to the north-east, Kunduz and Baghlan to the east, Samangan to the south-east, Sar-e Pul to the south-west, Jawzjan to the west and Turkmenistan to the north-west. The provincial capital is Mazar-e Sharif. The province consists of the following districts: Balkh, Charbulak, Charkent, Chemtal, Dawlatabad, Dehdadi, Kaldar, Keshendeh, Khulm, Marmul, Mazar-e Sharif, Nahr-e Shahi, Sholgareh, Shortepa and Zari.

According to a CSO estimation, the population of Balkh Province was 1 442 847 in 2018/19, with 454 457 living 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 is an important crop growing area, as favourable climatic conditions allow for two harvests a year. Dubbed a ‘Silk Route crossroad’, Balkh – and more specifically Mazar-e Sharif – is an 

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771 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Northern region District Atlas, 13 April 2014, url; GADM, Afghanistan [Map], 2018, url
772 Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Balkh, 2018, url; Afghanistan, CSO, بروزرسه نوم کنویر 1377 [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 27
773 Afghanistan, CSO, نوم کنویر 1377 [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 3
774 Afghanistan, CSO, بروزرسه نوم کنویر 1377 [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 27
776 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
777 Afghanistan, MRRD, Balkh provincial profile, n.d., url
import/export hub as well as a regional trading centre. The highway leading to the Uzbek border crossing point Hairatan-Termiz branches off the Ring Road approximately 40 km east of Mazar-e Sharif. Furthermore, a highway facilitating transport from Balkh to Bamyan in the centre of Afghanistan is reportedly under construction. An airport with scheduled passenger services to national and international destinations exists in Mazar-e Sharif. 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

According to RFE/RL, Balkh used to be one of the relatively calm provinces of northern Afghanistan, largely due to a monopoly on power by the former warlord Atta Mohammed Noor, who later became governor of Balkh. In December 2017, Noor resigned after a stand-off with President Ashraf Ghani, sparking fears that this would impair the security situation in the province. According to Afghan news-portals Tolonews and Pajhwok Afghan News, the tensions between the president and Noor 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.

While Balkh is reportedly ‘one of Afghanistan’s most stable provinces’, anti-government elements are active in the province and several security incidents have been reported in 2018 and early 2019. Taliban fighters attacked Afghan Local Police (ALP) personnel, members of pro-government militias, and security posts in the districts of Sholgareh, Chahrbulak, Chemtal, and Dawlatabad throughout 2018 and early 2019. The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) conducted several

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778 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
779 Diplomat (The), Kabul’s Plan to Realize Afghanistan’s Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, url
780 Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019
781 Pajhwok Afghan News, Mazar-i-Sharif-Turkey-Europe air corridor formally opens, 9 January 2019, url
782 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 17
783 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 6
785 RFE/RL, Afghan Governor’s Dismissal Highlights Rift In Party, Risks To Unity Government, 19 December 2017, url; RFE/RL, Powerful Afghan Governor Resigns, Ending Standoff With Ghani, 23 March 2018, url
788 RFE/RL, Powerful Afghan Governor Resigns, Ending Standoff With Ghani, 23 March 2018, url
789 Tolonews, 17 Members Of Public Uprising Force Killed In Balkh, 21 January 2018, url
790 Tolonews, Chahar Bolak Police Chief Dies After Taliban Attack, 22 April 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture 2 checkpoints in Balkh’s Chahar Bolak district, 15 September 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 9 ALP personnel killed in attack on Balkh post, 18 September 2018, url; Tolonews, Six Security Force Members Killed In Balkh Clash, 9 January 2019, url; Tolonews, Key Taliban Commander Killed In Balkh, 10 January 2019, url
791 Tolonews, Main District In Balkh Under Security Threat, 6 July 2018, url; Tolonews, Sources Claim Balkh Outposts Fallen To Taliban, 11 September 2018, url
792 Pajhwok Afghan News, Part of Balkh’s Dawlatabad district falls to Taliban, 3 September 2018, url; RFE/RL, Afghan Security Forces Retake Northern District From Taliban, 4 September 2018, url
clearing operations in Balkh.\textsuperscript{793} Furthermore, the US air-force carried out an airstrike in Charbulak district in April 2018.\textsuperscript{794}

The headquarters of the 209\textsuperscript{th} ANA Shaheen corps, which is responsible for ensuring security in the provinces of Balkh, Jawzjan, Faryab, Sar-e-Pul, Samangan, Kunduz, Takhar, Badakhshan, and Baghlan, are stationed in Dehdadi district of Balkh.\textsuperscript{795} German Federal Army soldiers are based in Camp Marmal in Mazar-e Sharif.\textsuperscript{796}

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Balkh province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal (LWJ) and the Taliban.\textsuperscript{797} When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

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<td>Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%</td>
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\textsuperscript{794} Tolonews, 35 Taliban Killed In US Airstrikes In Balkh, 28 April 2018, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{795} Tolonews, 209 Shaheen Corps: The Base The Taliban Attacked, 22 April 2018, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{796} Tagesspiegel, Afghanische Ex-Mitarbeiter der Bundeswehr demonstrieren vor Camp, 22 September 2018, \url{url}


\textsuperscript{798} LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
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<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
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**2.5.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population**

**2.5.3.1 General**

In 2018, UNAMA documented 227 civilian casualties (85 deaths and 142 injured) in Balkh. This represents an increase of 76% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by (non-suicide) IEDs and targeted killings.\(^{800}\) UNAMA recorded 99 civilian casualties caused by ground engagement in Balkh province which is a 296% increase compared to 2017.\(^{801}\)

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Chemtal, Charbulak, Balkh and Mazar-e-Sharif in the second highest category and the districts Dawlatabad, Shortepa and Keshendeh in the fourth highest category. The remaining districts are in the two lowest categories.\(^{802}\)

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\(^{799}\) According to UNHCR Alburz is an area in Chemtal district. (UNHCR, National Profile of Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Afghanistan, August 2008, url, p. 49)

\(^{800}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 68


\(^{802}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 2
In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 131 incidents related to insurgents in Balkh province.\(^{803}\)

In August 2018, eight civilians died in a roadside bomb blast in Sholgareh district, which was attributed to the Taliban by a local official.\(^{804}\) In October 2018, four polling observers were abducted and killed in a Taliban-controlled area of the district Nahr-e Shahi. A Taliban spokesman denied any Taliban involvement in the incident.\(^{805}\) In Keshendeh, Taliban insurgents reportedly kidnapped 25 passengers travelling from Sar-e-Pul to Mazar-e Sharif in November 2018.\(^{806}\) Taliban militants torched a fuel tanker and seized another on the Mazar-Shebrghan highway in November 2018, injuring four civilians during a clash with ANA forces.\(^{807}\)

In September 2018, security guards for two high ranking officials clashed at Hairatan port, killing one person and wounding two others.\(^{808}\) In December 2018, four persons died and nine were injured in an attack by unidentified gunmen allegedly targeting a pro-government commander at a funeral in Balkh.\(^{809}\)

### 2.5.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 1 218 persons who were displaced from Balkh province and all of them were displaced within the province itself, in the districts of Nahr-e-Shahi and Keshendeh.\(^{810}\)

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Balkh province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.\(^{811}\)

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 15 313 persons displaced to Balkh province, including 1 218 from the province itself, 10 749 from Faryab and 1 610 from Sar-e-Pul.\(^{812}\)

UNOCHA collected data, for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, on 2 226 persons displaced to Mazar-e-Sharif in Balkh province, from Faryab.\(^{813}\)

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\(^{803}\) Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, url, accessed 1 March 2019

\(^{804}\) Tolonews, Eight Civilians Killed in Balkh Roadside Mine Blast, 8 August 2018, url; RFE/RL, Roadside Bomb Kills Eight Civilians In Afghanistan, Says Local Official, 8 August 2018, url

\(^{805}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 polling observers killed after being kidnapped in Balkh, 21 October 2018, url

\(^{806}\) Tolonews, Taliban Kidnaps 25 Passengers In Balkh, 27 November 2018, url

\(^{807}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 civilians wounded in clash on Mazar-Shebrghan highway, 13 November 2018, url

\(^{808}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Security guards of top officials clash at Hairatan port, 17 September 2018, url

\(^{809}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 killed, 9 injured in attack on funeral prayers in Balkh, 14 December 2018, url

\(^{810}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, url

\(^{811}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, url

\(^{812}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, url

\(^{813}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, url
According to IOM, one in six people is a returnee or an IDP in Balkh province. 814

814 IOM, Displacement Survey Shows 3.5 Million Internally Displaced, Returnees from Abroad in 15 Afghan Provinces, 8 May 2018, url
2.6 Bamyan

2.6.1 General description of the province

The province of Bamyan borders Samangan to the north, Baghlan, Parwan and Wardak to the east, Ghazni and Daykundi to the south, and Sar-e Pul and Ghor to the west. It is divided into seven districts: Bamyan, Kahmard, Panjab, Sayghan, Shibar, Waras and Yakawlang. The provincial capital is Bamyan City. Bamyan is situated south of Hindu Kush and north of Baba (Koh-i-Baba) mountain range.

The estimated population of Bamyan is 478,424 with most of the people living in the main valleys. The main ethnic groups of Bamyan, which is dubbed the 'unofficial Hazara capital' and part of the Hazarajat, are the Hazara, followed by Tajiks and Pashtuns. Additionally, people of the Sayed/Sadat group live in Bamyan. Sayeds, claiming to be descendants of Prophet Mohammed, do not constitute a distinct ethnic group. According to various resources quoted in a query response of ACCORD, Bamyan Sayeds are mostly Hazaras, though they distinguish themselves from other Hazaras,

815 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Bamyan Province District Atlas, April 2014, url
816 Afghanistan, IEC, 2018 Wolesi Jirga Elections – Results by Polling Stations: Province Bamyan, 2018, url; Afghanistan, CSO, براوردنگ میوز کور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 15
817 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Bamyan Province, n.d., url
818 Afghanistan, CSO, براوردنگ میوز کور [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 2
819 Bamyan Tourism, The Land, n.d., url
820 Al Jazeera, Afghanistan, Who are the Hazaras?, 27 June 2016, url
821 Australia, DFAT, Hazaras in Afghanistan, 18 September 2017, url, p. 3
822 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Bamyan Province, n.d., url
and are traditionally part of the religious and political elite of the Hazara. Approximately 90% of Bamyans’s residents are Shias.

Scheduled passenger service to and from Bamyan’s airport was suspended in January 2018 after the only airline flying this route lost several staff members in an attack on a hotel in Kabul. As of February 2019, service seemingly has been resumed. Bamyan can be reached from Kabul either by the Kabul-Bamyan highway, via the province of Wardak, or via Parwan. Bamyan is supposed to be connected to neighbouring Baghlan by the so-called Baghlan to Bamyan (B2B) road in 2022, and a Chinese company has signed a contract to build a road connecting Bamyan’s Yakawlang district with Dare-SoSof district in Samangan in 2017. This is part of the National North-South Corridor project, which should eventually connect Mazar-e-Sharif in Balkh with Kandahar in the south. In November 2018 livestock owners and traders travelling on the Kabul-Bamyan highway claimed that Taliban insurgents collected ushr taxes from them in neighbouring Maidan Wardak.

Bamyan is reportedly one of Afghanistan’s 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 ‘[...] key highways leading to its centre are no longer secure,’ according to the Afghan newsportal Tolonews.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Bamyan remained the only opium-free province in the Northern region of Afghanistan in 2018.

2.6.2 Conflict background and actors in Bamyans

Tolonews called Bamyan ‘the safe haven of the country’ in 2017. An Afghan military expert traced the relative stability of Bamyan to the social cohesion among its inhabitants, as most of them belong to the same ethnic group. According to UNAMA, Bamyan’s relative peacefulness can also be attributed to the involvement of religious leaders in peace processes in the province.

BBC research on the Taliban presence, which was conducted between August and November 2017, concluded that the Taliban had a ‘low’ active presence in two of Bamyan’s seven districts, i.e. Sayghan and Shibar, the latter bordering Baghlan, Parwan and Wardak provinces, both of which were each attacked once in three months. After Tala wa Barfak district in neighbouring Baghlan province was captured by the Taliban in May 2018, local officials warned that Bamyan’s Kahmard and Sayghan districts might also collapse. In July 2018, Taliban insurgents indeed attacked several police check

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824 ACCORD, Anfragebeantwortung zu Afghanistan: Informationen zur Volksgruppe der Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayydid, Sayid, Sayeed) [Query response on Afghanistan: Information on the ethnic group of the Sadat (Sayed, Sayyed, Sadaat, Sayyid, Sayid, Sayeed)], 25 October 2017, url
825 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Bamyans Province, n.d., url
826 Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghor residents fume over suspension of flights, 19 March 2018, url
827 Sweden, Lifos, Inrikesflyg i Afghanistan, 7 February 2019, url, p. 11
828 Pajhwok Afghan News, Hajigak Pass reopens for traffic, 26 April 2015, url
829 World Bank (The), Trans-Hindukush Road Connectivity Project, n.d., url
830 Xinhua News Agency, Chinese firm signs contract to build road in Afghanistan, 9 January 2017, url
831 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban gunmen take taxes on Kabul-Bamyan highway, 5 November 2018, url
832 Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Who are the Hazaras?, 27 June 2016, url
833 Pajhwok Afghan News, More than 200,000 tourists visit Bamyans this year, 3 September 2017, url; Wiener Zeitung, Skifahren bei den Buddhas, 4 January 2018, url
834 Tolonews, Baniyan Tourism Takes A Knock Due To Security Threats On Roads, 28 June 2017, url
835 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 15
836 Tolonews, Baniyan Tourism Takes A Knock Due To Security Threats On Roads, 28 June 2017, url
837 RFE/RL, Afghan Taliban Wants What It Hasn't Been Able To Hold: Hazara Regions, 13 November 2018, url
838 Pajhwok Afghan News, 2017 causalties: nearly 25,000 people killed, wounded in Afghanistan, 14 January 2018, url
839 UNAMA, Bamiyan religious scholars gather to discuss peace-building in Afghanistan, 20 November 2017, url
840 BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, url
841 Pajhwok Afghan News, After Tala wa Barfak, Taliban eying Bamyans’s Kahmard, 12 May 2018, url
points in Kahmard district, killing one tribal elder and abducting four persons according to Tolonews. Three of the four abducted persons were later released and the Taliban fled into Tala wa Barfak.\(^{842}\)

In November 2018, Afghan president Ashraf Ghani announced the formation of a new security unit consisting of at least 443 security personnel in the province.\(^{843}\)

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Bamyan province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.\(^{844}\) When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

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<td>Gov control</td>
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\(^{842}\) Tolonews, Taliban Attack Police Check Posts in Bamiyan, 30 July 2018, url
\(^{843}\) Khaama Press, Ghani orders formation of the new 443-strong security unit in Bamyan province, 10 November 2018, url
\(^{845}\) LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
2.6.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.6.3.1 General

In 2018 UNAMA documented 7 civilian casualties (1 death and 6 injured) in Bamyan. This represents an increase of 75% compared to 2016. Leading causes of casualties were unexploded ordnance (UXO)/landmines, followed by ground engagements and threat/intimidation/harassment.846

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Yakawlang, Panjab, Kharmand and Sayghan in the lowest category. The districts Waras, Shibar and Bamyan are in the second lowest category.847

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 4 incidents related to insurgents in Bamyan province.848

In late November 2018, Afghan authorities arrested Hazara militia leader Alipoor (also known as Commander Shamsheer) on charges of attacking security forces,849 as well as of extortion of passengers by his gunmen on the highways in Bamyan, Ghor, and Wardak provinces.850 The arrest caused protests in Kabul, Bamyan, and Mazar-e-Sharif; in Kabul the protests turned violent.851 Alipoor’s supporters claimed that Alipoor had not been fighting government forces, but rather the Taliban in parts of Wardak, Ghor, and Daykundi.852 Alipoor’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.853

2.6.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 8 persons displaced from Bamyan province within the province itself. They were all displaced from the district of Waras to the district of Bamyan,854 in April 2018.855

No conflict-induced internal displacement to or from Bamyan province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.856

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 3,091 persons displaced to Bamyan mainly from other provinces.

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847 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 2
848 Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, url, accessed 1 March 2019
849 Tolonews, Alipoor Says He Is ‘Ready To Hand Over All Weapons’, 27 November 2018, url
850 RFE/RL, Afghan Authorities Release Militia Leader After Violent Demonstrations, 26 November 2018, url; Tolonews, NDS Chief Says Claims Against Alipoor Will Be Investigated, 27 November 2018, url
851 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
852 Tolonews, Alipoor Supporters Protest For The Second Day In Kabul, 26 November 2018, url
853 RFE/RL, Afghan Authorities Release Militia Leader After Violent Demonstrations, 26 November 2018, url
854 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, url
855 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Internal Displacement due to Conflict, 24 February 2019, url
856 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, url
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2.7 Daykundi

2.7.1 General description of the province

Located in the Central Region of Hazarajat, Daykundi is surrounded by Ghor to the north and west, Bamyan to the east, Ghazni to the south-east, Uruzgan to the south and Helmand to the southwest. According to Pajhwok Afghan News, Daykundi used to be part of Uruzgan and became a separate province in 2003, while the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) stated that the province of Daykundi was established in 2014.

Besides the provincial capital Nili, Daykundi consists of the following districts: Ashtarlay, Pato, Kajran, Khadir, Kiti, Miramor, Sang-e-Takht, and Shahrestan. Gizab/Pato district changed hands between Uruzgan and Daykundi in the past. In May 2018, Pajhwok Afghan News reported that Pato – formerly part of Gizab district in Uruzgan – had been declared an independent district and would soon become part of Daykundi. The Afghan CSO counted Pato as a ‘temporary’ district of Daykundi in 2018.

According to AAN, ‘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 estimations by the Afghan CSO, 498,840 people live in Daykundi as of 2018/19.\textsuperscript{865} Part of the Hazarajat,\textsuperscript{866} most of Daykundi’s residents are Hazara, with a minority of Pashtuns, Balochs, and Sayeds/Sadats.\textsuperscript{867}

Most of Daykundi’s territory is mountainous, with heavy snowfall in winter blocking many roads for months.\textsuperscript{868} An assessment by the Afghanistan Food Security Cluster (FSC) described the condition of Daykundi’s roads as ‘very bad’, with sparse infrastructure.\textsuperscript{869} According to Tolonews, only one paved road exists in the province.\textsuperscript{870} The same source reports that there is an airport in Daykundi, which is ‘not standard’ according to the governor of the province, as only small planes can land.\textsuperscript{871} According to the airport map produced by the Austrian COI unit, Daykundi is not served by scheduled passenger flights.\textsuperscript{872}

Daykundi residents largely depend on agriculture.\textsuperscript{873} According to FSC, remittances sent from migrants are an important source of income for the population of Daykundi.\textsuperscript{874}

According to the 2018 Opium Survey of UNODC, Daykundi was not among Afghanistan’s ten main opium-poppy-cultivation provinces in 2018\textsuperscript{875} – cultivation amounted to less than 1000 hectares in 2018.\textsuperscript{876} Compared to 2017, poppy cultivation decreased by 50 % in 2018,\textsuperscript{877} placing Daykundi among the provinces with a ‘strong decrease’ according to UNODC.\textsuperscript{878}

2.7.2 Conflict background and actors in Daykundi

Tolonews termed Daykundi a secure province, with the lack of infrastructure being a major problem to the population.\textsuperscript{879} An Afghan military expert traced the relative stability of Daykundi, as well as Bamyan and Panjshir, to the social cohesion among its inhabitants, as most of them belong to the same tribal group.\textsuperscript{880}

In 2015, armed groups of rival parties caused insecurity in the districts of Ashtarlay, Khadir, and Sang-e-Takht, according to residents.\textsuperscript{881} As Daykundi borders on the unstable provinces of Helmand and Uruzgan, Pajhwok Afghan News reported in March 2015 and June 2018 that residents repeatedly voiced fears of Taliban attacks.\textsuperscript{882} Throughout 2018, the Taliban launched attacks against security
checkpoints in several of Daykundi’s districts. In November 2018, President Ashraf Ghani reportedly acknowledged the promotion of Daykundi to a second grade province in order to increase the allocation of funds to the province. According to a publication of 2004, the ‘[…] the grade is determined largely by population, but there are additional political factors that play into the assignment. […] The grade of a province or district will affect the size of governor’s office and district office, as well as the position grades of the staff.’ Furthermore, Ghani ordered the Army Chief to create a military battalion in Daykundi.

Daykundi is under the responsibility of the 205th ANA Corps.

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Daykundi province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban. When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

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883 Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 pro-govt fighters, 2 policemen killed in Daikundi clash, 23 July 2018, url; RFE/RL, Dozens Of Afghan Police Officers Killed In Taliban Attacks, 16 October 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture security posts near Daikundi’s capital, 16 December 2018, url
885 MENA FN, Afghanistan - President acknowledges promotion of Daikundi to 2nd grade province, 10 November 2018, url
886 Global Security, Afghan National Army (ANA) - Order of Battle, n.d., url, page last modified 6 September 2018
888 LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
2.7.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.7.3.1 General

In 2018 UNAMA documented 41 civilian casualties (19 deaths and 22 injured) in Daykundi. This represents a decrease of 5% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by kidnapping/abduction and (non-suicide) IEDs.890

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Pato in the second highest category, the district of Kajran in the fourth highest category and the remaining districts in the two lowest categories.891

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 21 incidents related to insurgents in Daykundi province.892

In July 2018, at least nine members of a pro-government militia, as well as two policemen were killed in a Taliban attack on the district centre of Pato.893 In October 2018, hundreds of Taliban fighters equipped with heavy weapons reportedly attacked checkpoints in Kajran district, killing eight Afghan soldiers and five policemen. While the attacks had no direct link to the parliamentary elections which took place a few days after, RFE/RL pointed out that they highlighted the strength of the Taliban in large parts of Afghanistan.894 One day after the attacks, an IED explosion killed one woman and injured three persons. AAN cited officials who interpreted the Taliban attacks and IED explosion in mid-October 2018 as an attempt to dissuade residents from voting. According to them, larger attacks probably failed to materialise after these incidents because the Taliban had also suffered considerable casualties in Kajran.895

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889 According to UNOCHA and Pajhwok Afghan News Ajrestan district is located in Ghazni province. (UNOCHA Afghanistan Daykundi Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url]; Pajhwok Afghan News, 33 Security Personnel Flee Ajristan, Get Shelter in Daikundi, 14 August 2018, [url])

890 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url], p. 68

891 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url], p. 2

892 Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url], accessed 1 March 2019

893 Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 pro-govt fighters, 2 policemen killed in Daikundi clash, 23 July 2018, [url]

894 RFE/RL, Dozens Of Afghan Police Officers Killed In Taliban Attacks, 16 October 2018, [url]

895 Qaane, E., The 2018 Election Observed (7) in Daikundi: The outstanding role of women, AAN, 27 January 2019, [url]
In December 2018, Taliban insurgents captured security checkposts in Pato, only a few kilometres away from the district border of Daykundi’s capital Nili.\textsuperscript{896}

Afghan security forces responded with clearing operations in the end of December 2018, killing at least 30 Taliban insurgents in Pato and reopening the Nili-Pato highway.\textsuperscript{897} Another offensive of the Afghan security forces took place in the beginning of January 2019.\textsuperscript{898}

### 2.7.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 558 persons displaced from Daykundi province mainly within the province itself.\textsuperscript{899}

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Daykundi province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.\textsuperscript{900}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 2 756 persons displaced to Daykundi province, including 2 229 individuals from Ghazni.\textsuperscript{901}

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Daykundi province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.\textsuperscript{902}

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\textsuperscript{896} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture security posts near Daikundi’s capital, 16 December 2018, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{897} Pajhwok Afghan News, 30 militants eliminated in Daikundi operation, 27 December 2018, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{898} Pajhwok Afghan News, 46 militants killed, 33 injured in past 24 hours: MoD, 4 January 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{899} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{900} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{901} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{902} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, \url{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 northeast, Helmand to the southeast and Nimroz to the south, as well as Iran to the west. The province is divided into eleven districts: Anar Dara, Bakwa, Bala Buluk, Farah, Gulistan, Khak-e-Safed, Lash-e-Juwain, Pur Chaman, Pushtrud, Qala-e-Kah (formerly Pusht-Koh) and Shib Koh. The provincial capital of Farah is Farah.

According to estimates by the Afghan CSO, the population of Farah was 543,237 in 2018/19. 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.

According to the airport map produced by the Austrian COI department, Farah has an airport with scheduled passenger services to regional destinations. 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 southeast, respectively. Cross-border transport and trade with Iran.

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903 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Farah Province District Atlas, April 2014, [url]
905 Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url], p. 3
906 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Farah Provincial Overview, n.d., [url]
907 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Farah, n.d., [url]
908 Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019
909 Diplomat (The), Kabul's Plan to Realize Afghanistan’s Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, [url]
is reportedly possible at Abu Nasr Farahi port. In September 2018, Tolonews reported security problems near the border crossing, as the route towards the border leads through militant-controlled areas.

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.

2.8.2 Conflict background and actors in Farah

In June 2018, AAN in June 2018 called the Taliban ‘[...] a persistent and growing force in Farah since 2001, rebuilding their strength quietly after the U.S. invasion and then seizing territory in remote districts.’ Accordingly, 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.

AAN noted that there might be an ethnic dimension favouring the maintenance of a strong Taliban organisation in some parts of the province. Taliban stronghold Shiwan village in Bala Buluk district for instance, is mostly inhabited by so-called naqelin, i.e. Pashtuns, who have been resettled from their original areas in Helmand by the Afghan monarch about 100 years ago. Shiwan's naqelin reportedly still maintain close links to the Taliban strongholds in Helmand. Additionally, AAN assumed that the Baloch minority in Farah helped to establish links to Baloch smugglers in neighbouring Nimroz, who are reportedly able to draw on ‘[...] century-old connections with Iran and Pakistan.’

According to AAN, Farah is of strategic interest to insurgents and pro-government strongmen because of its transport routes into bordering Iran. Reportedly, the Taliban levy ‘taxes’ on cross-border traffic, as well as along the highway connecting Farah to Nimroz. Opium-poppy cultivation is especially strong in the districts under Taliban control. Drug production and smuggling is however not confined to Taliban insurgents, according to AAN; there is allegedly an increasing convergence of interests between the drug trade, Taliban networks and the local administration of Farah.

Rivalries among local pro-government strongmen reportedly have had negative consequences on the security situation in the province, as ‘[...] Farah’s government officials competed over the seven unofficial border crossing points to Iran, at which they collected customs – and apparently pocketed most of it,’ – a practice, which allegedly continues according to AAN.

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910 Tolonews, Import Ban Affects Business In Farah Port, 21 September 2018, url; IRNA, Afghanistan opens Farah border to Iranian goods, 4 November 2018, url
911 Tolonews, Import Ban Affects Business In Farah Port, 21 September 2018, url
912 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p.16
913 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p.17
914 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017, November 2017, url, p.16
915 Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, url
916 Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, url
917 Washington Post (The), Outgunned in urban centers, Taliban wages fierce fight in remote western Afghanistan, 26 February 2018, url
918 Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, url
919 Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, url
920 Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, url
921 Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, url
922 Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, url
923 Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, url
924 Ruttig, T., Why Farah? A short history of the local insurgency (II), AAN, 7 June 2018, url
IS has been reportedly present in some parts of Farah in 2015.\footnote{Osman, B., The Shadows of ‘Islamic State’ in Afghanistan: What threat does it hold?, AAN, 12 February 2015, \url; Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, \url, p. 27; VoA, Taliban Captures IS Bases in Afghanistan, 5 January 2016, \url} According to Iranian sources, Taliban fighters succeeded in dislodging IS militants.\footnote{Middle East Institute, Afghans see Iran´s hand in Taliban´s latest gains in western Afghanistan, 14 March 2018, \url}

According to Washington Post, around 6,000 members of the security forces were employed in the province of Farah in early 2018 – approximately half as much as in neighbouring Helmand Province with a similar size. The Washington Post cited local officials stating that the strength of government forces in the province is insufficient, as a majority of police are ‘ghost officers’, i.e. policemen on the payrolls, which exist only on paper.\footnote{Washington Post (The), Outgunned in urban centers, Taliban wages fierce fight in remote western Afghanistan, 26 February 2018, \url}

In February 2018, 50 Italian soldiers were stationed near the airport of Farah City in order to support the Afghan forces in clearing operations.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, 50 Italian troops in Farah to support Afghan forces, 7 February 2018, \url} In August 2018, the Afghan Ministry of Defense (MoD) confirmed the deployment of US Special Forces to assist in the training of the Afghan armed forces in Farah.\footnote{Khaama Press, MoD confirms deployment of US Special Forces in Farah province, 5 August 2018, \url}

Farah is under the responsibility of the 207th ANA Zafar Corps.\footnote{Global Security, Afghan National Army (ANA) - Order of Battle, n.d., \url, last modified 6 September 2018; Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., \url}

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Farah province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.\footnote{SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, \url, pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, \url, pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., \url; Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, \url} When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>BBC (reporting period: August-November 2017)</th>
<th>US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of July 2018)</th>
<th>US military (quoted by SIGAR) (assessment as of October 2018)</th>
<th>LWJ (last accessed: \footnote{LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.} April 2019)</th>
<th>Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)</th>
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<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
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<td>Bakwa</td>
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<td>Bala Buluk</td>
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<td>Gulistan</td>
<td>Open Taliban Presence - high</td>
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<td>Taliban control</td>
<td>TB control</td>
</tr>
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2.8.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.8.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 275 civilian casualties (122 deaths and 153 injured) in the province of Farah. This represents a decrease of 19% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by (non-suicide) IEDs and targeted killings.933

In a map depicting ‘conflict severity’ in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Farah, Bala Baluk and Pushtrod in the highest category. The districts of Anar Dara, Qala-e-Kah and Khak-e-Safed are in the third highest category, the districts of Shibkoh, Bakwa and Gulistan in the category below, and the district of Lash-e-Juwayn and Pur Chaman in the second lowest category.934

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 215 incidents related to insurgents in Farah.935

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933 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 68
934 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 2
Throughout 2018, the Taliban attacked military posts and security checkpoints, mainly in the district of Bala Buluk, but also in the district of Pushtrud, as well as in the outskirts of Farah City, and within the provincial capital itself. The district centre of Anar Dara was reportedly briefly captured by the Taliban in March 2018.

In May 2018, the insurgents succeeded in overrunning parts of Farah City for the first time in three years. The Taliban had already closed in on Farah City in October 2016, and in 2017, the British newspaper Guardian reported three failed attempts to capture the provincial capital. In the beginning of 2018, Afghan officials warned that Taliban insurgents were no longer only on the outskirts of Farah, but had actually entered the city. According to AAN, the Taliban employed a strategy of consolidating control over rural areas and infiltrating the provincial centre’s outskirts before eventually attacking the centre itself.

According to Tolonews, altogether approximately 2000 Taliban fighters originating from the provinces of Helmand, Herat, Ghor, and Zabul have been involved in the large-scale attack on Farah City in May 2018. Afghanistan Analysts Network however stated that this number cannot be confirmed. As the Taliban were comparatively well-equipped – using for instance night-vision goggles and helmet cameras –, Afghan officials accused Russia of arming the Taliban. Russian authorities rejected this, pointing out that the Taliban, with abundant income from opium production and trade, might have acquired Russian night-vision gear on the black market in Pakistan, or in former Soviet countries.

With the aid of US and Afghan airstrikes, government forces reportedly repelled the Taliban from Farah City after hours of fighting. Afghan and US forces conducted several airstrikes in Farah in 2018, for
instance in April, May, July, September, November and December, as well as in January 2019. According to a UN Secretary-General’s report of February 2019, Farah was among the six provinces with the largest number of airstrikes in Afghanistan in the period of December 2018 to February 2019.

In June 2018, a former district chief of Pur Chaman was arrested with several of his employees on charges of involvement in terrorist related activities. In July, 11 civilians travelling from Herat to Kabul died and about 40 were injured when their bus hit a roadside bomb in the district of Bala Buluk. In December 2018, Mal officials arrested a police officer allegedly affiliated to the Taliban and accused of facilitating a Taliban attack on police forces in November 2018 which resulted in the deaths of 22 policemen. In January 2019, Taliban insurgents kidnapped several persons, among them a local journalist, who was later killed by the Taliban.

### 2.8.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 24,674 persons displaced from Farah province, most of whom (23,662) were displaced within the province and the others went to Badghis, Helmand, Herat, Kandahar and Nimroz provinces.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 2,135 persons displaced from Farah province, a large part of them (2,051) were displaced within the province and the rest of them were displaced to Herat province.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 23,662 persons displaced to Farah province all coming from within the province itself.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 2,051 persons displaced to Farah province, all coming from the province itself.

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950 Khaama Press, Joint airstrikes leave 37 militants dead, 7 wounded in Farah, 16 April 2018, [url](url)
951 Khaama Press, Video: Deadly airstrikes target Taliban after Farah city attack, 16 May 2018, [url](url); Khaama Press, Taliban leader Mullah Din Mohammad and comrades killed in Farah airstrike, 21 May 2018, [url](url); Khaama Press, NDS Special Forces foil Taliban’s bid to carry out coordinated attack in Farah, 26 May 2018, [url](url)
952 Khaama Press, AAF targets Humvee vehicle captured by Taliban leaving 4 militants dead, 4 July 2018, [url](url); Khaama Press, Badar-16 operations kick off against Taliban in Farah province, 18 July 2018, [url](url)
953 Khaama Press, 46 militants killed, 38 thousand kgs of explosives in Farah airstrikes, 24 September 2018, [url](url)
954 Khaama Press, Humvee APC destroyed, 9 militants killed in AAF airstrike in Farah province, 23 November 2018, [url](url)
955 Khaama Press, 54 militants killed during the joint operations in past 24 hours: MoD, 22 December 2018, [url](url); Khaama Press, Drone strike target militants in Farah province, 23 December 2018, [url](url); Khaama Press, Taliban commander among 7 killed in Farah airstrikes, 24 December 2018, [url](url)
956 Khaama Press, 29 Taliban militants killed in coalition airstrike in Kandahar, 6 January 2019, [url](url)
957 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implication for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, p. 6
958 Khaama Press, Afghan Special Forces arrest ex-district chief in Farah over terror charges, 27 June 2018, [url](url)
959 RFE/RL, Bomb Kills At Least 11 In Western Afghanistan, 31 July 2018, [url](url)
960 Khaama Press, Mal arrest police officer affiliated with Taliban in Farah province, 22 December 2018, [url](url)
961 RFE/RL, Afghan Forces Free Hostages As Taliban Kidnap Government Employees, 5 January 2019, [url](url); Khaama Press, Reporters Without Borders reacts to the killing of a journalist by Taliban, 9 January 2019, [url](url)
962 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](url)
963 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](url)
964 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](url)
965 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](url)
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<td>Shib Koh</td>
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In 2018, 25% of Farah’s population was either a returnee or an IDP. According to UNOCHA, fighting and clashes between ANDSF and armed groups were the main reasons of displacements even in the provincial capital where fighting has ‘displaced more than 10,000 people to neighbouring villages, before returning to their homes after security forces had regained control of the area. Some 500 people reportedly also displaced from Farah City into Herat’.  

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2.9 Faryab

2.9.1 General description of the province

Bordering Turkmenistan to the west and north, Jawzjan and Sar-e Pul to the east, Ghor to the south and Badghis in the south-west, the province of Faryab is situated in the north-western region of Afghanistan. The provincial capital is Maymana. The province comprises the following districts: Almar,
Andkhoy, Biliharam, Dawlatabad, Garzwan, Khan-e-Char Bagh, Khwajasabzposh, Kohistan, Maymana, Pashtunkot, Qaramqol, Qaysar, Qorgh, Shrintagab. 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 2018/19 population estimation of the Afghan CSO, as well as the publication of the 2018 parliamentary election results by the Independent Election Commission again listed Ghormach as part of Badghis.

Estimates by the Afghanistan CSO report the population of Faryab to be 1,069,540 in 2018/19. Together with Sar-e Pul, Faryab is one of the two provinces with an Uzbek majority in Afghanistan. Additionally, Tajiks/Aimaqs, Pashtuns, Hazara, Moghol and other smaller ethnicities live in the province.

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. Another stretch of the Ring Road, planned to connect the district of Qaysar in Faryab with the site of Laman in Badghis south-west of Faryab, is under construction. According to an assessment by SIGAR, only 15% of this projected 233-kilometre section of the Ring Road between Qaysar and Laman has been built as of September 2017 despite considerable funding since 2005. SIGAR linked the project’s failure mostly to security issues and estimates the prospects for a timely completion to be bleak, due to increasing insecurity in the region. 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 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

970 Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan’s major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, url
971 Frontier Post (The), Ghormach falls to Taliban as ANA troops move to Maimana, 28 August 2018, url
972 Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, url
973 Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, url
975 Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url: p. 3
976 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
977 Diplomat (The), Kabul’s Plan to Realize Afghanistan’s Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, url
978 SIGAR, Afghanistan’s Ring Road from Qeysar to Laman: After more than 12 years and over $249 million spent, the project is only 15 percent complete, June 2018, url: p. 4
979 SIGAR, Afghanistan’s Ring Road from Qeysar to Laman: After more than 12 years and over $249 million spent, the project is only 15 percent complete, June 2018, url: p. 23
980 Bjelica, J., How Neglect and Remoteness Bred Insurgency and a Poppy Boom: The story of Badghis, AAN, 22 February 2017, url
981 Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan’s major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, url
though UNODC counted Ghormach — a district with sizeable opium-poppy cultivation — as part of Faryab for the first time in 2018. UNODC links the decrease mainly to this year’s weather conditions, as Faryab was affected by a drought.

### 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 Taleban moved to capture Mazar-e Sharif in 1997 and 1998 and from where anti-Taleban forces came to re-capture the city in 2001.’

Khaama Press reported in January 2019 that ‘Faryab is among the relatively volatile provinces in North of Afghanistan where Talibin militants are actively operating in some of its districts and often attempt to carry out attacks against the government and security institutions.’

AAN links the Talibin’s success in Faryab from 2007 onwards to ‘[...] local Jamiat-Jombesh rivalries, poppy-cultivation interests and radical propaganda by religious preachers, coupled with the absolute inconsistence of government outreach [...]’ as well as the exploitation of local land and water conflicts and the rearmament of local commanders. According to AAN, fighting broke out between local pro-government militias in early 2018, which further weakened the resistance against anti-government insurgents.

According to AAN, the Talibin became increasingly successful in the province after drawing on local fighters – which is a change in strategy compared to the Talibin’s approach before 2001. Since 2008, Faryab’s Talibin shadow governors mostly have been Uzbek and also a majority of the Talibin district officers are Uzbek 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.

However, AAN reported that the strategy of endorsement towards non-Pashtun ethnic groups among Faryab’s Talibin limits the group’s organisational capacity as some Pashtun Talibin commanders ignore instructions of Uzbek shadow governors. In order to avoid tensions, the current shadow governor allegedly deploys a strategy of individual smaller operations by each group in their own areas instead of joint operations with larger numbers of fighters.

General Abdul Rashid Dostum, Jombesh party leader and self-proclaimed sole representative of the Uzbek minority in Afghanistan, allegedly perceived the Talibin outreach to Uzbek communities as a threat. Subsequently, Dostum put considerable effort in combatting the Talibin 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 Talibin militants. Local government forces and pro-government militias have however not been able to hold most of the areas after
Dostum moved out of Faryab.991 According to the analyst Deedee Derksen, the rearmament of local militias by Dostum 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.992

Besides local Taliban insurgents, a small Taliban-affiliated group of the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) reportedly fights in Faryab.993 In April 2018, Qari Hekmat, the leader of the self-proclaimed ISKP, which operated in Jawzjan, was killed in a US airstrike in Bilcheragh close to Jawzjan’s borders. The fact that Hekmat has been killed in Faryab should be attributed to the village’s proximity to Hekmat’s stronghold in Jawzjan, according to AAN. AAN stated that Hekmat had shown no signs of planning to expand towards Faryab994 and in the beginning of August 2018, the group was defeated by the Taliban in Jawzjan.995

In terms of the presence government security forces, Faryab is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen Corp.996

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Faryab province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.997 When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

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<thead>
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<td>Contested</td>
<td>High INS activity</td>
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<td>TB control</td>
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991 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
992 War on the Rocks, In Afghanistan, Today’s Pro-Government Militias Could Be Tomorrows’s Insurgents, 11 December 2017, url
993 Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan’s major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, url
994 Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan’s major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, url
995 Ali, O., Qari Hekmat’s Island Overrun: Taleban defeat ‘ISKP’ in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, url
998 LWJ is living map that is frequently updated.
<table>
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<th><strong>Dawlatabad</strong></th>
<th>Open Taliban presence - Medium</th>
<th>Contested</th>
<th>Contested</th>
<th>Contested</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Khan-e-Char Bagh</strong></td>
<td>Gov control</td>
<td>GIROA Influence</td>
<td>GIROA Influence</td>
<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
<td>Gov control: 50%; TB control: 50%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Kohestan</strong></td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>INS activity</td>
<td>INS activity</td>
<td>Taliban control</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maymana</strong> (capital)</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
<td>GIROA Influence</td>
<td>GIROA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
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<td>Taliban control</td>
<td>TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%</td>
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<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lolash</strong></td>
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<td>/</td>
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<tr>
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<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bandar</strong></td>
<td>/</td>
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<td>/</td>
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<td>TB control</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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999 According to Pajhwok Afghan News Khwaja Musa is an area located in Pashtunkot district. (Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab Governor Denies Khwaja Musa Fell to Taliban, 2 March 2016, [url](#))

1000 According to Pajhwok Afghan News Juma Bazar is the capital of Khwajasabzposh district. (Pajhwok Afghan News, Elections 2018 - Faryab Administrative Units, n.d., [url](#))

1001 According to Anadolou Agency (AA) Chilgazi is an area in Ghormach district. (Anadolou Agency (AA), Taliban Overrun Military Base in Afghanistan, 14 August 2018, [url](#))

1002 According to Afghanistan Times Bandar is an area in Kohestan district. (Afghanistan Times, Taliban Martyred Six of a Family in Faryab, 1 January 2018, [url](#))
2.9.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.9.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 646 civilian casualties (230 deaths and 416 injured) in the province of Faryab. This represents an increase of 1% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by UXO/landmines.\textsuperscript{1003}

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Dawlatabad, Shirintagab, Khwajasabzposh, Pashtunktot, Qaysar and Almar in the highest category and the district of Kohestan in the second highest category. Qaramqol, Garziwan, and Bilcheragh districts are in the third highest category, Maymana in the category below, and Qurghan, Andkhoy and Khan-e-Char Bagh in the lowest categories.\textsuperscript{1004}

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 259 incidents related to insurgents in Faryab province.\textsuperscript{1005}

In March 2018, AAN stated that ‘[...] Faryab has become one of the most active fronts in the countrywide war between the Taleban and the government and its allies’ over the past two years.\textsuperscript{1006} Most of the districts of Faryab have been under Taliban control in the beginning of 2018 according to the same report, with the government controlling only the district centres and a few surrounding villages in the districts of Shirintagab, Khwajasabzposh, Dawlatabad, Pashtunktot, Almar, Qaysar, Bilcheragh, Kohestan and Garziwan.\textsuperscript{1007} The district of Ghormach – now again part of Badghis – was fully captured by the Taliban in August 2017 and again in August 2018, after it had changed hands several times during recent years.\textsuperscript{1008} Additionally, the Taliban also increased their presence along the Ring Road by establishing mobile checkpoints and searching vehicles for government employees and security force members along a crucial part of the highway connecting major trading centre Mazar-e Sharif in the north-east with Herat in the west of the country.\textsuperscript{1009}

According to AAN’s report published in the beginning of October 2018, almost two thirds of Faryab’s voters were prevented from registering for the 2018 parliamentary elections due to insecurity.\textsuperscript{1010} As the Taliban gained control over a majority of Faryab’s districts in 2017, taking the provincial capital Maymana ‘practically under siege’, the Afghan government and – for the first time since 2014 – also NATO forces shifted troops towards the province.\textsuperscript{1011} AAN analysts Obaid Ali and Thomas Ruttig took this as a sign of worry by the government forces, anticipating that Maymana might eventually be captured by the Taliban. According to the same report, the AAF had intensified airstrikes in the province at least since January 2018, while airstrikes had already caused considerable casualties among civilians in 2017.\textsuperscript{1012} AAF airstrikes, as well as clashes between Taliban and government forces,

\textsuperscript{1003} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, \url{url}, p. 68
\textsuperscript{1004} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, \url{url}, p. 2
\textsuperscript{1005} Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, \url{url}, accessed 1 March 2019
\textsuperscript{1006} Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan’s major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1007} Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan’s major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1008} Frontier Post (The), Ghormach falls to Taliban as ANA troops move to Maimana, 28 August 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1009} Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan’s major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1010} Adili, A.Y., Afghanistan Elections Conundrum (17): Voters disenfranchised in Faryab, AAN, 12 October 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1011} Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan’s major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1012} Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Battle for Faryab: Fighting intensifies on one of Afghanistan’s major frontlines, AAN, 12 March 2018, \url{url}
continued in early 2019. According to a UN Secretary General report of February 2019, Faryab was among the six provinces with the largest number of airstrikes in Afghanistan in the period of December 2018 to February 2019.

2.9.3.1 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 68 267 persons displaced from Faryab province mainly within the province itself, but also to Jawzjan, Balkh, Herat, Ghor and Kandahar.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 7 336 persons displaced from Faryab province, mainly within the province itself but also to Balkh province (2 226).

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 51 126 persons displaced to Faryab province. All of them were originating from the province itself.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 4 613 persons displaced to Faryab province, all of them originating from the province itself.

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<td>Garziwan</td>
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<td>Khwajasabzposal</td>
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<td>Kohestan</td>
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1014 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implication for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, [url], p. 6
1016 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url]
1017 UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url]
1018 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url]
According to UNOCHA, quoted by AAN, 30 282 Fariyabis left their places of origin, between January and September 2018, due to fightings and drought.\footnote{Adili, A.Y., Afghanistan Elections Conundrum (17): Voters disenfranchised in Faryab, AAN, 12 October 2018, url}

In May 2018, many IDPs went from Dawlatabad and two other districts to Maymana city due to conflict.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report 21-27 May 2018, 28 May 2018, url} In September 2018, 2 100 individuals came to Maymana due to an attack on their village in Pashtunkot district,\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report 10-16 September 2018, 17 September 2018, url} and 400 families were displaced in Maymana City due to military operations in Shirintagab district in January 2019.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report 01-07 January 2019, 10 January 2019, url}
2.10 Ghazni

2.10.1 General description of the province

The province of Ghazni is located in the southeast 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 has 19
administrative units: Ghazni district with the provincial capital of Ghazni City, as well as the districts of Abband, Ajrestan, Andar, Dehyak, Gelan, Giro, Jaghatu, Jaghuri, Khwajaumari, Malestan, Muqur, Nawa, Nawur, Qarabagh, Rashidan, Waghaz, Walimuhammad-e Shahid (Khugyani), and Zanakhan.1023 The district of Andar is also known as Shelgar.1024

According estimates by the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Ghazni is 1 315 041 in 2018/19.1025 Pajhwok Afghan News states that Ghazni is inhabited by Pashtuns, Tajiks and Hazara, as well as of several smaller groups such as Bayats, Sadats and Sikhs.1026 Nearly half of Ghazni’s population are reportedly Pashtuns, with a bit less than a half being Hazaras, and about 5 % Tajiks.1027

A US military expert called Ghazni City a ‘key intersection’, as it is situated on the Ring Road (or Highway 1), connecting the capital Kabul with major population centre Kandahar in the south. Additionally, the road to Paktika’s capital Sharan branches off the Ring Road in Ghazni City, while the road to Paktya’s capital Gardez forks a bit north of Ghazni City. Hence, control over Ghazni is of strategic importance.1028

According to UNOCHA, Highway 1 was partially destroyed and contaminated with IEDs in August 2018.1029 At the end of August 2018, this stretch of the Ring Road near Ghazni City had reportedly been cleared of IEDs and reopened for civilian traffic. Accordingly, UNOCHA stated in August 2018 that ‘[...] travel from Kabul to Ghazni via Highway 1 is possible but remains risky, notably due to sporadic fighting between Saydabad, Wardak, and Ghazni.’1030 Afghanistan Analysts Network reported in December 2018 that the Ghazni-Paktika highway was under Taliban control and closed for civilian and government vehicles, with the insurgents continuing to put pressure on the Kabul-Kandahar highway.1031

Zarkashan mine, reportedly one of the biggest gold mines in Afghanistan, lies in the district of Muqur. In February 2018, according to AAN, Muqur’s residents complained that Taliban insurgents were mining in Zarkashan with the help of Pakistani engineers.1032

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Ghazni was not one of the ten main opium-poppy-cultivating provinces of Afghanistan in 2018.1033 While Ghazni was reportedly poppy-free between 2013 and 2016, approximately 1 000 hectares of opium-poppy have been cultivated in 2017. In 2018, the size of the acreage decreased by 64 %.1034 Most of Ghazni’s opium-poppy has been cultivated in the insecure district of Ajrestan in 2018.1035

2.10.2 Conflict background and actors in Ghazni

Voice of America (VoA) termed Ghazni a ‘restive’ province in the beginning of 2018.1036 According to AAN, the Taliban have ‘long-established significant influence’ in the province and dominated militarily ‘[...] all but one of the 18 district centres and some larger areas in three districts’ in July 2018,’1037 with

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1023 Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 16; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: South Eastern Region - District Atlas, April 2014, url
1024 Muzhary, F. and Clark, K., Uprising, ALP and Taleban in Andar: The arc of government failure, AAN, 22 May 2018, url
1025 Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 2
1026 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Ghazni, n.d., url
1027 Naval Postgraduate School, Ghazni Provincial Overview, n.d., url
1028 Clearance Jobs, Taliban Seizure of Ghazni City Returns Terror Organization to its Roots, 13 August 2018, url
1029 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
1030 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Conflict Update No. 4, 20 August 2018, url
1031 Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, url
1032 Qaane, E., The Insecure Spring of Ghazni: Results of third-grade treatment by the centre?, AAN, 25 July 2018, url
1033 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 17
1034 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 19
1035 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 21
1036 VoA, IS Leaflets Threaten Residents in Restive Afghan Province, 10 January 2018, url
1037 Qaane, E., The Insecure Spring of Ghazni: Results of third-grade treatment by the centre?, AAN, 25 July 2018, url
the provincial capital remaining an exception until August 2018, when the Taliban overran Ghazni City.\textsuperscript{1038}

According to various sources reporting on Taliban attacks, the Afghan security forces were understaffed in Ghazni in 2018 (for more information see section \textsuperscript{2.10.3.1}).\textsuperscript{1039} Supplementing the ANP, ALP, and NDS paramilitary forces, a newly established ANA Territorial Force (ANA TF) is being piloted in the district of Jaghori as part of a pilot project. According to AAN, the establishment of this new local defence force has been authorised in February 2018 by presidential decree in order to create a force protecting local people and holding territory without being co-opted by strongmen or factional interests. While the decision to choose Jaghori as one of the pilot regions for the deployment of ANA TF was reportedly made before the Taliban attacks on Jaghori and Malestan in November 2018, AAN assumed that the attacks might have accelerated the formation of the Jaghori ANA TF companies.\textsuperscript{1040}

During the attack on Ghazni City in August 2018, the government forces were aided by US air strikes and US Army Special Forces on the ground.\textsuperscript{1041} In November 2018, three US special operations soldiers were killed in an IED explosion in Andar district at the outskirts of Ghazni City, a fourth soldier wounded in the attack died in December.\textsuperscript{1042}

Ghazni is under the responsibility of the 203\textsuperscript{rd} ANA Corps.\textsuperscript{1043}

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Ghazni province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal (LWJ) and the Taliban.\textsuperscript{1044} When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

\begin{table}
\begin{tabular}{|l|}
\hline
| District                  | Source (Date) |
\hline
| Ajristan                  | \textsuperscript{1039} Der Spiegel, Taliban-Offensive in Afghanistan Der Albtraum von Ghazni [Taliban Offensive in Afghanistan: The Nightmare of Ghazni], 15 August 2018, url; Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (1): Looking back at the Taleban attack on Ghazni, AAN, 16 December 2018, url; Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, url |
| Jaghori                   | \textsuperscript{1040} Clark, K., The Afghan Territorial Force: Learning from the lessons of the past?, AAN, 15 January 2019, url |
| Malestan                  | \textsuperscript{1041} Time, Exclusive: Inside the U.S. Fight to Save Ghazni From the Taliban, 23 August 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 12 US Army personnel killed in Afghanistan last year, url |
| Khas Uruzgan               | \textsuperscript{1042} BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 3 December 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 12 US Army personnel killed in Afghanistan last year, url |
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<th>Contested</th>
<th>GIRoA Influence</th>
<th>Contested</th>
<th>Taliban control</th>
<th>TB control</th>
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<td>TB control</td>
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<td>Gelan</td>
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</table>

1045 LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
1046 According to the Taliban Ajrestan district is located in Daykundi province. (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, [url])
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Open Taliban presence</th>
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<td>INS activity</td>
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<td>Contested</td>
<td>Taliban control</td>
<td>TB control</td>
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<td>TB control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ghazni (capital)</td>
<td>Open Taliban Presence - high</td>
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<td>Contested</td>
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<td>TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%</td>
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2.10.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.10.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 653 civilian casualties (253 deaths and 400 injured) in Ghazni. This represents an increase of 84% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by aerial attacks and targeted or deliberate killings.  

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Andar in the highest category and the districts of Ajrestan, Qarabagh, Dehyak and Ghazni in the second highest category. Gelan, Jaghatu, Muqur, Waghaz and Zanakhan districts are in the third highest category and the districts of Khwajaumari, Abband and Giro in the fourth category. The remaining districts are in the two lowest categories.

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 476 incidents related to insurgents in Ghazni province.

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1047 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 68
1048 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 2
Throughout 2018 and early 2019, Ghazni continued to be a major battlefield between Taliban insurgents and the Afghan government – backed by US forces since the second half of 2018. Starting in spring 2018, the Taliban increasingly expanded their control in the province. They slowly approached the outskirts of Ghazni City, established road checkpoints, extorted money and killed government employees as well as politicians. In the middle of August 2018, the Taliban captured large parts of Ghazni City, leading to fierce clashes between the insurgents and government forces. After five days, the government regained control over the provincial capital – though, according to AAN, it is disputed, whether this was because of the security forces’ counterattack backed by airstrikes, or because of a strategic retreat by the Taliban.

Airstrikes carried out in August 2018 led to civilian casualties and destroyed civilian homes. UNAMA recorded 262 civilian casualties (79 deaths, 183 injured) related to the Taliban attacks in August 2018. According to UNAMA, most of the civilian casualties were caused by indirect weapons; mainly rockets and mortars, as well as small arms fire during ground engagement. UNAMA reported seven airstrikes carried out by the pro-government forces, causing the death of 32 persons and injuring 49 others. Furthermore, the Taliban ‘[...] burned down large parts of the bazaar area, causing many people to lose their livelihoods, and intentionally damaged two media corporations.’

The parliamentary election, which should have taken place in October 2018, was first postponed to April 2019 in Ghazni due to the volatile security situation. In late December 2018, the Independent Election Commission announced that the parliamentary election in Ghazni, as well as the presidential election in all of Afghanistan will be held with a three-month delay in July 2019. In March 2019 the elections have been postponed again, this time to 28 September 2019.

Simultaneously with the attack on Ghazni City, the Taliban captured the district of Ajrestan west of the provincial capital, as well as an ANA base in Faryab, and a base in Baghlan Province. The New York Times took this as an indicator for Taliban military capacity, while the security forces allegedly showed a lack of coordination in Ghazni. An entire ANA commando of approximately 100 soldiers reportedly disappeared during the attack in Ajrestan. After fleeing into mountainous areas, about


1051 Der Spiegel, Taliban-Offensive in Afghanistan Der Albtraum von Ghazni [Taliban Offensive in Afghanistan: The Nightmare of Ghazni], 15 August 2018, url;


1053 Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (1): Looking back at the Taleban attack on Ghazni, AAN, 16 December 2018, url;

1054 Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (1): Looking back at the Taleban attack on Ghazni, AAN, 16 December 2018, url;


1056 Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (1): Looking back at the Taleban attack on Ghazni, AAN, 16 December 2018, url;

1057 Reuters, Afghanistan presidential election postponed to September, 20 March 2019, url;


1060 Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (1): Looking back at the Taleban attack on Ghazni, AAN, 16 December 2018, url;

1061 Tolonews, Dozens Of Commandos ‘Missing’ In Ghazni’s Ajiristan District, 13 August 2018, url;
20 survivors reached neighbouring Miramor district in Daykundi two days later, recounting that approximately 40 soldiers had been killed by Taliban ambushes during their flight.\textsuperscript{1062}

In November 2018, the Taliban launched a major offensive against the Hazara-dominated, formerly peaceful districts of Jaghori and Malestan, after the insurgents had already attacked neighbouring Khas Uruzgan in Uruzgan Province in the end of October.\textsuperscript{1063} According to AAN, the attacks have been ‘[…] unprecedented in their reach and led to massive displacement.’\textsuperscript{1064} RFE/RL and AAN interpreted the attacks as an attempt to gain a foothold among Hazara communities, after the traditionally Pashtun-dominated Taliban have succeeded in governing ethnic Tajik and Uzbek areas in the north of Afghanistan. However, according to RFE/RL, the integration of Hazara fighters into Taliban ranks might be much harder to achieve due to the history of ‘past atrocities’ against of Hazaras by the Taliban.\textsuperscript{1065}

In 2018, sources reported that the security force’s response to the Taliban attacks has been perceived as too slow – fuelling concerns of an anti-Hazara bias of the government, as well as ethnic targeting by the Taliban – leading Hazara representatives to start to mobilise forces in order to defend Jaghori and Malestan.\textsuperscript{1066} Furthermore, Hazara activists protested against the government in Kabul in 2018, urging for more effective measures to restore security in the districts under threat.\textsuperscript{1067} By the end of November 2018, the Taliban had been pushed out of Jaghori and Malestan. The threat of renewed attacks however still exists, according to AAN.\textsuperscript{1068}

AAN reports that the takeover of Andar in October 2018 ‘[…] actually normalised public services.’\textsuperscript{1069} A school, as well as a hospital, which had left the district centre because of fighting, were allowed to move back in October 2018. In this regard AAN found that ‘full control by one side has proved a better situation for civilians than their district being contested.’\textsuperscript{1070}

\subsection*{2.10.3.2 Displacement}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 46 311 persons displaced from Ghazni, most of whom (37 611) went to Ghazni district and the others were displaced to Bamyan province (2 617), Kabul district (2 562), Daykundi province (2 229) and in less important numbers in Helmand, Herat, Kandahar, Khost, Nimroz, Paktya and Zabul provinces.\textsuperscript{1071} UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 83 persons displaced from Ghazni.\textsuperscript{1072} UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 37 779 persons displaced to Ghazni province, all displaced to Ghazni district.\textsuperscript{1073}

\textsuperscript{1062} New York Times (The), Taliban Kill More Than 200 Afghan Defenders on 4 Fronts: ‘A Catastrophe’, 12 August 2018, \url{...}
\textsuperscript{1063} RFE/RL, Afghan Taliban Wants What It Hasn’t Been Able To Hold: Hazara Regions, 13 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{...}
\textsuperscript{1064} 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{...}
\textsuperscript{1065} RFE/RL, Afghan Taliban Wants What It Hasn’t Been Able To Hold: Hazara Regions, 13 November 2018, \url{...}
\textsuperscript{1066} 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{...}; Reporterly, Awakened Community: How an Unexpected Protest Lit Up at the Heart of Kabul, 12 November 2018, \url{...}
\textsuperscript{1067} 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{...}; Reporterly, Awakened Community: How an Unexpected Protest Lit Up at the Heart of Kabul, 12 November 2018, \url{...}
\textsuperscript{1068} 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{...}
\textsuperscript{1069} Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, \url{...}
\textsuperscript{1070} Muzhary, F., Unheeded Warnings (2): Ghazni city as vulnerable to Taleban as before, AAN, 30 December 2018, \url{...}
\textsuperscript{1071} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, \url{...}
\textsuperscript{1072} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, \url{...}
\textsuperscript{1073} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, \url{...}
No conflict-induced internal displacement to Ghazni province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.\textsuperscript{1074}

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<td>Waghaz</td>
<td>91</td>
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In 2018, Ghazni was considered by UNOCHA as one of ‘the main provinces of both origin and displacement of conflict-affected communities’.\textsuperscript{1075}

During the week of 29 January to 4 February 2018, 3 400 people came to the provincial capital because of military operations, intimidations and forced taxations by non-state armed groups; however districts of origin were not mentioned in the UNOCHA weekly report of 5 February 2018.\textsuperscript{1076} In May 2018, 4 district centres were attacked by insurgents causing the forced displacement of 10 000 people within their districts or to the provincial capital.\textsuperscript{1077} The assault on Ghazni city by the Taliban on 10 August 2018 caused the displacement of more than 21 000 people.\textsuperscript{1078}

In November 2018, heavy fighting in Malistan and Jaghuri districts have resulted in displacements within the province or further\textsuperscript{1079} and the displacement levels have intensified on 10 November because of ground operations and airstrikes.\textsuperscript{1080} In these two affected districts, families had to move repeatedly.\textsuperscript{1081} On 15 November 2018, 760 families from Malestan and Jaghuri districts were displaced to Bamyan province.\textsuperscript{1082}
2.11 Ghor

2.11.1 General description of the province

The province of Ghor is located in central-northwestern 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, Bamyam and Daykundi to the east, and Helmand and Farah to the south. Ghor is divided into ten districts: Chaghcharan (Feroz Koh), Charsadra, Dawlatyar, Du Layna, Lal Wa Sarjangal, Pasaband, Saghar, Shahrak, Taywara, and Tulak. The provincial capital of Ghor is called Feroz Koh or Chaghcharan. While Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA), the national broadcasting corporation of Afghanistan, stated that Chaghcharan was renamed to Feroz Koh in 2014, the Independent Election Commission and the Afghan Central Statistics Organization refer to Chaghcharan as Ghor’s provincial capital in 2018 publications.

The Afghan CSO estimated the population of Ghor to be 738,224 in 2018/19. According to the provincial profile published by the US Naval Postgraduate School, the largest ethnic group in Ghor are Tajiks, followed by Hazaras and a small number of Pashtuns and Uzbeks; RFE/RL stated that Aimaqs...
constitute the majority of Ghor. The Aimaqs are ‘[...] closely related to the Hazara, and to some degree the Tajiks [...]’ according to the US Naval Postgraduate School.

Afghan airline Kam Air, which used to operate in Ghor, suspended flights to Chaghcharan after several Kam Air staff members were killed in an attack in Kabul in January 2018. This reportedly posed a problem to Ghor’s residents as the highways to Herat and Kabul are insecure and in bad condition. According to the airport map produced by the Austrian COI department, scheduled passenger service to Chaghcharan was again available in March 2019.

Taliban insurgents and unidentified gunmen posed a security threat on several roads in Ghor in 2018. Furthermore, Pajhwok Afghan News reported that a bridge, which had remained under construction for eight years, caused problems on the highway to Kabul, as crossing the river Harirod is nearly impossible in the district of Lal Wa Sarjangal in rainy seasons.

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.

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. The absence of rule of law and government is 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

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1087 RFE/RL, Female Afghan Governor Won’t Back Down Amid Threats, Controversy, 19 October 2015, url
1088 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Ghor Provincial Overview, n.d., url
1089 Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghoro residents fume over suspension of flights, 19 March 2018, url
1090 Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghoro residents fume over suspension of flights, 19 March 2018, url
1091 Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019
1092 Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghoro residents fume over suspension of flights, 19 March 2018, url; Frontier Post (The), Gunmen seized 5 WFP wheat trucks in Ghor, 6 February 2018, url; Tolonews, Armed Men Gun Down Three Travelers On Herat-Ghor Highway, 17 April 2018, url; RFE/RL, Six Afghan Civilians Said Killed In Attack In Western Province, 17 April 2018, url; 1TV News, Gunmen kill three passengers in Ghor, 19 November 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban plant bombs on all routes to Ghoro’s Pasaband, 2 December 2018, url
1093 Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 years on, Harirod bridge still incomplete in Ghoro, 27 November 2018, url
1094 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 17
1095 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 33
1096 Ruttig, T., The ‘Humvee Bomb’ Series: The October wave of Taleban attacks in 2017 context, AAN, 7 November 2017, url
1097 Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, AAN, 23 November 2016, url
fought against ANSF, as they perceived the presence of government forces as a threat against their strongholds in neighbouring Charsada district.\textsuperscript{1099}

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.\textsuperscript{1100} 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.\textsuperscript{1101}

The ANSF conducted operations in Ghor in 2018.\textsuperscript{1102} According to a report of January 2019, the newly established ANA TF will be stationed ‘soon’ in several districts of Ghor.\textsuperscript{1103}

The 207\textsuperscript{th} Zafar Corps is in charge of ANA operations in the province of Ghor.\textsuperscript{1104}

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Ghor province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.\textsuperscript{1105} When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

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<td>TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{1099} Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, AAN, 23 November 2016, url

\textsuperscript{1100} Ruttig, T., A Matter of Registration: Fractional tensions in Hezb-e Islami, AAN, 25 November 2017, url

\textsuperscript{1101} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill HIA commander’s sons in Ghor clash, 13 January 2018, url

\textsuperscript{1102} 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

\textsuperscript{1103} Tolonews, Territorial Army To Begin Mission In West, 14 January 2019, url

\textsuperscript{1104} Afghanistan, MoD, 207 Zafar Corps, n.d., url


\textsuperscript{1106} LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
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<th>GIRoA Influence</th>
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<td>95%; Gov control: 5%</td>
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<td>97%; Gov control: 3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saghar</td>
<td>Low</td>
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<td>93%; Gov control: 7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tulak</td>
<td>Low</td>
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<td>Contested</td>
<td>92%; Gov control: 8%</td>
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<td>Murghab</td>
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<td>TB control</td>
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### 2.11.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.11.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 64 civilian casualties (28 deaths and 36 injured) in Ghor. This represents an increase of 94% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were targeted or deliberate killings, followed by ground engagements and (non-suicide) IEDs.\(^{1107}\)

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Taywara and Feroz Koh (Chagcharan) in the second highest category and the districts of Du Laina, Pasaband and Shahrok in the third highest category. Dawlatyar and Charsadra districts are in the fourth highest category and the remaining districts in the two lowest categories.\(^{1108}\)

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 56 incidents related to insurgents in Ghor province.\(^{1109}\)

The Taliban reportedly gained significant strength in Ghor around 2010.\(^{1110}\) Areas of Shahrok district have been under Taliban control for years now, according to Pajhwok Afghan News.\(^{1111}\) Throughout 2018, the Taliban conducted several operations in Ghor, abducting and assassinating persons,\(^{1112}\) attacking voter registration centres in the city of Chaghcharan twice in the wake of the 2018

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\(^{1107}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#).

\(^{1108}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#).


\(^{1110}\) Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, AAN, 23 November 2016, [url](#).

\(^{1111}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghor: Taliban lash 18-year-old girl on elopement charges, 28 June 2018, [url](#).

parliamentary election, and planting mines on roads. In November 2018, Taliban insurgents reportedly burnt the TV sets of residents in remote villages of Dawlatyar district.

According to Pajhwok Afghan News, residents of Shahrk and Du Layna voiced fear over a growing Taliban presence and an increasing number of terrorist attacks in July 2018. Heavy clashes between Taliban and security forces, as well as local militias in May 2018 reportedly caused the death of 46 combatants in Shahrk. In November 2018, the Afghan Ministry of Interior acknowledged that the Taliban had sought to expand their attacks in Ghor in 2018. In December 2018, the Taliban shadow governor of Ghor was reportedly killed by a drone strike in the bordering province of Helmand.

Taliban insurgents have been allegedly stopping passengers on the Ghor-Herat highway, issuing documents under the title ‘Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and Taliban’s Economic Commission’, extorting people and taking government employees hostage. According to Frontier Post, in February 2018, gunmen seized five lorries carrying wheat provided by the World Food Programme (WFP) on the way from Herat to Chaghcharan in Shahrk district. Officials blamed Taliban insurgents for the hijacking, while the Taliban did not claim responsibility.

In April and November 2018, news sources reported killings of passengers travelling from Daykundi to Herat by unknown gunmen at the outskirts of the provincial capital. In December 2018, Taliban insurgents reportedly planted bombs on all routes leading to the district of Pasaband in the south of Ghor, blocking the transport of goods to the province.

Pajhwok Afghan News and Khaama Press reported the arrest of one of the leaders of the network which was mentioned in section 2.11.2, as well as the seizure of a large quantity of arms and explosives during an NDS operation in Lal Wa Sarjangal district in February 2018. The captive was called a ‘senior ISIS’ leader by the news sources – a label rejected by AAN in 2016 as a one-sided pledge of allegiance by the captive at the most.

The lack of law enforcement by the government reportedly has particularly negative consequences on women in Ghor; Ghor was described by the New York Times in 2017 as ‘[...] may be the country’s capital of gender-based violence and abuse.’ Newspapers reported cases of Taliban or other non-government forces’ extra-judicial rulings in 2017 and 2018 that led to the stoning, forced marriage, lashing or murder of women allegedly for breaking sharia law in 2017 and 2018. According to the
Afghan news website Tolonews, the number of so-called ‘Kangaroo Courts’ – extra-judicial courts run by anti-government forces – increased in 2017 and early 2018 in the province.\(^\text{1129}\)

Two radio stations were reportedly burned down by unidentified men in Ghor in late 2017 and early 2018.\(^\text{1130}\)

2.11.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 13 142 persons displaced from Ghor, most of whom (10 305) were displaced within the province; 2 755 went to Herat province and the rest went to Nimroz and Kandahar provinces.\(^\text{1131}\)

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 294 persons displaced from Ghor.\(^\text{1132}\)

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 11 755 persons displaced to Ghor province, with 1 210 of them originating from Badghis province.\(^\text{1133}\)

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 246 persons displaced to Ghor province; all of them were displaced within the province.\(^\text{1134}\)

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<td>Chaghcharan</td>
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<td>Tulak</td>
<td>846</td>
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Fighting was the main cause of displacement: in May 2018, 5 000 people were displaced within Shahrak district and to neighbouring districts such as Dolayna and Chaghcharan.\(^\text{1135}\) In October 2018, operations of ANSF against a militia commander has resulted in displacements in Lal Wa Sarjangal district.\(^\text{1136}\) Ghor province was also affected by drought in 2018 which caused internal displacements in August 2018.\(^\text{1137}\)

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\(^{1129}\) Tolonews, Kangaroo Courts Increased in Afghanistan in 1396, 20 March 2018, [url](https://tolonews.com)

\(^{1130}\) TKG, Local Radio Station Burned in Ghor, 24 December 2017, [url]; Afghanistan Times, Unknown Gunmen Torch Radio Station in Ghor, 22 January 2018, [url]

\(^{1131}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url]

\(^{1132}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url]

\(^{1133}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan - Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url]

\(^{1134}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url]

\(^{1135}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 7 – 13 May 2018, 14 May 2018, [url]

\(^{1136}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 8-14 October 2018, 14 October 2018, [url]

\(^{1137}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 27 August – 2 September 2018, 4 September 2018, [url]
2.12 Helmand

2.12.1 General description of the province

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 Uruzgan, 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 districts of Baghran, Deh-e-Shu, Garmser, Kajaki, Lashkargah, Musa Qala, Nad-e Ali, Marja (formerly part of Nad-e-Ali), Nahr-e-Saraj (Gereshk), Nawa-e-Barikzai (Nawa), Nawamish, Nawzad, Reg-e-Khan Nishin (Reg), Sangin, and Washer. The provincial capital of Helmand is Lashkargah. According to the Afghan Central Statistics Organization, Marja and Nawamish are so-called ‘temporary’ districts, as they ‘[...] 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.’ 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 temporarily transferred to neighbouring Daykundi Province. The 2018 parliamentary elections in Nawamish were however administered from Lashkargah, causing protests in the district.

According to CSO estimates, the population of Helmand is 1,395,514 in 2018/19. 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 Hazaras in Nawamish 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 Garmser in southern Helmand.

The province has a ‘significant geo-strategic importance’ according to Pajhwok Afghan News, as 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. A domestic airport with scheduled passenger service reportedly exists in Helmand’s capital Lashkargah.

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.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Helmand remained by far the largest opium-poppy cultivating province in 2018 and accounted for 52% of the total opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. Compared to 2017, Helmand’s opium-poppy cultivation decreased by 5% in 2018. 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.

2.12.2 Conflict background and actors in Helmand

Helmand is reportedly ‘[...] one of Afghanistan’s most volatile provinces and the deadliest for international forces in 16 years of hostilities.’ The Taliban are reportedly able to draw on large numbers of supporters among Helmand’s population.

According to AAN, local strongmen returned to rule in Helmand after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 and were rewarded with local government posts by then newly appointed President Hamid Karzai. These strongmen could then secure control over patronage networks and resources, such as revenues from opium-poppy cultivation. Much of the violence of Helmand has been – and still is – driven by the drug economy. As stated by AAN, ‘allegations of abuses by these strongmen were legion and included illegal arrests and torture, all aggravated by the marginalization of “out” tribes who saw their poppy crops selectively eradicated and government ranks packed out by their rivals.’ This contributed allegedly much to the Taliban’s appeal in the eyes of the local population.

As a precondition for their deployment in the region, British officials demanded the clearing of local government posts from strongmen in 2006 – a demand, which President Karzai reluctantly fulfilled. However, according to AAN, removing the strongmen ‘[...] eliminated the source of much of the resentment, which was driving the province towards insurgency, but also the means of containing it,’ as security in the province was mostly based on agreements between the strongmen in government positions and local militias.

After the local militias withdrew and the British troops were unable to fill the gaps, the Taliban enhanced their operations in the province. In order to counter this development, US forces have been deployed in large numbers in Helmand from 2008 onwards. While the Taliban were pushed back from some areas, such as Marja, ISAF ‘[...] repeatedly squandered the chance to build a durable political settlement [...]’ in Sangin, according to AAN. After the international troops largely withdrew in

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1156 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
1157 Austria, BFA-Staatsdokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019
1158 Diplomat (The), 5 Reasons Why Helmand Matters to the Taliban, 31 May 2016, url
1159 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 17
1160 N-TV, Taliban auf dem Vormarsch: In Helmand geht es um Afghanistans Zukunft [Taliban on the rise: Afghanistan’s future at the stake in Helmand], 23 December 2015, url; Guardian (The), Why capturing Helmand is top of the Taliban’s strategic goals, 26 December 2015, url; Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, url
1162 Diplomat (The), 5 Reasons Why Helmand Matters to the Taliban, 31 May 2016, url
1163 Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, url
1164 Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, url
1165 Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, url
2014, the Taliban overran several ‘chiefdoms’ in Helmand, which had been under control of ANP, ALP and pro-government militia commanders.\textsuperscript{1166}

According to AAN, the government forces' lack of success can be partially traced to their lack of strength, as up to 40% of officially enrolled troops have been alleged to be ‘ghost soldiers’ – i.e. soldiers existing only on paper. Furthermore, AAN mentions a lack of communication between the different branches of the security forces, as well as a new combat strategy by the Taliban as further reasons for the government forces' weak performance. In 2015 and early 2016, the Taliban were able to expand their control in various districts, according to AAN.\textsuperscript{1167}

In 2017, US Marines returned to Helmand, reportedly in order to advise Afghan government forces from inside military bases and in order to increase airstrikes without conducting ground operations on their own.\textsuperscript{1168} Another report indicated that the Marines have been in combat in Helmand, even though fighting was mainly done by Afghan troops, while the US forces stayed behind.\textsuperscript{1169} According to the US newspaper LA Times, the outspoken aim of the Marine’s deployment in Helmand has been to secure the provincial capital Lashkargah from falling to the Taliban.\textsuperscript{1170}

Throughout 2017, the US-backed government forces launched several operations, pushing the Taliban away from major towns and highways, reportedly eliminating the threat to Lashkargah.\textsuperscript{1171} However, in February 2018, the Taliban allegedly still controlled approximately half of the province.\textsuperscript{1172} Aided by airstrikes, government forces reportedly took back Nawa district as their biggest success in Helmand in 2017.\textsuperscript{1173} According to the LA Times, the Afghan security forces remain dependent on US support in order to stay on the offensive.\textsuperscript{1174}

Besides the Taliban, Al Qaeda is allegedly present in Helmand. According to LWJ, Al Qaeda closely collaborates with the Taliban – even though the Pentagon reportedly stated that the two groups do not maintain strategic relationships.\textsuperscript{1175} In August 2018, Afghan security forces reportedly killed seven Al Qaeda members in Helmand.\textsuperscript{1176}

According to the news magazine The Diplomat, as of September 2018, there has been no known presence of Islamic State (IS) fighters in Helmand.\textsuperscript{1177}

On the government side, along with Afghan security forces such as the ANP, ALP, ANA, pro-government ‘uprising groups’ as well as the US forces, a special division called the Sangorian is reportedly active in Helmand.\textsuperscript{1178} The Sangorian was established in January 2016 by the operational commander of the

\textsuperscript{1166} Amiri, R., Helmand (1): A crisis a long time coming, AAN, 10 March 2016, \url{url}; Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, AAN, 11 March 2016, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1167} Amiri, R., Helmand (2): The chain of chiefdoms unravels, AAN, 11 March 2016, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1168} LA Times, The Marines Returned To Helmand Province. Is Their Mission A Blueprint For Trump’s Afghanistan Strategy?, 15 November 2017, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1169} AP News, Marines see Afghan forces improve in Helmand battles, 1 February 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1170} LA Times, The Marines Returned To Helmand Province. Is Their Mission A Blueprint For Trump’s Afghanistan Strategy?, 15 November 2017, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1171} LA Times, The Marines Returned To Helmand Province. Is Their Mission A Blueprint For Trump’s Afghanistan Strategy?, 15 November 2017, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1172} AP News, Marines see Afghan forces improve in Helmand battles, 1 February 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1173} Military Times, Helmand again the focus of US strategy in Afghanistan, 11 December 2017, \url{url}; AP News, Marines see Afghan forces improve in Helmand battles, 1 February 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1174} LA Times, The Marines Returned To Helmand Province. Is Their Mission A Blueprint For Trump’s Afghanistan Strategy?, 15 November 2017, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1175} LWJ, Afghan forces target al Qaeda commanders in Helmand and Nangarhar, 7 August 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1176} LWJ, Afghan forces target al Qaeda commanders in Helmand and Nangarhar, 7 August 2018, \url{url}; Afghanistan Times, Top Al-Qaeda Loyalist Killed in Helmand, 7 August 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1177} Diplomat (The), The Last 2 Sikhs in the Taliban’s Heartland, 26 September 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1178} Jamestown Foundation (The), The Sangorian: Weakening the Taliban from Within, 1 January 2019, \url{url}; RFE/RL, Secret Afghan Force Mimics, Infiltrates Taliban, 15 February 2018, \url{url}
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.\footnote{Jamestown Foundation (The), The Sangorian: Weakening the Taliban from Within, 11 January 2019, \url{url}}

Helmand is under the responsibility of the 215th ANA Corps.\footnote{Global Security, Afghan National Army (ANA) - Order of Battle, n.d., \url{url}}

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Helmand province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.\footnote{BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, \url{url}; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, \url{url}, pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, \url{url}, pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., \url{url}; Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, \url{url}}

When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

\footnote{LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.}

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<td>Taliban control</td>
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<td>Deh-e-Shu</td>
<td>Taliban control</td>
<td>High INS activity</td>
<td>High INS activity</td>
<td>Taliban control</td>
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<td>Garmser</td>
<td>Taliban control (East)/Open Taliban presence – Medium (West)</td>
<td>INS activity</td>
<td>INS activity</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 97%; Gov control: 3%</td>
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<td>Kajaki</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>INS activity</td>
<td>INS activity</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 99%; Gov control: 1%</td>
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<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 85%; Gov control: 15%</td>
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### 2.12.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.12.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 880 civilian casualties (281 deaths and 599 injured) in Helmand. This represents a decrease of 11% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by (non-suicide) IEDs and suicide or complex attacks.\(^{1183}\)

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Lashkargah, Nad-e Ali, Nawa-e-Barakzaiy, Sangin and Nahr-e Saraj in the highest category and the district of Garmser in the second highest category. Kajaki districts are in the third highest category and the districts of Musa Qala, Nawzad, and Washer in the category below. The remaining districts are placed in the lowest categories.\(^{1184}\)

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 313 incidents related to insurgents in Helmand province.\(^{1185}\)

Throughout 2018 and early 2019, US and Afghan forces continued operations in the province,\(^{1186}\) including airstrikes reportedly inflicting considerable damage among civilians.\(^{1187}\) The UN Secretary-General reported in the end of February 2019 that approximately one third of all airstrikes in Afghanistan were carried out in the province of Helmand in the period of November 2018 to February 2019. This is the largest share of airstrikes carried out in a single province.\(^{1188}\)

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\(^{1183}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 68

\(^{1184}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 2

\(^{1185}\) Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, url, accessed 1 March 2019


\(^{1187}\) RFE/RL, ‘At Least 30 Afghan Civilians’ Killed In Air Strike, 28 November 2018, url; RFE/RL, Air Strike In Afghanistan Kills 16 From Same Family, 25 January 2019, url

\(^{1188}\) UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 28 February 2019, url
In December 2018, the Taliban shadow governor of Helmand allegedly died in a US airstrike. Newspapers reported on several occasions about the liberation of captives of the Taliban by government forces. The Taliban, on the other hand, repeatedly attacked security checkpoints or security forces. Several suicide attacks took place in Helmand in 2018, some of them attributed to the Taliban, while those responsible for others remained unclear. UNAMA counted five Taliban suicide attacks causing 121 civilian casualties (28 deaths, 93 injuries) in 2018.

Besides suicide attacks, insurgents might have targeted civilians in Helmand by group poisoning in 2018, as more than 50 schoolgirls were hospitalised in Lashkargah in April 2018 after showing symptoms of poisoning. Preceding the 2018 parliamentary election, a bomb attack reportedly killed eight people at an election rally in Lashkargah. According to RFE/RL, no one claimed responsibility for the attack.

A car bomb blast killing 16 persons near a sports stadium in Lashkargah in March 2018 sparked peace protests, including the formation of a peace camp and eventually a peace march from Helmand to Kabul, which led to widespread media coverage and support of residents from other provinces. Notably, according to RFE/RL, women also participated in the sit-ins, which is unusual in the conservative Pashtun-dominated region.

### 2.12.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 8,269 persons displaced from Helmand province. They were mainly displaced within the province itself (6,615) and Kandahar (1,551).

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 259 persons displaced from Helmand province, mainly within the province itself.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 6,615 persons displaced to Helmand province. They were all originating from the province itself.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 237 persons displaced to Lashkargah district in Helmand province, they were all originating from Nad-e-Ali/Marja district in the province itself.
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According to UNOCHA, about 1 400 individuals were displaced from Khanshin to Lashkargah due to drought and lack of water as of December 2018. About 600 IDPs came to Lashkargah from Ghazni and Farah provinces due to insecurity.¹²⁰² According to the report for the period 20 – 26 November 2018, around 229 IDP families went from Nad-e Ali district to Lashkargah because of fighting.¹²⁰³

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 northeast, Ghor to the east, and Farah to the south. Herat is divided into 16 districts: 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 –, which have been carved out of Shindand district for a better allocation of funds. The provincial capital of Herat is the city of Herat. According to Pajhwok Afghan News, Herat is one of the largest provinces of Afghanistan.

The Afghan CSO estimated the population of the province at 1,967,180 in 2018/19, with 506,896 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

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1204 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Hirat Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](http://example.com)
1206 Ali, O. and Ruttig, T., Classics of Conflict (1): Reviewing some of Afghanistan’s most notorious hotspots, AAN, 3 July 2015, [url](http://example.com)
1207 Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimate population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, p. 38
1208 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Herat province, n.d., [url](http://example.com)
1209 Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimate population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, p. 38
1210 Pajhwok Afghan News, Govt won’t talk peace from a weak position: Ghani, 1 June 2015, [url](http://example.com)
and Aimaq minorities.\textsuperscript{1211} Large-scale migration reportedly changed the ethnic composition of the city. 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.\textsuperscript{1212} USIP noted that the ‘[...] degree of ethnic segregation in Herat today is pronounced.’\textsuperscript{1213}

The province is connected to other major cities by the Ring Road.\textsuperscript{1214} A primary road leads from Herat eastwards to Ghor and Bamyan and on to Kabul.\textsuperscript{1215} Other highways connect the provincial capital with the Afghan-Turkmen border crossing at Torghundi, as well as with the Afghan-Iranian border crossing at Islam Qala.\textsuperscript{1216} According to the Afghan newspaper Salaam Times, the Taliban have been extorting money from traders and other citizens on the highway between Kabul and Herat, as well as Herat and Farah, while local officials claimed in December 2018 that the roads leading to the border ports at Torghundi and Islam Qala were secure due to an enhanced presence of the security forces in the area.\textsuperscript{1217} The UN Secretary-General noted in his report covering events from 10 September to 7 December 2018 that ‘the Taliban also carried out frequent attacks [..] along the Herat-Qala-e-Naw road in the west, complicating Government [sic] access and limiting the movements of residents.’\textsuperscript{1218}

According to the airport map produced by the Austrian COI department, an airport with scheduled passenger services to national and international destinations exists in the vicinity of Herat City.\textsuperscript{1219}

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.\textsuperscript{1220}

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Herat was not one of the ten main opium-poppy cultivating provinces of Afghanistan in 2018.\textsuperscript{1221} Compared to 2017, Herat's opium-poppy cultivation decreased by 46 % in 2018. The main opium-poppy cultivating provinces in 2018 have been Kushk and Shindand.\textsuperscript{1222}

2.13.2 Conflict background and actors in Herat

According to Khaama Press, ‘Herat has been among the relatively calm provinces in West of Afghanistan but the Taliban militants are active in some of its remote districts and often attempt to carry out terrorist related activities.’\textsuperscript{1223}

AAN described the district and provincial administration in Herat in January 2017 as ‘generally dysfunct’, with political power ‘[...] scattered among many actors [...]’.\textsuperscript{1224} According to a report of January 2017, the security situation has been deteriorating, as violent clashes between government forces and insurgents – reportedly mostly the Taliban – as well as between different Taliban factions increased. AAN linked the upsurge of fighting to the weak position of key district and provincial
officials, who have been mostly assigned as interim candidates lacking a full mandate after President Ashraf Ghani summarily dismissed their predecessors in 2014.  

Within the Taliban, conflicts emerged after the announcement of the death of the Taliban leader Mullah Omar in 2015. Mullah Rasool, following a more conciliatory stance towards the government in Kabul, split away from the mainstream Taliban together with approximately 1,000 fighters. While the government forces in Herat reportedly do not fight against the Rasool group, which advocated peace talks and pledged to protect a large government pipeline project in the region, at least 60 clashes between the group and the mainstream Taliban reportedly took place between 2015 and 2017, leaving hundreds of Taliban fighters dead according to the US military newsportal Stars and Stripes.

The district of Nizam-e Shahid near Herat City, as well as Herat City itself, reportedly witnessed an upsurge of criminality in recent years. AAN attributed this to the alleged practice of local strongmen to settle disputes by contract killings, while ‘[...] there are reports that locals whose fortunes have worsened in the wake of the international military drawdown are resorting to abductions and thefts as a quick way to make lots of money.’ These developments have been allegedly facilitated by corruption within the police.

Besides criminal acts, the Taliban are allegedly also active in the city, causing casualties among security force members as well as civilians.

Between 2017 and 2018, ISKP reportedly conducted three suicide attacks in Herat City.

The 207th Zafar Corps is in charge of the ANA operations in the province of Herat. Italian forces are stationed in the province of Herat as part of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission.

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 Taliban’.

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Herat province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban. When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.
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<td>Kohsan</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
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1236 LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
2.13.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.13.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 259 civilian casualties (95 deaths and 164 injured) in the province of Herat. This represents a decrease of 48% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were (non-suicide) IEDs, followed by ground engagements and targeted killings.\(^{1237}\)

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Shindand (together with the 'temporary' districts formerly part of Shindand) in the highest category, and the district of Herat in the second highest category. Adraskan and Obe districts are in the category below and Guzara, Pashtun Zarhun, Kushk, Kushk-e-Kuhna and Chist-e Sharif districts are in the fourth category. The remaining districts are in the two lowest categories.\(^ {1238}\)

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 175 incidents related to insurgents in Herat province.\(^ {1239}\)

Shindand is allegedly the most volatile district of Herat, witnessing violent clashes between rival Taliban factions, as well as between the mainstream Taliban and pro-government forces.\(^ {1240}\) Government forces conducted operations in Shindand in December 2018\(^ {1241}\) and January 2019.\(^ {1242}\) In December 2018 AAN noted that the continued infighting in Shindand had the 'surprising' effect of the 2018 parliamentary elections actually taking place in the districts under 'influence or control' of the Rasool Taliban faction.\(^ {1243}\) The same source however also noted that 'the insecure district of Shindand, which borders Farah province and has been divided into five smaller districts, also witnessed a patchy, insecure and, in some places, non-existent election'.\(^ {1244}\)

According to Tolonews, besides Shindand, Obe is the other insecure district in Herat.\(^ {1245}\) AAN stated in December 2018 that 'at present, the exercise of control over Obe district is not static. It changes daily.' AAN described the situation in the district as a 'mutually-hurting stalemate.' Reportedly, with the exception of healthcare, the Taliban interfere directly with public services provided in the district.\(^ {1246}\) In October 2018, Khaama Press reported the death of the Taliban deputy shadow governor of Herat in the district of Obe, allegedly, due to wounds inflicted during government operations a few days earlier.\(^ {1247}\)

\(^ {1237}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, \url{url}, p. 68
\(^ {1238}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, \url{url}, p. 2
\(^ {1239}\) Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, \url{url}, accessed 1 March 2019
\(^ {1240}\) VoA, 11 Afghan Forces Killed in Taliban Attack on Herat Province, 13 April 2018, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Clash among Afghan forces and Taliban leaves 15 dead, wounded in Herat, 28 April 2018, \url{url}; Al Jazeera, Afghan soldiers killed in 'coordinated Taliban attack' in Herat, 7 December 2018, \url{url}; Ariana News, Infighting Leaves 45 Taliban Militants Killed or Wounded in Herat, 30 November 2018, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Herat intelligence officer killed in Taliban ambush, 30 November 2018, \url{url}
\(^ {1241}\) Khaama Press, Prominent Taliban leaders killed in U.S. drone strikes in West of Afghanistan, 27 December 2018, \url{url}
\(^ {1242}\) Khaama Press, Afghan and Coalition Forces kill 6 militants in separate operations, airstrike, 26 January 2019, \url{url}
\(^ {1243}\) Kazemi, R.S., The 2018 Election Observed (6) in Herat: Insecurity, organisational shambles, alleged rigging, AAN, 20 December 2018, \url{url}
\(^ {1244}\) Kazemi, R.S., The 2018 Election Observed (6) in Herat: Insecurity, organisational shambles, alleged rigging, AAN, 20 December 2018, \url{url}
\(^ {1245}\) Tolonews, Concerns Rise Over Possible Taliban Attacks On Herat Districts, 8 September 2018, \url{url}
\(^ {1246}\) Kazemi, R.S., One Land, Two Rules (2): Delivering public services in insurgency-affected Obeh district of Herat province, AAN, 9 December 2018, \url{url}
\(^ {1247}\) Khaama Press, Taliban’s deputy shadow governor dies of critical wounds in Herat, 14 October 2018, \url{url}
The mainstream Taliban faction and government forces also clashed in the districts of Zawal and Guzra. According to Khaama Press, in December 2018 Taliban leaders were killed in two separate drone strikes in the districts of Farsi and Zawal.

In March 2018, IS reportedly conducted an attack, killing at least one person and wounding seven others, in front of a Shia mosque in the city. In April 2018, at least six civilians, including four children, were killed by a bomb attack near a mosque and a bazaar. In June 2018, a publicly known local Shia cleric was killed in Herat City, in September 2018, police and mosque guards reportedly prevented a suicide attack on a Shia mosque in the district of Injil. AAN claimed that attacks on Shia religious figures and sites have increased in Herat since 2016, citing demographic changes, radicalisation among some religious figures, strategic considerations by the Nangarhar-based ISKP, and the proximity to Iran as possible reasons for the increase in attacks. AAN, however, has pointed out that widespread sectarian conflict between Herat's Shia and Sunni population was unlikely 'at least in the foreseeable future' due to the prevailing 'Shia-Sunni solidarity' among Heratis.

In February 2018, the newsportal Arab News reported that all of Herat's districts have been cleared of landmines in a 10-year-long effort, except for Shindand and Gulran. The volatile security situation has so far prevented the clearance of these two remaining districts. Yet, in December 2018 RFE/RL reported that three civilians were killed after their vehicle struck a roadside bomb in Guzra district.

Further, 12 civilians were killed in January 2018 when a roadside bomb hit a vehicle in Gulran district. A bomb blast in the Tang-i-Til locality of Shindand district killed least six people and wounded seven others in April 2018. Pajhwok Afghan News reported at least four road construction workers being killed by unidentified armed men in Shindand district in May 2018.

2.13.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 609 persons displaced from Herat province, most of which (570) were displaced within the province.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 60 persons displaced from Herat province.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 5 482 persons displaced to Herat province: most of whom (2 755) were from Ghor province; other IDPs were from Badghis, Daykundi, Farah, Faryab, Ghazni, Helmand, Kunar and Paktya provinces.

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1248 Khaama Press, 17 Afghan army soldiers martyred in Herat attack: officials, 9 June 2018, url
1249 The New Arab, 'Taliban roadside bomb; in Afghanistan's Herat province kills civilians, 8 December 2018, url
1251 Reuters, At least one dead in blast near mosque in Afghan city of Herat, 25 March 2018, url
1252 RFE/RL, Bomb Attack Kills At Least Six In Western Afghanistan, 9 April 2018, url
1253 Kazemi, R.S., Speculation Abounding: Trying to make sense of the attacks against Shias in Herat city, AAN, 3 February 2019, url
1254 Kazemi, R.S., Speculation Abounding: Trying to make sense of the attacks against Shias in Herat city, AAN, 3 February 2019, url
1255 Arab News, Thousands of lives saved as Herat cleared of landmines, 18 February 2018, url
1256 RFE/RL, Three Civilians Killed In Afghan Roadside Bombing, 8 December 2018, url
1257 Pajhwok Afghan News, 12 civilians dead in Herat landmine explosion, 21 January 2018, url
1258 Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 killed, 7 wounded in Shindand rickshaw blast, 9 April 2018, url
1259 Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 road construction workers killed in Herat, 26 March 2018, url
1260 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, url
1261 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, url
1262 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, url
UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 1 558 persons displaced to Herat province most of whom (1 270) were displaced from Badghis province.\textsuperscript{1263}

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In 2018, Herat province hosted the ‘the highest number of IDPs and returnees nationwide – more than 200 000’.\textsuperscript{1265} In August 2018, 12 000 displaced families were displaced in Herat city, mainly in the west of the provincial capital.\textsuperscript{1266} In November 2018, 147 600 people out of 223 100 people displaced by drought in Western Afghanistan were displaced in Herat province.\textsuperscript{1267}

\textsuperscript{1263} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1264} The district of origin of 7 persons displaced is not mentioned in UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1265} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 12
\textsuperscript{1266} UNOCHA, Humanitarian Regional Team (HRT) - Western Region Afghanistan - Meeting Summary, 14 August 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1267} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 29 October – 4 November 2018, 5 November 2018, url
2.14 Jawzjan

2.14.1 General description of the province
Jawzjan is situated in the north of Afghanistan, bordering Turkmenistan to the north, Balkh to the east, Sar-e Pul to the south, and Faryab to the west. The province is divided into the following districts: Aqcha, Darzab, Fayzabad, Khanyab, Khamyab, Khwajadukoh, Mardyan, Mingajik, Qarqin, and Qushtepa, as well as the provincial capital Shiberghan. 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.

The Afghan CSO estimates the population of Jawzjan to be 579,833 in 2018/19. According to a provincial profile of 2008, the two largest ethnic groups in the province are Uzbek and Turkmen, with smaller groups of Pashtuns and so-called Arabs – i.e. descendants of migrants who left the Arabian peninsula in the 14th century –, as well as some Tajiks and Kuchi nomads, whose numbers vary depending on the season.

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. Pajhwok Afghan News reported a growing number of security incidents on the highway between Sheberghan and Mazar-e Sharif in November 2018. Travellers reportedly have been caught in crossfire as security forces and Taliban insurgents clashed on the highway in the districts of Aqcha in Jawzjan and Chahar Boluk in Balkh. Furthermore, armed robberies reportedly took place on the highway in the above mentioned districts, as well as in Mingajik.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Jawzjan lost its poppy-free status in 2016. While opium-poppy cultivation reached a peak in 2017 – with a nearly eightfold increase compared to 2016 –, the size of the opium-poppy cultivating area in Jawzjan decreased by 90% in 2018 compared to 2017. UNODC links the decrease in acreage to 2018’s severe draught in northern Afghanistan. Jawzjan was not among the ten main opium-poppy cultivating provinces of Afghanistan in 2018.

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. 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 (arbarke, 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.\footnote{1282}

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.\footnote{1283} Subsequently, the Taliban were able to expand their control in Jawzjan as well as in other provinces of northern Afghanistan.\footnote{1284} 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.\footnote{1285}

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.\footnote{1286}

IMU, which had infiltrated Jawzjan in early 2015 from neighbouring Faryab Province according to RFE/RL,\footnote{1287} has been a former ally of the Taliban, but shifted allegiance towards IS after the death of Taliban leader Mullah Omar’s death in 2015.\footnote{1288} 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.\footnote{1289} AAN stated that it had found no reliable evidence of a connection between Hekmat’s IS group and Nangarhar’s Islamic State Khorasan Province, which is allegedly recognised by the ‘Daesh central’ in Syria and Iraq (i.e. the main franchise) as an IS branch.\footnote{1290} A study on IS presence in Afghanistan published in 2017 supports this finding.\footnote{1291}

According to AAN, Hekmat’s shift to ‘IS’ was rather driven by ‘[...] power-saving opportunism [...]’ than by ideological motives.\footnote{1292} The self-proclaimed IS group managed to hold control over the districts of Qushtepa and Darzab for three years, fighting the Taliban\footnote{1293} – though not expanding its territory due to the widespread Taliban presence in the province\footnote{1294} –, and initially outlasting the death of its founder by a US drone strike in April 2018.\footnote{1295} In August 2018, the Taliban overran the group’s strongholds, 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. According to AAN, the Taliban took over Qushtepa and Darzab after the group’s defeat.\footnote{1296}

\footnote{1282} Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, \url{url}, p. 28-29
\footnote{1283} Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, \url{url}
\footnote{1284} RFE/RL, Afghanistan’s New Northern Flash Points, n.d., \url{url}; Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, \url{url}
\footnote{1285} Ali, O., Qari Hekmat’s Island Overrun: Taleban defeat ‘ISKP’ in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, \url{url}
\footnote{1286} Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, \url{url}
\footnote{1287} RFE/RL, Afghanistan’s New Northern Flash Points, n.d., \url{url}
\footnote{1288} Ali, O., Qari Hekmat’s Island Overrun: Taleban defeat ‘ISKP’ in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, \url{url}
\footnote{1289} Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, \url{url}; AAN, Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taleban, 24 November 2015, \url{url}
\footnote{1290} Ali, O., Qari Hekmat’s Island Overrun: Taleban defeat ‘ISKP’ in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, \url{url}
\footnote{1291} Mielke, K. and Miszak, N., Making sense of Daesh in Afghanistan: A social movement perspective, June 2017, \url{url}, pp. 28-29
\footnote{1292} Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, \url{url}
\footnote{1293} Ali, O., Qari Hekmat’s Island: A Daesh enclave in Jawzjan?, AAN, 11 November 2018, \url{url}; Ali, O., Precarious Consolidation: Qari Hekmat’s IS-affiliated ‘island’ survives another Taleban onslaught, AAN, 4 March 2018, \url{url}; Der Spiegel, Afghanistan 120 Tote bei Kämpfen zwischen Taleban und IS [Afghanistan: 120 Dead in Clashes Between Taliban and IS], 19 July 2018, \url{url}
\footnote{1294} Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, AAN, 18 September 2017, \url{url}
\footnote{1295} 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{url}
\footnote{1296} Ali, O., Qari Hekmat’s Island Overrun: Taleban defeat ‘ISKP’ in Jawzjan, AAN, 4 August 2018, \url{url}
Regarding the government forces, the province of Jawzjan is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Shaheen Corp.  

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Jawzjan province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban. When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

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<td>INS Activity</td>
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<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qushtepa</td>
<td>Open Taliban Presence - high</td>
<td>INS Activity</td>
<td>INS Activity</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shiberghan (capital)</td>
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<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
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<td>TB control: 50%; Gov control: 50%</td>
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1297 Afghanistan, MoD, 209 Shaheen Corps, n.d., url
1299 LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
2.14.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.14.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 183 civilian casualties (61 deaths and 122 injured) in Jawzjan. This represents an increase of 55% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by aerial attacks and (non-suicide) IEDs.\footnote{UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, \url{url}, p. 68}

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Darzab in the highest category and the district of Quşhtepa in the second highest category. Aqchah, Fayzabad, Khanqa, and Sheberghan districts are in the category below and Mardyan in the fourth highest category. The remaining districts are placed in the two lowest categories.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, \url{url}, p. 2}

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 111 incidents related to insurgents in Jawzjan province.\footnote{Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, \url{url}, accessed 1 March 2019}


Due to security reasons, the 2018 parliamentary elections did not take place in the districts of Darzab, Khamyab and Mardyan.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, No elections in 3 high security risk districts of Jawzjan, 17 October 2018, \url{url}} In another district, two children were injured in a rocket attack on a polling station.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, 46 killed, 240 injured in nationwide poll violence, 20 October 2018, \url{url}}

In June 2018, Pajhwok Afghan News reported about an increase in the number of rapes and sexual violence against women, as well as killings of male relatives by self-proclaimed IS fighters in the district
of Darzab.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, 'Daesh atrocities growing in Jawzjan’s Darzab district’, 20 June 2018, url} In the same district, the self-proclaimed IS fighters reportedly beheaded a twelve-year old boy on charges of supplying food to the police,\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Jawzjan: Daesh militants behead 12-year-old child, 17 April 2018, url} as well as an adult accused of spying for the government forces.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Daesh behead alleged govt spy in Jawzjan, 21 June 2018, url} The Taliban allegedly punished two women for having phone contact with men in October 2018 in Darzab.\footnote{Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban whip 2 women over phone contact with men, 28 October 2018, url} UNAMA reported that Anti-Government Elements hindered health care personnel in Jawzjan from conducting vaccination campaigns (including for Polio) on two occasions in 2018.\footnote{UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 16}

### 2.14.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 2 261 persons who were displaced from Jawzjan province within the province itself and also to the district of Nahr-e-Shah in Balkh province. According to the same data, IDPs from outside of Jawzjan province, mainly came from Faryab province.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, url}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 329 persons displaced from Qushtepa district to Shiberghan district in Jawzjan province.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, url}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 7 981 persons displaced to Jawzjan province, including 1 638 from the province itself and 6 077 from Faryab.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, url}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 868 persons displaced to Shiberghan district, mostly from Qushtepa district within the province, and from Faryab.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, url}

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<td>Shiberghan</td>
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<td>7 981</td>
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According to UNOCHA data in 2018, IDPs came to Shiberghan mainly from Faryab province and Jawzjan province itself due to conflicts.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, url}

According to UNHCR, Jawzjan province is one of the five provinces with the lowest rates of IDP enrolment for male children (37 %) and female children (30 %).\footnote{UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report - Final Report, May 2018, url, p. 17}
2.15 Kabul Province

2.15.1 General description of the province

Kabul province is located in central Afghanistan. It borders Parwan and Kapisa to the north, Laghman to the east, Nangarhar to the south-east, Logar to the south, and Wardak to the west. Kabul city being the provincial capital, the province is divided into the following districts: Bagrami, Chahrasyab, Dehsabz, Estalef, Farza, Guldara, Kabul, Kalakan, Khak-e-Jabbar, Mirbachakot, Musayi, Paghman, Qarabagh, Shakardara and Surobi. According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Kabul province is estimated at 4,860,880 for 2018/19, comprising Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazara, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baloch, Sikhs and Hindus. The majority of the population of Kabul province are Sunni Muslims, but there are also Shias, Sikhs and Hindus.

Major roads depart from Kabul city and connect the Afghan capital with the rest of the country. The main highway to Mazarr-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 district. The Kabul-Jalalabad highway leads to Nangarhar through the districts of Bagrami, Khak-e-Jabbar and Surobi. The Kabul-Kandahar highway connects Kabul to Wardak.

1324 Pajhwok Afghan News, Kabul province background profile, n.d., url
1325 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kabul Provincial Overview, n.d., url
1326 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kabul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url; Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 4
1329 Australian Institute of International Affairs, A Precarious State: the Sikh Community in Afghanistan, 11 July 2018, url
province through Paghman district in the south-west of the province. Another primary road passes through Bagrami and Chahrasyab in the south and connects Kabul city with Logar province. Kabul city hosts an airport which was served by international and domestic scheduled passenger flights as of March 2019.

As reported by Landinfo in September 2018, many of the incidents outside of the capital took place along the main highways, with insurgents usually attacking Afghan security forces’ outposts and civilians often being caught in the cross-fire. Furthermore, IEDs were often used on the road network in Kabul province. The Afghan security authorities have been investing many resources in trying to secure the metropolitan area and the capital. Road network control is important, among other things, to prevent insurgents from transporting explosives into Kabul city and thus being able to carry out suicide or complex attacks. For instance, the Kabul-Jalalabad highway, which in 2015 was considered one of the ‘world’s most dangerous roads’ and ‘one of the most important trade routes in Afghanistan’, passes through areas where Taliban were active, like Surobi district. The highly secured Green Village compound lies along this highway. The road was closed for hours after a terrorist attack on the compound in January 2019.

Moreover, Landinfo reported on security incidents taking place along the road network in Paghman district and occasional incidents along the highways through Qarabagh, Dehsabz districts.

According to the 2018 UNODC survey Kabul province saw an increase in cultivation area by 11% compared to 2017. Poppy-cultivation was limited to the Uzbin valley of Surobi district, where security was ‘extremely poor’.

2.15.2 Conflict background and actors in Kabul province

As reported by AAN in July 2015, the government’s control over Uzbin valley in Surobi district had decreased in the recent past and members of Hezb-e Islami, which has historically been the stronger group in the area, as well as the Taliban, were present in the district at that time. Surobi has a significant strategic relevance because of its proximity to Kabul city and the Salang highway. Furthermore, the Uzbin valley of Surobi district served as a relatively easily traversable connection to the insecure districts of Tagab in Kapisa and Badpash in Laghman.

According to UNAMA, reporting in November 2018, Surobi ‘has in recent years suffered from several community conflicts. Earlier this year, for example, a mediation process [...] helped two tribes resolve a longstanding land dispute that had turned violent. According to Surobi local council head Rahmatullah, the major causes of conflict in the district are underdevelopment and poverty’.

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1331 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kabul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url]
1332 Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019
1333 Norway, Landinfo, Respons, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sentrale regionen og i det sentrale høylandet-oppdatering, 5 September 2018 [url], p. 4
1334 Diplomat (The), Next Stop Jalalabad: Traveling on One of the World’s Most Dangerous Roads, 13 December 2015, [url]; Stars and Stripes, Afghans often unintended victims of Taliban attacks on Jalalabad Road, 31 January 2015, [url]
1335 Der Spiegel, Autobomben-Anschlag vor Ausländerhotel, 14 January 2019, [url]
1336 Al Jazeera, Fatal blast rocks Afghan capital Kabul, 15 January 2019, [url]
1337 Norway, Landinfo, Respons, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sentrale regionen og i det sentrale høylandet-oppdatering, 5 September 2018 [url], p. 4
1338 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url], p. 21
1339 Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan’s most notorious hotspots, AAN, 9 July 2015, [url]
1340 War on the Rocks, Remembering the French war in Afghanistan, 10 September 2018, [url]
1341 Foschini, F., Classics of Conflict (2): Reviewing some of Afghanistan’s most notorious hotspots, AAN, 9 July 2015, [url]
1342 UNAMA, Kabul elders call for participation of all Afghans in peacefully resolving community conflict, 15 November 2018, [url]
In its September 2018 update on the security situation in the central highlands of Afghanistan, Landinfo stated [informal translation] that it was not aware of ISKP activities outside Kabul city. In Kabul city, the group has carried out numerous attacks; however, not in the surrounding districts of Kabul province. In Kabul province, the major insurgent actor was the Taliban.  

In terms of the presence of government security forces, the main part of Kabul province is under the responsibility of the Train, Advise, and Assist Command - Capital (TAAC-C). Turkish forces and contingents from other nations lead the TAAC. The district Surobi falls under the responsibility of the 201st ANA Corps.

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Kabul province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban. When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

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1343 Norway, Landinfo, Respons, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sentrale regionen og i det sentrale høylandet-oppdatering, 5 September 2018 url, p. 4
1344 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, url, p. 15
1346 LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
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### 2.15.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.15.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 1,866 civilian casualties (596 deaths and 1,270 injured) in Kabul province. This represents an increase of 2% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were suicide/complex attacks, followed by (non-suicide) IEDs and targeted killings.\(^{1347}\)

According to Landinfo’s September 2018 update on the security situation in the central highlands [informal translation], most of the civilian casualties in the province were recorded in Kabul city, as well as in Surobi district.\(^{1348}\)

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Kabul in the highest category and the district of Surobi in the third highest category. Paghman and Qara Bagh districts are in the fourth highest category and remaining districts fall in the two lowest categories.\(^{1349}\)

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 324 incidents related to insurgents in Kabul province, of which 36 were located outside of Kabul city according to the source’s geotagging.\(^{1350}\)

Airstrikes were carried out by Afghan security forces in Surobi district in October 2018, killing and wounding Taliban insurgents.\(^{1351}\) Moreover, military ground operations were carried out in the same

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1348 Norway, Landinfo, Respons, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetssituasjonen i den sentrale regionen og i det sentrale høylandet-oppdatering, 5 September 2018, [url](#), p. 4
1350 Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019
1351 Tolonews, 42 Taliban Insurgents Killed In ANSF Operations, 23 October 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban militants critically wounded in an airstrike in Kabul, 23 October 2018, [url](#)
district in July 2018.\footnote{Khaama Press, Operations underway in Kabul’s Surobi after last week’s attack by militants, 9 July 2018, url}

As reported by Landinfo in September 2018 [informal translation], suicide attacks, which were the most frequent method of attack used in Kabul city, were also reported in other parts of the province.\footnote{Tolonews, 11 Haqqani Members Arrested In Kabul, 5 September 2018, url} Taliban militants carried out attacks on Afghan security forces’ outposts in Surobi district in July 2018, killing and wounding soldiers.\footnote{Khaama Press, Army soldiers suffer casualties in an explosion in Kabul, 6 August 2018, url} Roadside bombs exploded in Paghman district in August 2018, killing security forces\footnote{Khaama Press, Afghan army helicopter crashes in Kabul, leaving one wounded, 2 August 2018, url} and in March 2018, killing civilians.\footnote{Siasat Daily (The), 2 killed in roadside blast in Afghanistan, 19 March 2018, url} Moreover, in December 2018 an explosion purportedly targeting a security forces’ convoy took place in Paghman district, killing and wounding security personnel.\footnote{Khaama Press, 6 killed, 6 wounded in Kabul explosion, 11 December 2018, url}

### 2.15.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 35 persons displaced from Surobi district in Kabul province, all displaced to Pul-e-Alam district of Logar province.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, url}

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Kabul province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, url}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 9 422 persons displaced to Kabul province (mainly to Kabul district), coming from Nangarhar, Ghazni, Wardak, Kapisa, Baghlan, Logar, Kunduz, Paktia, Badghis, Samangan, Laghman, Urugzan and Badakhshan provinces.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, url} UNOCHA registered a peak of 476 IDPs coming from the provincial capital of Ghazni province in mid-August 2018, due to the three-day assault of the Taliban on Ghazni city\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 15 - 21 January, 22 January 2018, url} and a peak of 1 400 IDPs coming from Jaghuri district of Ghazni province mid-November 2018.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 April - 6 May 2018, 7 May 2018, url}

\footnotetext[1352]{Khaama Press, Operations underway in Kabul’s Surobi after last week’s attack by militants, 9 July 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1353]{Tolonews, 11 Haqqani Members Arrested In Kabul, 5 September 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1354]{Norway, Landinfo, Respons, Afghanistan: Sikkerhetsitualisjonen i den sentrale regionen og i det sentrale høylandet-oppdatering, 5 September 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1355]{Khaama Press, Afghan army helicopter crashes in Kabul, leaving one wounded, 2 August 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1356]{Khaama Press, Army soldiers suffer casualties in an explosion in Kabul, 6 August 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1357]{Siasat Daily (The), 2 killed in roadside blast in Afghanistan, 19 March 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1358]{Khaama Press, 6 killed, 6 wounded in Kabul explosion, 11 December 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1359]{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, url}
\footnotetext[1360]{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, url}
\footnotetext[1361]{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, url}
\footnotetext[1362]{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 15 - 21 January, 22 January 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1363]{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 5 - 11 February, 12 February 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1364]{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 4 - 11 March 2018, 11 March 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1365]{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 14 - 21 May 2018, 22 May 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1368]{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 July - 5 August 2018, 6 August 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1369]{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 13 - 19 August 2018, 20 August 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1370]{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 6 - 12 August 2018, 14 August 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1371]{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 3 - 9 September, 10 September, url}
\footnotetext[1372]{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 10 - 16 September 2018, 17 September 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1373]{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 24 - 30 September, 30 September 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1374]{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 5 - 11 November 2018, 12 November 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1375]{UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Conflict, Update No. 2, 15 August 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1376]{UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Armed Clashes Flash Update No. 1, 14 November 2018, url}
\footnotetext[1377]{UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kabul Province - Meeting Summary, 15 November 2018, url}
UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 1 176 persons displaced to Kabul province, all to Kabul district. These IDPs are mainly coming from Tagab and Nejrab districts in Kapisa province (889 IDPs) and from neighbouring Logar, Ghazni and Baghlan provinces.1364

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UNOCHA’s Humanitarian Response Plan of December 2018 classified Kabul as one of the 12 provinces with large concentrations of IDPs and returnees who are most affected by the ongoing conflict and drought.1365 IOM ranked Kabul district third out of the top 20 districts hosting the most returnees and IDPs from January to June 20181366 and seventh out of the top 25 districts hosting most returnees and IDPs from October to December 2018.1367

According to UNHCR, Kabul and Nangarhar provinces are the main areas of return since 2002 and into 2018.1368 Kabul province remains a particularly attractive return destination and is described by UNHCR as one of the four provinces with the highest percentage of returnees who did not originate there.1369

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1364 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, url
1367 IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results October - December 2018, 15 March 2019, url, p. 5
1368 UNHCR, Fact Sheet Afghanistan, April 2018, url, p. 2; UNHCR, Fact Sheet Afghanistan, May 2018, url, p. 2; UNHCR, Fact Sheet Afghanistan, June 2018, url, p. 2; UNHCR, Fact Sheet Afghanistan, 30 September 2018, url, p. 2; UNHCR, Afghanistan Voluntary Repatriation Update, October 2018, url, p. 4
2.16 Kandahar

2.16.1 General description of the province
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. Kandahar is divided into the following districts: Arghandab, Arghestan, Daman, Ghorak, the provincial capital Kandahar, Khakrez, Maruf, Maywand, Miyanimishin, Nesh, Panjwayi, Reg (Shiga), Shahwalikot, Shorabak, Spinboldak, and Zheray, as well as 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 Afghanistan CSO estimates, the population of Kandahar is 1 337 183 in 2018/19, with 596 423 of its residents living in the provincial capital. The majority of Kandahar’s population belongs to Pashtun tribes, with smaller groups of Baloch, Hazara and Tajiks, as well as other ethnicities, which are usually referred to as Farsiwan, i.e. Farsi/Dari speakers.

The Ring Road connects the provincial capital of Kandahar with the major population centres of Herat and Kabul. 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.’ A northbound road towards Uruzgan forks in Kandahar City. Heading southwards, a road connects the city of Kandahar with the Afghan-Pakistani border crossing at Spin Boldak-Chaman. In October 2018, the border crossing reportedly has been closed due to clashes between Afghan and Pakistani security forces. According to the airport map of the Austrian COI department, 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 is projected to lead through Afghanistan alongside the Ring Road from Herat to Kandahar and would therefore intersect Taliban-controlled areas. The Taliban reportedly agreed to the project and vowed not to attack construction workers. However, in May 2018, Arab News reported that five workers had been killed and one was abducted by unidentified gunmen in Kandahar.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, after neighbouring Helmand, Kandahar hosted the second largest opium-poppy cultivating area in Afghanistan in 2018. Compared to 2017, the size of Kandahar’s opium-poppy acreage decreased by 16 % in 2018. The main opium-poppy cultivating areas have been reportedly the districts of Maywand, Zheray, Nesh, Spinboldak, and Panjwayi.
2.16.2 Conflict background and actors in Kandahar

Kandahar is reportedly the ‘birthplace’ of the Taliban and therefore has symbolic importance for the group.\textsuperscript{1385} Additionally, its location bordering the Pakistani province of Balochistan, which ‘[…] serves as the group’s safe haven as well as a prime recruitment center,’ and the role of opium-poppy cultivation in the province, add strategic importance to Kandahar.\textsuperscript{1386} While Xinhua News Agency stated that the security situation has been improving in the province\textsuperscript{1387} and Reuters described the province as ‘relatively secure’ in May 2018,\textsuperscript{1388} Khaama Press and LWJ reported an increase in Taliban attacks throughout late 2017 to early 2019.\textsuperscript{1389} According to the Afghan news portal Ariana News, Kandahar ‘[…] witnessed a sharp increase in deadly attacks by the militants in recent months where Afghan security forces and their international allies have also doubled counter-attacks […]’.\textsuperscript{1390} Kandahar has been one of the four provinces with the highest casualty rates in 2018, according to Pajhwok Afghan News.\textsuperscript{1391}

Listing several murders of women with public profiles an article about such murders in Afghanistan published in the London Review of Books indicated that the situation of women deteriorated significantly in Kandahar after foreign donors, who had been fostering women’s rights, largely left the province. Citing an NGO representative of Kandahar, she stated that ‘[…] the Western presence had produced a generation of educated women society [in Kandahar] had no use for.’\textsuperscript{1392}

AAN credited the years of relative stability in the province to the presence of the powerful strongman and police chief General Abdul Razeq. The US allegedly backed Razeq because of his strong stance against the Taliban.\textsuperscript{1393} Human Rights Watch reported on several war crimes by Razeq and his followers, which the US and Afghan governments reportedly largely ignored for the sake of security in Kandahar.\textsuperscript{1394} According to AAN, ‘Razeq’s rule drove the insurgency, but also contained it’: Razeq removed the Taliban from Kandahar City and its surrounding districts, while the Taliban control over more distant areas reportedly remained ‘significant but static.’\textsuperscript{1395} In October 2018, Razeq was assassinated, allegedly by the Taliban.\textsuperscript{1396} AAN assumed that power struggles are a likely going to be the result of Razeq’s death, as Razeq’s former post as provincial police chief is a lucrative position thanks to the opium-poppy industry in neighbouring Helmand.\textsuperscript{1397}

\textsuperscript{1385} ISW, Regional Command South, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{1386} LWJ, Taliban overruns Afghan army camp in Kandahar, 19 October 2017, url; Reuters, Heavy casualties as blast rocks Afghan city of Kandahar, 22 May 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1387} Xinhua News Agency, Two civilians injured in S. Afghan shoot out, 11 March, url
\textsuperscript{1388} Reuters, Heavy casualties as blast rocks Afghan city of Kandahar, 22 May 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1389} Khaama Press, Afghan forces suffer casualties in Kandahar VBIED suicide attack, 28 September 2017, url; LWJ, Taliban overruns Afghan army camp in Kandahar, 19 October 2017, url; Khaama Press, Explosion targets military convoy in Kandahar province, 11 March 2018, url; Khaama Press, 3 terrorist networks busted in Kandahar province, 22 January 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1390} Ariana News, 11 Children Killed as Car Bomb Targets Foreign Forces Convoy in Kandahar, 30 April 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1391} Pajhwok Afghan News, 2018 casualties indicate 7 percent surge, 3 January 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1392} Jeong, M., Diary: Femicide in Kandahar, 31 August 2017, May Jeong is a visiting scholar at the New York University Journalism Institute.
\textsuperscript{1393} Ruttig, T., The Killing of Razeq: Removing the Taleban’s strongest foe in Kandahar, an indirect hit at elections, AAN, 19 October 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1394} HRW, “Today We Shall All Die”: Afghanistan’s Strongmen and the Legacy of Impunity, 3 March 2015, url; Ruttig, T., The Killing of Razeq: Removing the Taleban’s strongest foe in Kandahar, an indirect hit at elections, AAN, 19 October 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1395} Ruttig, T., The Killing of Razeq: Removing the Taleban’s strongest foe in Kandahar, an indirect hit at elections, AAN, 19 October 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1396} Ruttig, T., The Killing of Razeq: Removing the Taleban’s strongest foe in Kandahar, an indirect hit at elections, AAN, 19 October 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1397} Ruttig, T., The Killing of Razeq: Removing the Taleban’s strongest foe in Kandahar, an indirect hit at elections, AAN, 19 October 2018, url
The Afghan forces, aided by foreign forces, carried out several operations in Kandahar in 2018 and early 2019. LWJ claimed in May 2018 that “[...] Afghan security forces appear to be focusing on Taliban forces in the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar [...]”.

Kandahar is under the responsibility of the 205th ANA Corps.

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Kandahar province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.

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<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%</td>
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2.16.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.16.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 537 civilian casualties (204 deaths and 333 injured) in the province of Kandahar. This represents a decrease of 25% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were (non-suicide) IEDs, followed by ground engagements and search operations.1403 Between 1 January and 30 September 2018, UNAMA reported that ‘pressure-plate IEDs left over from fighting in recent years continue to be of particular concern in many parts of Kandahar, where pressure-plate and other non-suicide IEDs caused most of the civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Element use of IEDs in the province. Anti-Government Elements also continue to impact civilians with remote-controlled IEDs targeting Pro-Government Forces in civilian populated areas, particularly in Kandahar’.1404

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Kandahar,

1403 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 68
1404 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, pp. 7-8
Maiwand and Shah Wali Kot in the highest category and the districts of Khakrez, Maruf, Miyanshin and Nesh in the second highest category. The districts of Arghestan, Daman, Ghorak, Spin Boldak, and Zheray are placed in the category below while Arghandab and Panjwayi fall in the fourth highest category. The remaining districts are in lower categories.1405

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 243 incidents related to insurgents in Kandahar province.1406

The Taliban conducted several attacks on security checkpoints in the province throughout 2018 and early 2019, resulting in casualties.1407 Furthermore, IED blasts caused casualties among civilians,1408 killing for instance eleven children in a car bomb blast targeted at a convoy of foreign forces in April 2018.1409

RFE/RL reported in October 2018 that four civilians were accidentally killed in an airstrike by the Afghan Air Force in the district of Maruf. AAF allegedly targeted Taliban insurgents, who mixed with a wedding procession after they had launched an attack.1410 In February 2018 Afghan special forces reportedly ‘summarily executed civilians in Kandahar province during military operations from January 31 to February 1, 2018’ according to Human Rights Watch.1411

The 2018 parliamentary election was postponed for a week in Kandahar due to the assassination of General Abdul Razeq shortly before.1412 In late September 2018, an election candidate from the Kuchi community, a nomadic Pashtun group, was shot dead in the province.1413

2.16.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 789 persons displaced from Kandahar province. They were mainly displaced within the province itself.1414

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Kandahar province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.1415

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 3 439 persons displaced to Kandahar province, including 1 551 from Helmand.1416

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Kandahar province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.1417

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1405 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 2
1408 Reuters, Heavy casualties as blast rocks Afghan city of Kandahar, 22 May 2018, url
1409 Ariana News, 11 Children Killed as Car Bomb Targets Foreign Forces Convoy in Kandahar, 30 April 2018, url
1410 RFE/RL, Air Strike Kills Four Civilians In Southern Afghanistan, 5 October 2018, url
1411 HRW, Afghanistan: Alleged Summary Executions by Special Forces, 21 February 2018, url
1412 Van Bijlert, M., Before Election Day Three: Looking at Kandahar’s upcoming vote, AAN, 26 October 2018, url
1413 RFE/RL, Afghan Candidates Killed On The Campaign Trail, 19 October 2018, url
1414 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, url
1415 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, url
1416 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, url
1417 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, url
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2.17 Kapisa

2.17.1 General description of the province

The province of Kapisa is situated in central-eastern Afghanistan, surrounded by the provinces of Panjshir to the north, Laghman to the east, Kabul to the south, and Parwan to the west. Kapisa is divided into the following districts: Alasay, Hisa-e-Awal-e-Kohestan, Hissa-e-Duwum-e-Kohestan, Kohband, Mahmud-e-Raqi, Nejrab, and Tagab. Mahmud-e-Raqi is the provincial capital of Kapisa.

The Afghan CSO estimated the population of Kapisa at 471,574 in 2018/19. The major ethnic groups of Kapisa are Tajik, Pashtun, and Nuristani, with the Tajiks, which are the largest single group, living mainly in the northern part of the province.

A primary road connects the capital of Kapisa to Kabul City.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Kapisa was not among Afghanistan's ten main opium-poppy cultivating provinces in 2018. The size of the opium-poppy acreage reportedly decreased by 60% in 2018 compared to 2017. Opium-poppy was mainly cultivated in the districts of Tagab and Alasay.

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1418 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kapisa Province - District Atlas, April 2014, [url](#)
1420 Afghanistan, CSO, [برآورد نوس کشور 1397](#) [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url](#), p. 2
1422 Ali, O., Fire in the Pashai Hills: A two-district case study from Kapisa, AAN, 6 April 2015, [url](#)
1423 iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, [url](#)
1424 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 17
1425 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, [url](#), p. 23
2.17.2 Conflict background and actors in Kapisa

According to AAN, Kapisa 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.’\textsuperscript{1426}

A 2014 report by the New York Times stated that the battle between Taliban insurgents 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 forces’ allegations of infiltration of the ANA by the insurgents or close cooperation between the Afghan Army and the insurgents. The Taliban, on the other hand, reportedly were a ‘disciplined’ force in Kapisa, ‘[...] able to operate freely.’\textsuperscript{1427}

AAN surmised in 2012 that Kapisa might be ‘sociologically divided’ into southern districts more sympathetic towards the insurgents, and the north, ‘where allegiance to Jamiat-e Islami makes community support for the Taliban less likely’.\textsuperscript{1428} In 2015, the southern districts of Alasay, Nijrab, and Tagab were reported to be the most insecure districts of Kapisa. According to AAN, the political landscape in Kapisa was characterized by a ‘[...] never-ending story of local warlords and Taleban competing with each other [...]’, and the poor economic situation of many residents which ‘[contributed] to the high rates of militancy and private feuds [...]’ in some districts of the province.\textsuperscript{1429}

Kapisa is under the responsibility of the 201\textsuperscript{st} ANA Corps.\textsuperscript{1430}

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Kapisa province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.\textsuperscript{1431} When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

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<tr>
<td>Tagab</td>
<td>Open Taliban Presence - high</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%</td>
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\textsuperscript{1426} Foschini, F., In Kabul’s Shadow: the attacks in the provinces on 15-16 April, AAN, 24 April 2012, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1427} New York Times (The), Hour’s Drive Outside Kabul, Taliban Reign, 22 November 2014, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1428} Foschini, F., In Kabul’s Shadow: the attacks in the provinces on 15-16 April, AAN, 24 April 2012, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1429} Ali, O., Fire in the Pashai Hills: A two-district case study from Kapisa, AAN, 6 April 2015, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1430} Global Security, Afghan National Army (ANA) - Order of Battle, n.d., \url{url}, last modified 6 September 2018
\textsuperscript{1432} LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
2.17.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.17.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 139 civilian casualties (39 deaths and 100 injured) in Kapisa. This represents an increase of 38% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by aerial attacks and (non-suicide) IEDs.\footnote{1433 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 68}

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Tagab in the highest category, the district of Nijrab in the second highest category, the district of Alasay in the category below and the remaining districts in the two lowest categories.\footnote{1434 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 2}

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 81 incidents related to insurgents in Kapisa province.\footnote{1435 Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, url, accessed 1 March 2019}

In February 2018, Pajhwok Afghan News reported that the Taliban, as well as the ALP, have been collecting ushr taxes from Tagab’s residents for years now.\footnote{1436 Pajhwok Afghan News, Both Taliban, ALP take ushr from Tagab residents, 20 February 2018, url} In 2018 and 2019, government forces reportedly carried out several operations in Kapisa, with US support, mainly in the districts of Tagab and Nijrab in 2018 and early 2019,\footnote{1437 Khaama Press, ISIS militants among 7 killed in Nangarhar and Kapisa drone strikes, 1 March 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban suffered heavy losses in joint operations: NATO, 6 March 2018, url; AA, Afghan government says 171 terrorists killed, 11 March 2018, url; RFE/RL, Afghan Army: Dozens Of Militants Killed In Operations, 21 April 2018, url; New York Times (The), Airstrikes Are Killing More Civilians in Afghanistan, U.N. Warns, 26 September 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 Taliban, 2 children killed in Laghman, Kapisa airstrikes, 26 November 2018, url; Xinhua News Agency, Airstrike kills 10 Taliban militants in Afghanistan’s Kapisa province, 1 December 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 50 rebels killed, 80pc of Tagab area cleared, 6 December 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 14 Taliban killed in ongoing Kapisa operation, 2 January 2019, url} retaking several villages in Tagab from the Taliban in January 2019.\footnote{1438 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban judge reconciles with govt in Kapisa, 18 January 2019, url}
In September 2018, an airstrike killed nine civilians in the district of Tagab. In late November 2018, two children reportedly were killed by an airstrike in Tagab district.

According to the website of the US Central Command, the Taliban shadow governor of Kapisa, as well as the district shadow governor of Tagab, were killed in a US airstrike in July 2018.

### 2.17.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 7,560 persons displaced from Kapisa province, mainly within the province itself or in neighbouring provinces Kabul and Parwan.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 1,330 persons displaced from Nejrab and Tagab districts in Kapisa province, mainly to Kabul district of Kabul province and within the province itself in Mahmud-e-Raqi district.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 5,789 persons displaced to Kapisa province, mainly coming from within the province itself (5,600 IDPs) or from neighbouring provinces Parwan, Laghman, Nuristan, Baghlan, Samangan and Kunar.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 350 persons displaced to Mahmud-e-Raqi district in Kapisa province, all coming from within the province itself from Nejrab district.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tagab</td>
<td>5,019</td>
<td>3,402</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alasay</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nejrab</td>
<td>1,848</td>
<td>1,351</td>
<td>1,085</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahmud-e-Raqi</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hisa-e-Duwum-e-Kohestan</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hisa-e-Awal-e-Kohestan</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>168</td>
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</table>

Throughout 2018, UNOCHA continuously reported conflict induced displacement in and from the insecure districts of Tagab, Alasay and Nejrab. According to UNOCHA, the main reasons for these displacements are military (clearing) operations, insecurity and ongoing armed conflict, threats by non-state armed groups, economic problems and frequent intimidation. The IDP families mainly found refuge in the Tamir area (district center) of Tagab, the district center of Nejrab and in the districts of Mahmud-e-Raqi, Hisa-e-Duwum-e-Kohestan and Hisa-e-Awal-e-Kohestan.

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1439 UNAMA, Concerns About Rising Number of Civilian Casualties from Airstrikes, 25 September 2018, [url](#)
1440 Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 Taliban, 2 children killed in Laghman, Kapisa airstrikes, 26 November 2018, [url](#)
1441 US, Central Command, Taliban’s Two Top Leaders in Kapisa Province Killed, 27 July 2018, [url](#)
1442 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)
1443 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, [url](#)
1444 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)
1445 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, [url](#)
1446 UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 3 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 1 - 7 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 18 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 15 - 21 January, 22 January 2018, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary,
In April 2018, UNOCHA reported a peak of 1,000 displaced families (7,000 individuals) due to an ANSF military operation (by the name of Sailab) in the insecure areas of Afghanistan, Ghain and Pacha Ghan of Nejrab district, launched to ‘clear’ the region from opposition groups. The IDP families settled in Maghdud Khil, Koramai, China, Tarinan, and Chokambaz villages of Nejrab district or were displaced to ‘secure districts’ of Kapisa (like the provincial capital Mahmud-e-Raqi) and to Kabul.

In January 2019, the provincial governor of Kapisa informed UNOCHA of the launch of ANSF military clearing operations in Nejrab district, leading to a ‘big number of the population’ being displaced from their places of origin such as Afghanistan, Ghain, Shpee and Pacha Ghan areas of Nejrab district to the center of the district, Hisa-e-Awal-e-Kohestan, Hisa-e-Duwum-e-Kohestan and Mahmud-e-Raqi districts of Kapisa province. According to the governor, cited in a UNOCHA meeting report from January 2019, at that time, ANSF military operations were still ongoing in insecure areas of Kapisa province and several villages of Nejrab and Tagab districts became safe, which caused some of the displaced families to return home.

Throughout 2018, UNOCHA reported regularly on IDPs arriving in Kapisa province coming from insecure areas in neighbouring provinces such as Baghlan, Samangan, Laghman, Nuristan, Parwan, Shigal Wa Sheltan district of Kunar province and Surobi district of Kabul province. These IDPs mainly went to the provincial capital of Mahmud-e-Raqi and in Hisa-e-Awal-e-Kohestan district.

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.


1447 UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 18 April 2018, url, p. 1

1448 UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 18 April 2018, url, p. 1; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 16 - 22 April 2018, 23 April 2018, url, p. 1

1449 UNOCHA, Provincial Disaster Management Committee (PDMC) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 29 January 2019, url, p. 1

1450 UNOCHA, Provincial Disaster Management Committee (PDMC) - Kapisa Province - Meeting Summary, 29 January 2019, url, p. 1


2.18 Khost

2.18.1 General description of the province

The province of Khost is situated in the eastern part of Afghanistan, bordering Pakistan to the east, Paktika to the southwest, and Paktya to the west and northwest. Khost is divided into the following districts: 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.

The Afghan CSO estimated the population of Khost at 614,584 in 2018/19. According to 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 and various other minorities living mostly in the city of Khost. According to the US-based Tribal Analysis Center (TAC), the province is inhabited by a large number of tribes, among them the Zadran tribe.
namesake of the so-called ‘Zadran Arc’, which includes stretches of Western Khost, Paktya and Paktika. Historically a strong tribe, TAC described the Zadran in 2013 as a ‘loose tribe’, characterized by infighting and multiple political affiliations. Furthermore, Kuchi and Musalyan nomads live in Khost seasonally. 

In 2013, TAC described Khost as a ‘[...] major transit hub for trade from Pakistan [...]’. Khost reportedly has three border crossings with Pakistan (Ghulam Khan, Babrak Tanai and Zazai Maiden). According to Pajhwok Afghan News, the key border crossing of Ghulam Khan was closed in 2014 due to military operations in Pakistan's North Waziristan but reopened in March 2018. The border crossing of Zazai Maiden has also been temporarily closed in the past. In 2018, border disputes between Afghan and Pakistani security forces caused casualties among the fighting parties, as well as among civilians. RFE/RL stated that the border fencing, and continued border fortifications by Pakistan, ‘have threatened to disrupt the daily lives of people living in communities that straddle the border’. 

The so-called Khost-Gardez Pass connects Khost with neighbouring Paktya, Logar and ultimately Kabul. According to a 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. 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.’ AAN noted that due to the geographical terrain of mountainous Khost, insurgents 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

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1462 TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, url, p. 8
1463 TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, url, p. 8
1464 TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, url, p. 9
1465 TAC, Khost Province District Studies, 20 May 2013, url, p. 9
1466 Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost market unaffected by closure of Pakistan border, 8 July 2016, url
1467 Pakistan Today, Tribesmen, business communities welcome Pak-Afghan Ghulam Khan border opening, 1 May 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Af-Pak trade via Ghulam Khan route set to resume, 5 March 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost market unaffected by closure of Pakistan border, 8 July 2016, url; Dawn, Ghulam Khan route to open on 7th, 5 March 2018, url
1468 Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost market unaffected by closure of Pakistan border, 8 July 2016, url
1469 RFE/RL, Afghanistan Returns Captured, Dead Pakistani Soldiers After Cross-Border Clash, 16 April 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Zazai Maiden residents clash with Pakistani forces, 15 July 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Pakistani soldiers killed in border clash, 16 April 2018, url
1470 RFE/RL, Afghanistan Returns Captured, Dead Pakistani Soldiers After Cross-Border Clash, 16 April 2018, url
1471 iMMAP, Afghanistan Administrative Map, 19 September 2017, url; New York Times (The), Costly Afghanist an Road Project Is Marred by Unsavory Alliances, 1 May 2011, url
1472 ThinkProgress, Afghans fearful as CIA-backed militias patrol the ground and U.S. drones haunt the skies, 13 December 2017, url
1473 Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019
1474 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 19
1476 Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia’s Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, url
and the success of their operations.'\textsuperscript{1477} AAN assumed that ‘this discourages acts that would antagonise whole communities.’\textsuperscript{1478}

The Haqqani network reportedly has been most active in the ‘Zadran Arc’,\textsuperscript{1479} with its late founder Jalaluddin Haqqani being a member of the Zadran tribe.\textsuperscript{1480} The group is affiliated with the Taliban, though it declared itself independent from the Quetta Shura from 2007 to 2015.\textsuperscript{1481} Declassified US cables quoted by Associated Press (AP) stated that the Haqqani network, contrary to other Taliban factions, ‘[…] functions more in the military area, and is not a force in setting Taliban political or social issues’,\textsuperscript{1482} a perception seemingly shared by Ruttig.\textsuperscript{1483}

The Haqqani network reportedly maintains close ties to the Pakistani secret service ISI, as well as other Pakistani militant groups and Al Qaeda.\textsuperscript{1484} In 2017, the UN Security Council reported the presence of individuals affiliated to Al Qaeda in Khost.\textsuperscript{1485} Jalaluddin Haqqani reportedly died aged 71 in September 2018. According to the Associated Press (AP), it is unlikely that Haqqani’s death will weaken the organization founded by him as Haqqani had already handed over control to his son Serajuddin at an earlier point of time.\textsuperscript{1486}

On the government side, a ‘campaign force’ named Khost Protection Force (KPF) reportedly has been the most influential security actor in the province.\textsuperscript{1487} According to several sources, KPF is supported by the CIA and unaccountable to the provincial government. KPF has been accused of human rights violations such as extrajudicial killings, torture, and arbitrary arrests, most recently in January 2019 in the province of Paktya, as well as in Khost in December 2018.\textsuperscript{1488}

In 2018 and early 2019, regular Afghan security forces conducted ground operations and airstrikes in the province.\textsuperscript{1489} Khost is under the responsibility of the 203rd\textsuperscript{1490} ANA Corps.\textsuperscript{1490}

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Khost province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.\textsuperscript{1491} When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

\textsuperscript{1477} Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia’s Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1478} Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia’s Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1479} Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, London, 2009, p. 62
\textsuperscript{1480} AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1481} Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s organization and structure, 23 August 2017, \url{url}, p. 9
\textsuperscript{1482} AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1483} Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, London, 2009, p. 73
\textsuperscript{1484} AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, \url{url}; Ruttig, T., Loya Paktia’s Insurgency: The Haqqani Network as an Autonomous Entity, London, 2009, pp. 75-76; New York Times (The), Costly Afghanistan Road Project Is Marred by Unsavory Alliances, 1 May 2011, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1485} UN Security Council, Twentieth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, 7 August 2017, \url{url}, p. 15
\textsuperscript{1486} AP, Death of Afghan group’s founder unlikely to weaken militants, 4 September 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1487} Washington Post (The), CIA runs shadow war with Afghan militia implicated in civilian killings, 3 December 2015, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1488} Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, \url{url}; New York Times (The), C.I.A.’s Afghan Forces Leave a Trail of Abuse and Anger, 31 December 2018, \url{url}; Washington Post (The), CIA runs shadow war with Afghan militia implicated in civilian killings, 3 December 2015, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1489} Xinhua News Agency, Airstrike kills 4 Haqqani militants in Afghanistan, 26 July 2018, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 62 insurgents killed, 17 injured in fresh raids: MoD, 20 September 2018, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 Afghan soldiers killed in Khost gunbattle, 10 December 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1490} Global Security, Afghan National Army (ANA) - Order of Battle, n.d., \url{url}
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<td>Bak</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
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<td>Gurbuz</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jajimaydan</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khost (Matun) (capital)</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandozayi</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Musakhel</td>
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<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
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<td>Nadirshahkot</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>Contested</td>
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<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
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<td>Sabari</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - Medium</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
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<td>Shamal</td>
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<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
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<td>Spera</td>
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<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 40%; Gov control: 40%</td>
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<td>Tani</td>
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<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Terazayi</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - Medium</td>
<td>Contested</td>
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<td>Alisher</td>
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<td>Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%</td>
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<td>Ismail Khel</td>
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<td>Gov control</td>
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1492 LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
1493 The percentages referred to by the Taliban on their website sometimes don’t add up to 100%.
2.18.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.18.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 175 civilian casualties (84 deaths and 91 injured) in Khost. This represents a decrease of 3% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were (non-suicide) IEDs, followed by targeted killings and search operations.\(^{1494}\) With regard to all of Afghanistan, the same source further found that ‘search operations caused 353 civilian casualties (284 deaths and 69 injured) with the majority caused by NDS Special Forces and the Khost Protection Force, both of whom are supported by international military forces.’ \(^{1495}\)

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Khost (Matun) in the second highest category. Musakhel, Sabari, Terezayi and Jaji Maydan are in the third highest category, the districts of Mandozayi, Nadir Shah Kot and Bak in the fourth highest category and the remaining districts in the two lowest categories.\(^{1496}\)

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 67 incidents related to insurgents in Khost province.\(^{1497}\)

According to Khaama Press and Pajhwok Afghan News, all districts of Khost are comparatively calm.\(^{1498}\) However, insurgent activity, as well as operations by Afghan security forces and the KPF ‘campaign forces’ caused civilian casualties in Khost in 2018 and early 2019. In February 2018, reportedly seven members of a family reportedly died in an operation of the security forces in the district of Terezayi,\(^{1499}\) while an operation in Sabari district caused ten casualties (four deaths, six injuries). According to Pajhwok Afghan News, it was not clear whether the persons wounded or killed in Sabari were civilians.\(^{1500}\) In July 2018, five members of a family were reportedly killed in an operation of the Afghan Special Forces in Bak district.\(^{1501}\) A clash between security forces and insurgents claimed the lives of four civilians in Nadirshahkot district in March 2018, according to Xinhua News Agency.\(^{1502}\) Residents later brought the coffins of the killed civilians to Khost City in order to protest, demanding prosecution for the deaths.\(^{1503}\) Furthermore, the Kabul-Khost highway was blocked for several hours by protestors asking for a stop to ‘campaign forces’ operations.\(^{1504}\) A KPF raid in December 2018 allegedly left four civilians dead, including a toddler.\(^{1505}\)

In April 2018, a journalist was reportedly shot dead in Khost.\(^{1506}\) In May 2018, an explosion in a mosque serving as a voter registration centre for the upcoming parliamentary elections killed at least 17 persons.\(^{1507}\) In June 2018, two people were shot dead and three others were injured in a Mosque in

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\(^{1494}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 68
\(^{1495}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 6
\(^{1496}\) UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 2
\(^{1497}\) Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, url, accessed 1 March 2019
\(^{1498}\) Khaama Press, Afghan forces thwart deadly VBIEED attack in Khost province, 6 March 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Judges, attorneys not available in 3 Khost districts, 31 December 2018, url
\(^{1499}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 members of a family killed in Khost operation, 8 February 2018, url
\(^{1500}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 10 people suffer casualties in Khost operation, 21 February 2018, url
\(^{1501}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 of a family killed in Khost raid by Afghan special forces, 8 July 2018, url
\(^{1502}\) Xinhua News Agency, Afghan gun battle claims 4 lives of civilians, 4 March 2018, url
\(^{1503}\) Xinhua News Agency, Afghan gun battle claims 4 lives of civilians, 4 March 2018, url
\(^{1504}\) Ariana News, Residents Protest against Operations of ‘Campaign Forces’ in Khost, 4 March 2018, url
\(^{1505}\) New York Times (The), C.I.A.’s Afghan Forces Leave a Trail of Abuse and Anger, 31 December 2018, url
\(^{1506}\) BBC News, BBC reporter Ahmad Shah killed in Afghanistan attack, 30 April 2018, url
\(^{1507}\) BBC News, Afghanistan: At least 17 killed in Khost mosque blast, 6 May 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 17 killed in blast at voter registration centre in Khost, 6 May 2018, url
In January 2019, two people died and 20 persons were injured in the provincial capital in an explosion, for which nobody claimed responsibility.\textsuperscript{1509}

In November 2018, a bomb blast in the mosque of an army base reportedly killed 26 members of the Afghan security forces.\textsuperscript{1510}

### 2.18.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 4,676 persons displaced from Khost province, of whom almost all (4,669) were displaced to the capital district, Khost (Matun).\textsuperscript{1511}

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Khost province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.\textsuperscript{1512}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 6,139 persons displaced to Khost province from Baghlan, Ghazni, Logar, Nangarhar, Paktika and Paktya provinces.\textsuperscript{1513}

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Khost province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.\textsuperscript{1514}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bak</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gurbuz</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jajimaydan</td>
<td>2,100</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Musakhel</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sabari</td>
<td>2,212</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spera</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Terezayi</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Khost (Matun)</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>6,139</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Causes of displacements are linked to the conflict according to UNOCHA: military operations in January 2018\textsuperscript{1516} and cross border shelling in Jajimaydan district in April 2018 drove 1,000 people living near the border to leave this area.\textsuperscript{1517}

\textsuperscript{1508} Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 killed, 3 injured in gun attack on Khost mosque, 7 June 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1509} Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 killed, 3 injured in gun attack on Khost mosque, 7 June 2018, \url{url}; Khaama Press, 2 killed, over 20 wounded in an explosion in Khost province, 8 January 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1510} NBC News, Suicide blast kills dozens at mosque in Afghanistan’s Khost province, 23 November 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1511} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1512} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1513} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1514} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1515} The district of origin of 7 persons displaced is not mentioned in UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1516} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 22 - 29 January, 29 January 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1517} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 16 – 22 April 2018, 23 April 2018, \url{url}
2.19 Kunar

2.19.1 General description of the province

Kunar is located in eastern Afghanistan, on the Afghan-Pakistani border; it borders Nuristan to the north, Pakistan to the east, Nangarhar to the south, and Laghman to the west.1518 The provincial capital is Asadabad;1519 the province is divided into the following districts: Asadabad, Barkunar (also Asmar), Chapadara, Chawkay (also Sawkay), Dangam, Dara- e-Pech (also Manogi), Ghaziabad, Khashkunar, Marawara, Narang, Nari, Nurgal, Sarkani, Shigail,1520 Watapur and Sheltan.1521 The latter is defined 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.1522 According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Kunar is estimated at 482 115 for 2018/19.1523 It is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Pashai and Nuristani.1524 The province, which is rich in forests, has been affected by high

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1519 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., url; Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunar, 1 February 2017, url
1522 Ruttig, T., The Afghanistan Election Conundrum (12): Good news and bad news about district numbers, AAN, 16 August 2018, url
1523 Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 2
1524 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., url; Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunar, 1 February 2017, url
rates of illegal logging, mining and smuggling by insurgents, mafia groups and, allegedly, some government officials.\textsuperscript{1525}

A national highway from Jalalabad passes through the districts of Nurgal, Chawkay, Narang, Asadabad, Shigal and leads to Asmar.\textsuperscript{1526} From Asmar the highway leads to Nuristan province through Ghaziabad and Nari districts. In 2017, insurgents built a stone wall on the road in order to limit the transit of government officials. The Afghan security forces reopened the road in August 2018 after a series of operations.\textsuperscript{1527} The province shares a 175 kilometre-long border with Pakistan; through the Korengal valley, which lies west of the provincial capital, the insurgents have been entering and leaving the province during the years.\textsuperscript{1528} Pakistani militants and Al Qaeda fighters used to access Afghanistan from the former tribal areas or urban centres in Pakistan and passed through insurgent controlled areas in Nangarhar, Kunar, Nuristan and Badakhshan.\textsuperscript{1529}

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.\textsuperscript{1530}

\subsection*{2.19.2 Conflict background and actors in Kunar}

According to a government source quoted by Tolonews in March 2017, at least 15 terrorist organisations, among them ISKP, Al Qaeda and Lashkar-e-Taiba, were active in the province.\textsuperscript{1531} Sources from 2018-2019 reported that Pakistan’s Tehrik-e-Taliban members run a military base, called Ghazi Camp, in Kunar province; they shifted it to Kunar after clearing operations by the military in Pakistan.\textsuperscript{1532}

ISKP is active in the province. According to the New York Times, ISKP fighters pushed back the Taliban from Korengal valley and expanded their control over it, as of January 2019. Before the takeover of the valley, ISKP expansion in the country ‘had been contained’ through military operations, but the seizure of the valley by the armed group again raised concerns over its expansion in the region. The consolidation of ISKP in the valley could ‘threaten several neighboring districts’, as well as the main road connecting Kunar with Nuristan province, speculated the New York Times in January 2019.\textsuperscript{1533} According to the Kunar police chief quoted by Pajhwok Afghan News in 2017, there were hundreds of ISKP militants in the province. They had started their activities in Chapadara and maintained training centres in Nari. Moreover, ISKP fighters have also appeared in areas of Nurgal, Watapur and Dara-e-Pech districts.\textsuperscript{1534}

As of February 2019, the UN Secretary-General described Kunar as one of the IS ‘strongholds’ in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{1535} UNAMA’s 2018 annual report noted that ‘Daesh/ISKP is present in the east of Afghanistan, with an estimated 3,000 fighters currently active, primarily in Nangarhar and Kunar

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1525] IWPR, Illegal Logging Destroying Afghan Forests, 23 January 2018, url
\item[1526] Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, url, p.5; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
\item[1527] Salaam Times, Afghan forces reopen key Kunar highway blocked by Taliban, 9 August 2018, url
\item[1528] US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunar Provincial Overview, n.d., url
\item[1529] Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, url
\item[1530] UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 23
\item[1531] Tolonews, Daesh, Al-Qaeda Among 15 Terror Groups in Kunar, April 2017, url
\item[1532] Dawn, Son of TTP chief killed in drone attack in Afghanistan, 8 March 2018, url; RCD, Taliban Promotes Training Camp for ‘Commando Mujahidin’, 23 January 2019, url
\item[1533] New York Times (The), Violence Grows in Northern Afghanistan, but Neither Side Is Gaining Much Ground, 10 January 2019, url
\item[1534] Pajhwok Afghan News, Hundreds of Daesh rebels emerge in Kunar: police chief, 5 July 2017, url
\item[1535] 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
\end{footnotes}
provinces'.\textsuperscript{1536} The same source further noted that with regards to Al Qaeda: ‘Al-Qaeda is believed to maintain a limited presence in eastern Afghanistan, especially Kunar and Nuristan provinces, and to continue to have links to anti-Government groups operating throughout Afghanistan. Most recent reporting in mid-2018 suggested that Al-Qaeda operatives have recently increased from 100-120 individuals, based on mid-2017 estimates, to an estimated 250-400’.\textsuperscript{1537}

According to news magazine, the Diplomat reporting in 2017, a group of Hezb-e Islami militants have been based in Shigal district.\textsuperscript{1538} Although as of 2017 they were communicating with other insurgent groups, they have neither joined the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, nor ISKP.\textsuperscript{1539}

According to local sources quoted by the IWPR, insurgents operating in areas not controlled by the government, like Chapadara and Dara-e-Pech, funded themselves through profits from deforestation and mining.\textsuperscript{1540}

In terms of presence of government security forces, Kunar province is under the responsibility of the 201\textsuperscript{st} ANA Corps, which falls under the Train, Advise, and Assist Command – East (TAAC-E), led by US and Polish forces.\textsuperscript{1541}

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Kunar province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal (LWJ) and the Taliban.\textsuperscript{1542} When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

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<thead>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asadabad (capital)</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
<td>GIRoA Control</td>
<td>GIRoA Control</td>
<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
<td>TB control: 60%; Gov control: 40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barkunar</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - Medium</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapadara</td>
<td>Open Taliban Presetence - high</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Taliban control</td>
<td>TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chawkay</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{1536} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 60
\textsuperscript{1537} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of civilians in armed conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 61
\textsuperscript{1538} Diplomat (The), Afghan Jihad Frozen in Time?, 25 April 2017, url
\textsuperscript{1539} USIP, The Political Deal with Hezb-e Islami, 6 July 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1540} IWPR, Illegal Logging Destroying Afghan Forests, 23 January 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1541} USDoD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, url, p. 15
\textsuperscript{1543} LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Taliban Presence</th>
<th>GIRoA Influence</th>
<th>GIRoA Influence</th>
<th>Gov Control</th>
<th>TB Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dangam</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dara-e-Pech</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td></td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghaziabad</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td></td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khaskunar</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td></td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marawara</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narang</td>
<td>Gov</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nari</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurgal</td>
<td>Gov</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td></td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarkani</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shigal Wa Sheltan</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watapur</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asmar</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manogi</td>
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2.19.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.19.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 397 civilian casualties (128 deaths and 269 injured) in Kunar province. This represents an increase of 77% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by aerial attacks and (non-suicide) IEDs.¹⁵⁴⁴

In a map depicting ‘conflict severity’ in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Ghaziabad,

¹⁵⁴⁴ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 68
Watapur, and Sarkani in the highest category and Chapadara, Dara-e-Pech, Marawara, Nari, Dangam, Shigal and Chawkay in the second highest category. Bar Kunar is placed in the third highest category and Nurgal, Asad Abad and Khas Kunar are in the fourth highest category. The remaining district falls in the lower category.1545

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 174 incidents related to insurgents in Kunar province.1546

With regards to targeted killings, in 2018 UNAMA documented ‘nine incidents [...] in which Anti-Government Elements threatened health care personnel to stop vaccination campaigns, including for polio. Six of these incidents took place in the eastern region (Kunar and Nangarhar provinces)’1547 and ‘on 28 July [2018], in Dara-i-Pech district, Kunar province, Daesh/ISKP killed four men for allegedly spying for pro-Government forces. The victims had been abducted and held in captivity for two months. Daesh/ISKP claimed responsibility for the execution of the men and published photos on the Amaq [IS-run] news website’.1548

Airstrikes were carried out by Afghan and US security forces in Shigal District in December 2018 wounding Taliban fighters and causing ‘31 civilian casualties (13 deaths and 18 injured), including 28 women and children’,1549 in Narang in late October 2018, killing three children;1550 in Barkunar early October 2018, killing Taliban commanders;1551 in Marawara in June 2018, killing the chief of the Pakistani Taliban, Mullah Fazlullah;1552 and in March 2018, targeting Ghazi Camp, killing Fazlullah’s son and other members of TTP.1553 Moreover, military ground operations by Afghan security forces were carried out in Dara-e-Pech in late January 2019,1554 in Shigal District in December 2018,1555 and in Watapur in September 2018, killing IS militants.1556

Clashes between ISKP militants and Afghan security forces took place in Marawara and Watapur districts in December 2018, resulting in casualties among ISKP fighters.1557 Suicide attacks took place in Sawkay district in late June 2018, killing and injuring policemen and civilians at a police checkpoint1558 and in Watapur in March 2018, killing a Kunar provincial council member and a religious scholar.1559

Clashes between the Taliban and ISKP militants took place in October 2018, killing and wounding fighters of both sides and also children.1560

1545 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 2
1548 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 31
1551 Khaama Press, Drone strike target Taliban’s Red Unit commanders in Kunar province, 2 October 2018, url
1552 Al Jazeera, Pakistan Taliban chief Mullah Fazlullah ‘killed in drone attack’, 15 June 2018, url; RFE/RL, Suicide Bomber Kills Eight Policemen In Afghanistan’s Kunar Province, 26 June 2018, url
1553 Dawn, Son of TTP chief killed in drone attack in Afghanistan, 8 March 2018, url
1554 Tolonews, Daesh Commander Killed In Kunar, 30 January 2019, url; Khaama Press, Nearly 20 Taliban, ISIS-K militants killed during the operations of Afghan, Coalition Forces, 30 January 2019, url
1555 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 43
1556 Xinhua News Agency, Afghan forces launches operations against IS outfit, 24 September 2018, url
1557 Khaama Press, Afghan forces repulse ISIS attacks in two districts of Kunar province, 11 December 2018, url
1558 RFE/RL, Suicide Bomber Kills Eight Policemen In Afghanistan’s Kunar Province, 26 June 2018, url; Tolonews, Suicide Bombing Claims Eight Lives In Kunar, 25 June 2018, url
1559 Tolonews, Kunar Provincial Council Member Killed In Suicide Attack, 30 March 2018, url
1560 Tribune Express (The), Several dead after Afghan Taliban, IS clash in Kunar, 6 October 2018, url; UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, url, p. 7
In late January 2019 IS fighters were killed after the detonation of their own improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Dara-e-Pech district.\textsuperscript{1561} In late January 2019 Taliban were killed in the detonation of an IED allegedly installed by ISKP militants.\textsuperscript{1562}

Three civilians were killed and another 16 wounded in Shigal district in August 2018 when their vehicle struck a roadside bomb.\textsuperscript{1563}

2.19.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 15 207 persons displaced from Kunar, most of them (14 022) being displaced within the province.\textsuperscript{1564}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 104 persons displaced from Kunar province with all of them displaced within the province.\textsuperscript{1565}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 14 047 persons displaced to Kunar province.\textsuperscript{1566}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 104 persons displaced to Kunar province coming from Ghaziabad, Barkunar, Narang, Dara-e-Pech, Barkunar and Chapadara districts within the province.\textsuperscript{1567}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{District} & \textbf{Displaced from (2018)} & \textbf{Displaced to (2018)} & \textbf{Displaced from (2019)} & \textbf{Displaced to (2019)} \\
\hline
Asadabad & / & 1 962 & / & / \\
Barkunar & 842 & 1 129 & 47 & 34 \\
Chapadara & 759 & 531 & 11 & / \\
Chawkay & 3 758 & 3 507 & / & / \\
Dangam & 5 268 & 4 564 & / & / \\
Dara-e-Pech & 187 & 151 & 8 & / \\
Ghaziabad & 180 & / & 19 & / \\
Khaskunar & / & 234 & / & 11 \\
Marawara & 70 & 52 & / & / \\
Narang & / & 46 & 19 & 27 \\
Nari & 63 & / & / & / \\
Nurgal & 873 & 491 & / & 32 \\
Sarkani & 192 & 243 & / & / \\
Shigal Wa Sheltan & 511 & 292 & / & / \\
Watapur & 2 504 & 845 & / & / \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{1561} Khaama Press, ISIS-K militants blown up by IED in Kunar province, 28 January 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1562} Khaama Press, ISIS-K bomb kill Taliban local commander in Kunar province, 19 January 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1563} Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 civilians dead, 16 wounded in Kunar roadside blast, 28 August 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1564} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1565} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1566} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, url
\textsuperscript{1567} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, url
During the first four months of 2018, and in July and December 2018, UNOCHA reported that people have been displaced because 'threats and intimidation by Non State Armed Groups (NSAG)'\(^{1568}\) and also due to clashes between these groups and ANSF, especially in Chawkay and Khaskunar districts in January 2018.\(^{1569}\)

Moreover, clashes between armed groups have resulted in the following displacements mainly within the province:

- 600 persons displaced within Nurgal district in May 2018,\(^{1570}\)
- in July 2018, 3 500 people were displaced in Chapadara district,\(^{1571}\)
- 1 000 persons have been displaced within Watapur district in October 2018,\(^{1572}\)
- in August 2018, an armed group was targeted by ANSF operations in Asmar district causing the displacement of 2 700 people within the district and to other districts of Kunar.\(^{1573}\)

Cross-border shelling, especially in Dangam district, is another cause of displacements.\(^{1574}\) For example in March 2018, 3 000 people went to Dangam district center as a result of these cross-border shelling.\(^{1575}\)


\(^{1569}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 8 – 14 January 2018, 16 January 2018, [url](http://unocha.org)

\(^{1570}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 7 – 13 May 2018, 14 May 2018, [url](http://unocha.org)

\(^{1571}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 2 – 8 July 2018, 9 July 2018, [url](http://unocha.org)

\(^{1572}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 1-7 October 2018, 8 October 2018, [url](http://unocha.org)

\(^{1573}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 July – 5 August 2018, 6 August 2018, [url](http://unocha.org)


2.20 Kunduz

2.20.1 General description of the province

Kunduz is located in northern Afghanistan; it borders Tajikistan to the north, Takhar province to the east, Baghlan province to the south, and Balkh province to the west. The provincial capital is Kunduz city and the province is divided into the following districts: Aliabad, Chardarah, Dasht-e-Archi, Emamsaheb, Khanabad, Kunduz and Qala-e-Zal. The districts of Gulbad, Gultepa and Aqtash are newly established districts. According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Kunduz is estimated at 1,091,116 for 2018/19 and is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmen, Hazara, Aymaq and Pashai.

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). In the past, the Taliban have set up check-points on the highway section connecting Kunduz to Baghlan. Moreover, the Kunduz-Takhar highway runs east from

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1576 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunduz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url]
1577 Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunduz, 1 February 2017, [url]
1580 Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, [url], p. 3
1581 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Kunduz Provincial Overview, n.d., [url]; Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Kunduz, 1 February 2017, [url]
1582 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]
Kunduz city, passing through the district of Khanabad and connecting the province with Takhar and Badakhshan.\footnote{Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, \url{url}, p.5; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Kunduz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, \url{url}; Ali, O., The Taleban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 12 October 2016, \url{url}}

In August 2018, Taliban militants kidnapped 170 passengers who were travelling to Kabul through Takhar, near Khanabad district, with the aim to identify members of the Afghan security forces.\footnote{CBS News, Taliban kidnaps more than 100 bus passengers in northern Afghanistan, 20 August 2018, \url{url}; Khaama Press, Taliban militants kidnap 170 passengers from Kunduz-Takhar highway, 20 August 2018, \url{url}; Bakhtar News, Taliban Abduct Commuters of Three Buses in Kunduz-Takhar Highway, 20 August 2018, \url{url}} Moreover, the highway has occasionally been closed in the past because of fights between the Taliban and Afghan security forces,\footnote{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}} limiting mobility between Kunduz, Takhar, and Badakhshan and affecting the whole north-eastern region.\footnote{MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, \url{url}, p.6} Furthermore, Taliban mined the road during parliamentary elections in October 2018, ruining parts of it, and destroying police check-points, as well as military vehicles.\footnote{DW, Kunduz violence could destabilize neighbors, 30 September 2015, \url{url}} Another national highway connects Kunduz city with Balkh province to the west.\footnote{UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, \url{url}, p. 21} 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.\footnote{Ali, O., The Taleban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 12 October 2016, \url{url}}

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Kunduz maintained its poppy-free status, which it has held since 2007. Even though the cultivation rate has risen ‘in recent years’, it still remained under 100 hectares in 2018, which is the UNODC threshold for obtaining ‘poppy-free status’.\footnote{Al Jazeera, Taliban launch deadly attacks as they attend Afghan peace talks, 5 February 2019, \url{url}}

\subsection*{2.20.2 Conflict background and actors in Kunduz}

The security situation of the province has purportedly been deteriorating over recent years.\footnote{Ali, O., The Taleban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 12 October 2016, \url{url}} The security situation in and around Kunduz city has also been reported to be getting worse, with ‘fears the city could again fall into the hands of the Taliban as it did briefly on two occasions in recent years - in September 2015 and in October 2016’.\footnote{Ali, O., The Taleban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 12 October 2016, \url{url}}

Kunduz was the last Taliban stronghold before the Taliban’s fall in 2001, when it was freed by U.S. led security forces.\footnote{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}} Kunduz city temporary fell to the Taliban in September 2015,\footnote{RFE/RL, Afghanistan’s New Northern Flash Points, n.d., \url{url}} and they almost recaptured it in October 2016 by encircling the city and cutting off the main supply and reinforcement routes. After these attempts by Taliban to capture Kunduz city, the Afghan security forces tried to regain control over the districts of Dasht-e-Archi, Qala-e-Zal, Emamshaeb 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.\footnote{Ali, O., The Taleban Assault on Kunduz city: Déjà vu, but why?, AAN, 12 October 2016, \url{url}}

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.\footnote{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}} According to a
report by AAN in 2017, insurgents had been weakened by night-raids and airstrikes 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. According to AAN, in 2018, the Taliban were active in Dasht-e-Archi and Chardarah districts, where government control was limited to small parts of the district centres and some neighbouring villages. Moreover, according to sources quoted by AAN, as of February 2019, the Taliban had established a parallel shadow government in Dasht-e-Archi which 'includes “a district governor, head of education, judicial, health, public outreach, military and the finance committees”'. These posts are held by 'young Pashtuns and Uzbeks from the district'. In Aliabad, Emamsaheb and Khanabad the government’s presence reached almost half of the districts, whilst the remaining parts were contested. Aqtash, Gulbad and Gultepa were largely or entirely under Taliban control.

According to an April 2018 report by the Jamestown Foundation, a US-based institute for research and analysis, the Islamic State (IS) set up bases in the northern provinces of Afghanistan, including in Kunduz. In the past, the province had 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. Besides Uzbek and Tajik militants, fighters coming from 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. Still, the two insurgent groups have different beliefs: Jundullah follows a radical ideology and almost completely ignores local culture, whereas the Taliban, who are mainly locals, respect and rely on elders and their system of traditional mediation.

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Kunduz province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Corps, which falls under the Train, Advise, and Assist Command – North (TAAC-N), led by German forces.

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Kunduz province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban. When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

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1598 Ali, O., New Taleban Attacks in Kunduz: Less coordination, still well placed to threaten the city, AAN, 9 July 2017, url
1600 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
1601 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
1603 Jamestown Foundation (The), Islamic State a Deadly Force in Kabul, 6 April 2018, url
1604 DW, Kunduz violence could destabilize neighbors, 30 September 2015, url
1605 RFE/RL, Afghanistan’s New Northern Flash Points, n.d., url
1606 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
1607 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, p. 16
2.2.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.2.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 337 civilian casualties (105 deaths and 232 injured) in Kunduz province. This represents a decrease of 11% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground...
engagements, followed by aerial attacks and (non-suicide) IEDs.\textsuperscript{1613} The same source ‘also documented continued reductions in civilian casualties from ground engagements in Kunduz province and Laghman province, which joined the top five provinces that had a reduction of civilian casualties from such operations in 2018’.\textsuperscript{1614} For Kunduz province, it recorded 109 civilian casualties caused by ground engagements, which is a 31 % decrease compared to 2017.\textsuperscript{1615}

In a map depicting ‘conflict severity’ in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Emamzahab, Dasht-e-Archi, Chardarah, and Kunduz in the highest category and Qala-e-Zal and Kahanabad districts in the second highest category while Aliabad district falls into the category below.\textsuperscript{1616}

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 167 incidents related to insurgents in Kunduz province.\textsuperscript{1617}

An aerial operation carried out by international military forces in March 2019 in Telawka neighbourhood near Kunduz city ‘killed 13 civilians and injured three more’; 10 of the recorded fatalities were children. The attack was intended to support pro-Government forces on the ground.\textsuperscript{1618}

Military operations by Afghan security forces took place in Khanabad district in late January 2019, killing insurgents.\textsuperscript{1619} Airstrikes were carried out by Afghan security forces in Chardarah in July 2018, killing civilians,\textsuperscript{1620} and in April 2018, in Dasht-e-Archi, killing civilians, most of them being children.\textsuperscript{1621} The latter airstrike targeted a religious ceremony next to a madrassa, where ‘senior Taliban leaders present in the area, including members of the Quetta Shura, as well as members of a Taliban “Red Unit”’ had allegedly gathered ‘to launch an operation against Kunduz city’, according to the government. The Afghan Air Force released ‘multiple rockets’ and fired ‘heavy machineguns’, which caused 107 casualties (36 killed and 71 injured), of which 81 were children (30 killed and 51 injured).\textsuperscript{1622}

In September 2018, Taliban militants tried to storm the district centre of Dasht-e-Archi again and engaged in battles with Afghan security forces leading to casualties reported on both sides; reportedly more than 30 security forces members and nearly 30 Taliban fighters were killed and wounded.\textsuperscript{1623} In October 2018 and in February 2019, sources reported fears that Taliban could overrun Kunduz city again.\textsuperscript{1624}

Kunduz was among the provinces with the highest level of Taliban violence during 2018 parliamentary elections: in Dasht-e-Archi and Qala-e-Zal districts ‘Taliban’s shadow district governors appeared in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item 1613 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, \url{[url]}, p. 68
\item 1614 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, \url{[url]}, p. 47
\item 1615 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, \url{[url]}, p. 47
\item 1616 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, \url{[url]}, p.2
\item 1617 Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, \url{[url]}, accessed 1 March 2019
\item 1618 UNAMA, Kunduz airstrike kills 13 civilians, mostly children – UN initial findings, 25 March 2019, \url{[url]}
\item 1619 Tolonews, Taliban Commanders Killed In NDS Operation in Kunduz, 31 January 2019, \url{[url]}; Xinhua News Agency, Afghan forces storm Taliban bastion in northern Kunduz province, killing 4 militants, 27 January 2019, \url{[url]}; Fars News, 21 Afghan Security Forces Killed in Taliban Attack, 10 September 2018, \url{[url]}
\item 1620 Indian Express (The), Afghanistan: Air strike near Kunduz kills 14 civilians, 20 July 2018, \url{[url]}; Stars and Stripes, US says Kunduz airstrike did not kill civilians, 10 August 2018, \url{[url]}; Tolonews, MoD Confirms Civilian Deaths in Kunduz Operation, 19 July 2018, \url{[url]}
\item 1621 Tolonews, Ghani Visits Dasht-e-Archi Victims in Kabul Hospital, 7 April 2018, \url{[url]}; UNAMA, Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report Airstrikes in Dasht-e-Archi district, Kunduz Province, 2 April 2018, May 2018, \url{[url]}, p. 2
\item 1622 UNAMA, Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Special Report Airstrikes in Dasht-e-Archi district, Kunduz Province, 2 April 2018, \url{[url]}, p. 2
\item 1623 Tolonews, Dozens of Afghan Forces Killed In North, 10 September 2018, \url{[url]}
\item 1624 Al Jazeera, Taliban launch deadly attacks as they attend Afghan peace talks, 5 February 2019, \url{[url]}; Ali, O., The 2018 Election Observed (3) in Kunduz: A Very Violent E-Day, AAN 7 November 2018, \url{[url]}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
mosques during Friday prayers and announced the Taleban leadership’s position on the elections’. 1625 In other Taliban-controlled areas of the province ‘their fighters individually talked with local elders and mosque preachers, asking them to prevent people from taking part in the elections’.1626 Shelling at polling centres was reported in most parts of the province, even inside the city, killing and injuring Independent Election Commission volunteers and voters.1627 Voting did not take place in Qala-e-Zal, Gultepa and Gulbad, due to high security risks.1628 Intense Taliban attacks were registered also in Khanabad and Emamsaheb districts, limiting voting.1629 In April 2018, 400 schools that had been closed by the Taliban for one month in some areas of Kunduz province reopened thanks to tribal elders’ mediation.1630

2.20.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 46 312 persons displaced from Kunduz province, mainly within the province itself, and to neighbouring provinces Balkh and Takhar, in Kabul province and in other provinces like Kunar and Kandahar. 1631

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 2 429 persons displaced from Khanabad district in Kunduz province, all within the province itself in Kunduz district.1632

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 43 638 persons displaced to Kunduz province (mainly to Kunduz district), all coming from within the province itself.1633

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 2 429 persons displaced to Kunduz district in Kunduz province, all coming from Khanabad district within the province itself.1634

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<td>Kunduz</td>
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<td>Aliabad</td>
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Ongoing military operations led by the International Military Forces and ANSF in Kunduz province have displaced thousands of people throughout 2018. 1635 According to humanitarian actors in Afghan civil

1630 Asia Plus, After a month closure, elders help reopen 400 schools in Kunduz, 24 April 2018, url
1631 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, url
1632 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 24 March 2019, url
1633 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, url
1634 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, url
1635 ACBAR, Putting Protection at the Heart of the Peace Process, 29 October 2018, url
society, the scale of damage to civilian infrastructure and homes caused by airstrikes and the subsequent land mining of these areas by non-state armed groups prevents the possible return of displaced families, even after the airstrikes have ended.\textsuperscript{1636}

UNOCHA continuously reported conflict-induced displacement in and from Chardarah district, due to military clearing/search operations and airstrikes.\textsuperscript{1637} A displacement peak was registered in mid-January 2018 when almost 7,000 people were displaced due to an operation codenamed ‘Pamir 17’ in 10 villages of the district.\textsuperscript{1638} The IDPs mainly went to the provincial capital Kunduz city, others stayed within the district itself.\textsuperscript{1639} According to UNOCHA, the majority of these displaced families returned back to their places of origin or neighbouring villages inside Chardarah district in February 2018, however a large number of them stayed in Kunduz city.\textsuperscript{1640} Another peak was registered by UNOCHA in the summer of 2018, with more than 7,000 people from Chardarah district being displaced to Kunduz city in July.\textsuperscript{1641} more than 2,400 IDPs arriving in Kunduz city in August due to four concurrent military operations in Chardarah\textsuperscript{1642} and almost 5,000 people displaced to Kunduz city in September due to a military operation in Nahri Sofi and Dobandi villages of Chardarah.\textsuperscript{1643}

A military operation in Emamsaheb district in January 2018 reportedly displaced some 2,000 families to other areas, including the provincial capital Kunduz City.\textsuperscript{1644} In the summer of 2018 UNOCHA registered thousands of IDPs from Emamsaheb reaching the district centre.\textsuperscript{1645}

In January 2018 UNOCHA registered more than 2,600 IDPs within Qala-e-Zal district.\textsuperscript{1646} Fighting at the military frontline between ANSF and AGEs in Bazar Aqtepa of Qala-e-Zal district at the end of April - beginning of May 2018 caused thousands of people to be displaced to Kunduz city and a desert area close to the district center of Qala-e-Zal.\textsuperscript{1647}

Military operations (in Ehsan Toop village) and drought led to the displacement of more than 1,400 people from Khanabad district to Kunduz city in April 2018.\textsuperscript{1648} In May 2018, UNOCHA registered more than 2,300 conflict-induced IDPs within the district of Khanabad itself.\textsuperscript{1649} In January 2019, UNOCHA

\textsuperscript{1636} ACBAR, Putting Protection at the Heart of the Peace Process, 29 October 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1637} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1640} UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kunduz Province - Meeting Summary, 6 February 2018, \url{url}, p. 1
\textsuperscript{1641} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 2 - 8 July, 9 July 2018, \url{url}, p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kunduz Province - Meeting Summary, 25 July 2018, \url{url}, pp. 1-2
\textsuperscript{1642} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 July - 5 August 2018, 6 August 2018, \url{url}, p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kunduz Province - Meeting Summary, 12 August 2018, \url{url}, p. 1
\textsuperscript{1643} UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kunduz Province - Meeting Summary, 25 September 2018, \url{url}, pp. 1-2; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 24 - 30 September, 30 September 2018, \url{url}, p. 1
\textsuperscript{1644} Pajhwok Afghan News, 12 Villages Cut Off as Taliban Dynamite Kunduz Bridge, 23 January 2018, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1645} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1646} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1647} Pajhwok Afghan News, Kunduz Clashes Displace Hundreds of Families, 2 May 2018, \url{url}; Tolonews, Conflicts Displace Almost 1,000 Kunduz Families, 5 May 2018, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 April - 6 May 2018, 7 May 2018, \url{url}, p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kunduz Province - Meeting Summary, 7 May 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{1648} UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kunduz Province - Meeting Summary, 8 April 2018, \url{url}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 23 - 29 April 2018, 30 April 2018, \url{url}, p. 1
\textsuperscript{1649} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, \url{url}
reported more than 2,400 people displaced from remote villages in Khanabad district to the district centre and Kunduz city.\textsuperscript{1550}

In November 2018, AGEs coordinated attacks on ANSF bases in Qarluq, Tepa Haji Mohibullah and Hazarbagh areas of Dasht-e-Archi district which led to the displacement of 400 families to Khwajaghar district of neighbouring Takhar province in November 2018.\textsuperscript{1551}

According to a research study from the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) on the challenges of IDP protection in Afghanistan, Kunduz province has become increasingly significant as both a point of departure and destination.\textsuperscript{1552} The research data published in January 2018 reported 63\% of IDP movements are within the province itself, 18\% are to Kabul province and 15\% are to Nangarhar province.\textsuperscript{1553} Furthermore, 97\% of NRC’s IDP respondents from Kunduz reported fleeing areas under Taliban control.\textsuperscript{1554} UNOCHA noted in November 2018 that Kunduz was one of the three provinces that experienced the highest numbers of conflict-related displacement.\textsuperscript{1555}

In June 2018, the UN Secretary-General reported particularly high levels of displacement in Kunduz province, with many displaced families having been moved multiple times and having no immediate prospect of returning to their areas of origin.\textsuperscript{1556} UNOCHA’s Humanitarian Response Plan of December 2018 classified Kunduz as one of the 12 provinces with large concentrations of IDPs and returnees who are most affected by the ongoing conflict and drought.\textsuperscript{1557} Furthermore, the Afghanistan Protection Cluster mentioned Kunduz as one of the six top hosting provinces for IDPs in May, June and August 2018.\textsuperscript{1558}

IOM rated Chardarah district 20\textsuperscript{th} out of the top 20 districts hosting the most returnees and IDP’s in April - June 2018\textsuperscript{1559} and Kunduz district as 24\textsuperscript{th} out of the top 25 districts hosting most returnees and IDPs from October to December 2018.\textsuperscript{1560} Several sources described Kunduz as one of the main areas for returning registered refugees in 2018.\textsuperscript{1561} A January 2018 study by Oxfam stated that the fear that the arrival of large groups of returnees in Kunduz will increase competition and upset the ethnic and power configurations in the province.\textsuperscript{1562}

\textsuperscript{1550} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 8 - 14 January 2019, 15 January 2019, \url{url}, pp. 1-2
\textsuperscript{1551} UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Kunduz Province - Meeting Summary, 13 November 2018, \url{url}, pp. 1-2; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Takhar Province - Meeting Summary, 19 November 2018, \url{url}, pp. 1-2
\textsuperscript{1552} NRC et al., Escaping War: Where to Next? A Research Study on the Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan, January 2018, \url{url}, p. 19
\textsuperscript{1553} NRC et al., Escaping War: Where to Next? A Research Study on the Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan, January 2018, \url{url}, p. 19
\textsuperscript{1554} NRC et al., Escaping War: Where to Next? A Research Study on the Challenges of IDP Protection in Afghanistan, January 2018, \url{url}, p. 10
\textsuperscript{1555} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, \url{url}, p. 9
\textsuperscript{1556} UN Secretary-General, The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security, 6 June 2018, \url{url}, p. 11
\textsuperscript{1557} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: 2019 Update to the 2018-2010 Humanitarian Response Plan, 21 December 2018, \url{url}, p. 33
\textsuperscript{1558} Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Fact Sheet Afghanistan May 2018, 14 June 2018, \url{url}, p. 1; Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Fact Sheet Afghanistan June 2018, 23 July 2018, \url{url}, p. 1; Afghanistan Protection Cluster, Fact Sheet Afghanistan, August 2018, \url{url}, p. 1
\textsuperscript{1559} IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results January - March 2018, 31 March 2018, \url{url}, p. 5; IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results April - June 2018, 25 September 2018, \url{url}, p. 5
\textsuperscript{1560} UNHCR, Fact Sheet Afghanistan, 30 June 2018, \url{url}, p. 2; UNHCR, Fact Sheet Afghanistan, 30 September 2018, \url{url}, p. 2; Ahmad A., Refugees Return to Poverty, Unemployment and Despair: Afghanistan’s Labor Market and the Status of Women, VDIC, November 2018, \url{url}, p. 19
\textsuperscript{1561} Oxfam, Returning to Fragility: Exploring the Link Between Conflict and Returnees in Afghanistan, January 2018, \url{url}, p. 25
2.21 Laghman

2.21.1 General description of the province
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.\textsuperscript{1663} The provincial capital of Laghman is Mehtarlam.\textsuperscript{1664} The province is divided into the following districts: Ailingar, Alishang, Dawlatshah, Mehtarlam, Qarghayi,\textsuperscript{1665} and Bad Pash (also Bad Pakh); the latter became a district of its own in 2011.\textsuperscript{1666} According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Laghman is estimated at 476,537 for 2018/19\textsuperscript{1667} and is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Tajik and Pashai tribes.\textsuperscript{1668} 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.\textsuperscript{1669}

The Kabul-Jalalabad section of Asian Highway AH-1 passes through Qarghayi district,\textsuperscript{1670} where a secondary road branches off to connect to Nurgeram in Nuristan via the provincial capital Mehtarlam.\textsuperscript{1671} Bad Pash district has been a strategic crossing-point for Afghan and foreign insurgents coming from the border area and moving deeper into Afghanistan, especially to Kabul and Kapisa.\textsuperscript{1672}

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.\textsuperscript{1673}

\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.\textsuperscript{1674}

Purportedly, Ailingar 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.\textsuperscript{1675} As of February 2019, the UN Secretary-General described Laghman as one of the IS ‘strongholds’ in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{1676}

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Laghman province is under the responsibility of the 201\textsuperscript{th} ANA Corps, which falls under Train, Advise, and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), led by US and Polish forces.\textsuperscript{1677}

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Laghman province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.\textsuperscript{1678} When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
District & Taliban & ISKP & Government Security Forces \\
\hline
Alingar & Yes & No & Present \\
\hline
Alishang & Yes & No & Present \\
\hline
Dawlatshah & Yes & No & Present \\
\hline
Mehtarlam & Yes & No & Present \\
\hline
Qarghayi & Yes & No & Present \\
\hline
Bad Pash & Yes & No & Present \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{1663} US, Naval Postgraduate School, Laghman Provincial Overview, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{1664} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Laghman Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
\textsuperscript{1665} US, Naval Postgraduate School, Laghman Provincial Overview, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{1666} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Laghman Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
\textsuperscript{1667} Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Laghman, 1 February 2017, url
\textsuperscript{1668} Foschini, F., The Enteqal Seven (2): Around Mehtarlam, an ‘insurgency corridor’ in the making, AAN, 10 May 2011, url
\textsuperscript{1669} Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 2
\textsuperscript{1670} pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Laghman province, n.d., url
\textsuperscript{1671} Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, url
\textsuperscript{1672} Khaama Press, Four key Taliban group leaders ambushed in Laghman, 1 October 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1673} Salaam Times, Security forces launch operation in Laghman amid Taliban-ISIS clashes, 27 February 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1674} 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
\textsuperscript{1675} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, url, p. 15
\textsuperscript{1676} BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1677} SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, url
a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alingar</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - Medium</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 88%; Gov control: 12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alishang</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - Medium</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 85%; Gov control: 15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dawlatshah</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mehtarlam (Bad Pash) (capital)</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>GIRoA control</td>
<td>Mehtarlam: GIRoA control and Bad Pash: Contested</td>
<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
<td>Mehtarlam: Gov control: 75%; TB control: 25% and Bad Pash: TB control: 98%; Gov control: 2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qarghayi</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
<td>TB control: 98%; Gov control: 2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.21.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.21.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 271 civilian casualties (93 deaths and 178 injured) in Laghman province. This represents a decrease of 23% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by targeted killings and UXO/landmines. The same source ‘also documented continued reductions in civilian casualties from ground engagements in Kunduz province and Laghman province, which joined the top five provinces that had a reduction of civilian casualties from such operations in 2018’. For Laghman province, it recorded 123 civilian casualties caused by ground engagements, which is a 53% decrease compared to 2017.

In a map depicting ‘conflict severity’ in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Alishang, Mehtarlam, and Alingar in the highest category and Dawlatshah in the second highest category. Qarghayi falls in the fourth category.


1680 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 68


1683 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 2
In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 144 incidents related to insurgents in Laghman province.\textsuperscript{1684} A Taliban attack on an army outpost in Qarghayi was foiled by Afghan security forces in January 2019.\textsuperscript{1685} Also in Qarghayi district, IEDs, purportedly installed by anti-government militants, were defused by Afghan security forces in late December 2018.\textsuperscript{1686} Airstrikes were carried out by foreign security forces in Alishtang in November 2018, killing insurgents.\textsuperscript{1687} Military operations against insurgents, Taliban and ISKP fighters, were carried out by Afghan security forces in Dawlatshah in October and in Alingar in September and February 2018, killing militants.\textsuperscript{1688} Clashes between Taliban insurgents and ISKP fighters were reported in Alingar district throughout 2018.\textsuperscript{1689} Battles between the two militant groups in Alingar district in February 2018 reportedly went on for more than a month killing as many as 40 militants and injuring dozens, according to local officials; Afghan special forces also conducted ground and air operations in the area. A local resident interviewed by the Salaam Times said that the fighting had reportedly caused the closure of schools, stoppages of vaccinations and the groups had been ‘committing atrocities’.\textsuperscript{1690} In August 2018 six girls were killed after the detonation of an unexploded ordnance in Alishang district.\textsuperscript{1691} Pajhwok Afghan News reported at least six civilians killed in a roadside bombing in Qarghayi district in February 2019.\textsuperscript{1692} Election related violence was recorded in Laghman province by UNAMA, as the detonation of IEDs placed near a school serving as a polling centre in Mehtarlam injured civilians (12 men and two children).\textsuperscript{1693} According to local sources quoted by IWPR, the Taliban have been threatening musicians and people listening to music for not conforming to their interpretation of Islam in some areas of Laghman province, including in Alishang and Mehterlam districts.\textsuperscript{1694}

2.21.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 9 738 persons displaced from Laghman province almost all of whom (9 265) were displaced within the province.\textsuperscript{1695}

\textsuperscript{1684} Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, \textit{url}, accessed 1 March 2019
\textsuperscript{1685} Khaama Press, Afghan forces foil Taliban attack on an army outpost in Laghman province, 22 January 2019, \textit{url}
\textsuperscript{1686} Khaama Press, Afghan forces defuse Taliban IEDs in Laghman, 23 December 2018, \textit{url}
\textsuperscript{1687} Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 Taliban, 2 children killed in Laghman, Kapisa airstrikes, 26 November 2018, \textit{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Taliban killed, 3 Daesh financiers held in Laghman, Nangarhar, 3 November 2018, \textit{url}
\textsuperscript{1690} Salaam Times, Security forces launch operation in Laghman amid Taliban-ISIS clashes, 27 February 2018, \textit{url}
\textsuperscript{1692} Pajhwok Afghan News, Landmine kills 6 civilians in Laghman, 19 February 2019, \textit{url}
\textsuperscript{1694} IWPR, Taleban Try to Silence Afghan Music Again, 20 February 2018, \textit{url}
\textsuperscript{1695} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, \textit{url}
UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 14 persons displaced from Laghman province.\textsuperscript{1696}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 9,325 persons displaced to Laghman province.\textsuperscript{1697}

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Laghman province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.\textsuperscript{1698}

<table>
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<tbody>
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<td>2,527</td>
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<td>Alishang</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>3,500</td>
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<td>/</td>
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<td>Dawlatshah</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mehtarlam/Bad Pash</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>3,228</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qarghayi</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2018, Laghman was considered as one of “the main provinces of both origin and displacement of conflict-affected communities”.\textsuperscript{1699} Insecurity is a factor in displacements in Laghman province.\textsuperscript{1700} In at least seven Afghanistan Weekly Field Reports published between January 2018 and January 2019, UNOCHA stated that people have been displaced because of threats and intimidation by Non State Armed Groups (NSAG).\textsuperscript{1701} Laghman districts affected by these causes of displacements are Alingar,\textsuperscript{1702} Alishang\textsuperscript{1703} and Mehtarlam\textsuperscript{1704} districts.

Clashes between non-state armed groups and sporadic conflicts were also a cause mentioned more than one time in UNOCHA weekly reports on displacements from Alingar district to Mehtarlam city\textsuperscript{1705} and from Alishang district.\textsuperscript{1706}

In February 2018, an ANSF operation against non-state armed groups forced 4,200 people to find a shelter within Alingar district or in Mehtarlam City.\textsuperscript{1707}

\textsuperscript{1696} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, \url{[url]}
\textsuperscript{1697} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, \url{[url]}
\textsuperscript{1698} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, \url{[url]}
\textsuperscript{1699} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, \url{[url]} p. 42
\textsuperscript{1700} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 July – 5 August 2018, 6 August 2018, \url{[url]}
\textsuperscript{1704} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 April–6 May 2018, 7 May 2018, \url{[url]}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 01 January- 07 January 2019, 9 January 2019, \url{[url]}
\textsuperscript{1705} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 16 – 22 April 2018, 23 April 2018, \url{[url]}; UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 30 April–6 May 2018, 7 May 2018, \url{[url]}
\textsuperscript{1707} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 1 - 7 January 2019, 9 January 2019, \url{[url]}
\textsuperscript{1708} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 19 - 25 February, 26 February 2018, \url{[url]}
2.22 Logar

2.22.1 General description of the province

Logar is located in central Afghanistan, about 65 kilometres south of Kabul.\(^{1708}\) It borders on the provinces of Kabul to the north, Nangarhar to the north and east, Paktya to the south, and Ghazni and Maydan Wardak to the west.\(^{1709}\) The provincial capital of Logar is Pul-e-Alam.\(^{1710}\) The province is divided into the following districts: Azra, Barakibarak, Charkh, Kharwar, Khoshi, Mohammad Agha, and Pul-e-Alam.\(^{1711}\) According to the Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan, the population of Logar is estimated at 419,377 for 2018/19\(^{1712}\) and is composed mainly of Tajiks, Pashtuns, and Hazara.\(^{1713}\) The province is rich in chromite ore, with deposits extracted illegally and smuggled to Pakistan.\(^{1714}\) The presence of natural resources in the province has often caused local rivalries over revenues coming from mineral deposits.\(^{1715}\)

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1708 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Logar, n.d., url
1709 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Logar Provincial Overview, n.d., url
1710 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Logar Provincial Overview, n.d., url
1712 Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 2
1713 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Logar Provincial Overview, n.d., url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Logar, n.d., url
1714 Pajhwok Afghan News, Illegal extraction of Logar chromites goes on, 6 October 2015, url; VoA, Report; Militant Groups in Afghanistan Get Rich Off Mineral Smuggling, 1 February 2017, url
1715 Global Security Review, Are Afghanistan’s Mineral Deposits the Answer to the Country’s Economic Woes?, 31 December 2018, url
The Kabul-Gardez-Khost highway passes through the districts of Mohammad Agha and Pul-e-Alam. According to local sources quoted by the Afghanistan Times, Taliban militants stopped buses travelling on the highway section in Mohammad Agha and kidnapped government employees in November 2018. Security on the highway had purportedly been deteriorating and government officials could not travel on it. The province 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 insurgents’ fronts in nearby provinces of Nangarhar, Paktya, Paktika, Khost, Wardak, and Ghazni; as well as in Pakistan. 

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Logar has maintained poppy-free status since 2014.

2.22.2 Conflict background and actors in Logar

According to a 2014 report by AAN, the security situation in Logar province had been deteriorating since 2011. Taliban militants were seeking to control Azra, Khoshi, Barakibarak and Mohammadagha districts due to their strategic positions as bordering Nangarhar, Paktya, Maydan Wardak, and Kabul provinces. According to local sources quoted by AAN in December 2014, Taliban militants terrorised the population of Muhammad Agha by posting rules on mosque walls, sending death threats to people supposedly working for the government, extorting locals to spy for them and imposing curfews.

According to local sources quoted by Tolonews, in April 2018, Taliban fighters and members of other insurgent groups have been active in parts of all of Logar’s districts, including the provincial capital.

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Logar province is under the responsibility of the 203rd ANA Corps, which fall under Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces.

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Logar province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal (LWJ) and the Taliban. When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

|---------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|


1717 Afghanistan Times, Taliban drag government servants out of buses along Kabul-Logar road, 16 November 2018, url


1719 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 21

1720 Ali, O., The Empty Streets of Mohammad Agha: Logar’s struggle against the Taliban, AAN, 15 December 2014, url

1721 Tolonews, Logar Still Insecure After 72 Military Operations, 27 April 2018, url

1722 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, url, p. 16


1724 LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
Azra
Open Taliban presence – Medium
GIRoA influence
GIRoA influence
Taliban control
TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%

Barakibarak
Open Taliban Presence – high
Contested
Contested
Contested
TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%

Charkh
Open Taliban Presence – high
Contested
Contested
Taliban control
TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%

Kharwar
Open Taliban Presence – high
Contested
Contested
Taliban control
TB control: 98%; Gov control: 2%

Khoshi
Open Taliban presence – low
GIRoA influence
GIRoA influence
Gov control or undetermined
TB control: 65%; Gov control: 35%

Mohammadagha
Open Taliban Presence – high
Contested
Contested
Contested
TB control: 55%; Gov control: 45%

Pul-e-Alam (capital)
Open Taliban Presence – high
Contested
Contested
Contested
TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%

Tsarkh
/
/
/
/
TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%

2.22.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.22.3.1 General

In 2018 UNAMA documented 143 civilian victims (68 deaths and 75 injured) in Logar province. This represents a decrease of 3% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by targeted killings and complex attacks.\(^{1725}\)

In a map depicting ‘conflict severity’ in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Charkh, Barakibarak, Pul-e Alam, and Mohammad Agha in the second highest category and Kharwar in the fourth highest category. The remaining districts fall in the lower category.\(^{1726}\)

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 151 incidents related to insurgents in Logar province.\(^{1727}\)

Logar is described by Khaama Press as ‘among the relatively volatile provinces’ with militants ‘actively operating’; airstrikes carried out by coalition forces killed 8 Taliban militants in Mohammad Agha district in late December 2018.\(^{1728}\) In August 2018, Taliban militants tried to storm the district centre of Azra. According to local sources, Afghan policemen, who had asked for air backup, were accidentally killed in airstrikes carried out by US forces.\(^{1729}\) However, these claims were denied after an examination by pro-government security forces stating that the policemen were killed after a Taliban attack.\(^{1730}\) In July 2018, an airstrike by the Afghan Air Force killed four civilians while targeting militants in Babos and Alowzai areas of Pul-e-Alam.\(^{1731}\)

\(^{1725}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 68
\(^{1726}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 2
\(^{1727}\) Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, url, accessed 1 March 2019
\(^{1728}\) Khaama Press, Drone strikes leaves [sic] 8 militants dead in Logar province, 26 December 2018, url
\(^{1729}\) APA and DPA, Dutzende Tote bei Gefechten und Explosionen in Afghanistan, 8 August 2018, url
\(^{1730}\) Stars and Stripes, US says airstrike did not kill Afghan forces, 8 August 2018, url
\(^{1731}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Protest as airstrike kills 4 civilians in Logar, 9 July 2018, url
Further military operations against insurgents were carried out in the form of ground engagements: in November 2018, Taliban militants were killed and some more were detained in Padkhab Shana area of Pul-e-Alam city during a night raid by NDS.1732 Also in November, ‘eight civilians, including women and children’, were killed during a night raid in Mohammad Agha district.1733

In the first quarter of 2018, around 72 military operations against insurgents were purportedly carried out in the form of night raids and airstrikes, killing insurgents but also reportedly targeting civilian houses belonging to the civilian population in Barakibarak.1734

In January 2019, a Taliban car bomb targeting the convoy of the Logar provincial governor exploded along this highway in Mohammad Agha district.1735 In November 2018 a district chief and the NDS director for Barakibarak district were killed in a Taliban roadside bombing in Pul-e-Alam city.1736 In late April 2018, Logar deputy governor Qamaruddin Shakib was killed in a Taliban attack in the district of Mohammad Agha.1737

In August 2018, UNAMA verified threats by the Taliban against girls’ schools in Logar’s Barakibarak district that resulted in ‘the suspension of classes for girls above grade six in the district and the replacement of female teachers for younger girls with male teachers’.1738 In July 2018 schools were purportedly closed in Mohammad Agha and Pul-e Alam due to threats by Taliban insurgents.1739 A bomb explosion caused at least eight fatalities during a gathering of peace activists in late June 2018.1740

### 2.22.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 2,471 persons displaced from Logar province, displaced to neighbouring provinces Kabul and Khost or within the province itself.1741

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019, reporting 182 persons displaced from Barakibarak district in Logar province, to Kabul district in Kabul province.1742

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 217 persons displaced to Logar province, mainly coming from within the province itself (168 IDPs) or from neighbouring provinces of Kabul, Paktya and Khost.1743

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Logar province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.1744

|----------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|

1732 Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 Taliban killed, 9 suspected detained in Logar, 25 November 2018, [url](#)
1733 Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 civilians killed in Logar night raid, 21 November 2018, [url](#)
1734 Tolonews, Logar Still Insecure After 72 Military Operations, 27 April 2018, [url](#)
1735 Ariana News, Attack on Logar officials’ convoy leaves eight killed, 10 wounded, 20 January 2019, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Taliban attack in Afghanistan’s Logar province kills eight security forces, 20 January 2019, [url](#)
1736 Pajhwok Afghan News, District chief, intelligence director killed in Logar roadside bombing, 18 November 2018, [url](#)
1737 Tolonews, Logar Still Insecure After 72 Military Operations, 27 April 2018, [url](#)
1739 APA and DPA, Taliban bedrohen Lehrer in Afghanistan: Schulen geschlossen, 14 July 2018, [url](#)
1740 APA and DPA, Mindestens 29 Tote bei Kämpfen und Explosionen in Afghanistan, 28 Juni 2018, [url](#)
1741 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)
1742 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)
1743 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, [url](#)
1744 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, [url](#)
According to UNOCHA, the main reasons for IDPs leaving the insecure districts of Barakibarak and Charkh in Logar province are military operations, insecurity, intimidation and economic problems. In April and July 2018 UNOCHA reported respectively 1,000 and 900 IDPs arriving in Logar’s provincial capital, Pul-e-Alam, coming from Chaparhar district of Nangarhar province. According to the authorities in Logar another 500 displaced people arrived in Pul-e-Alam in July 2018 coming from different locations within the province itself and from neighbouring Paktya province.

After Kabul, Logar province is mentioned by UNHCR as one of the main areas of return in the central region in 2018. According to IOM’s Afghanistan’s Displacement Tracking Matrix Baseline Mobility Assessment in 2018, 1-in-6 people is a returnee and 1-in-4 people is an IDP in Logar province. IOM ranked provincial capital Pul-e-Alam as 9th out of the top 20 districts hosting the most returnees and IDPs from January to June 2018; and ranked 16th out of the top 25 districts hosting the most returnees and IDPs from October to December 2018.

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**Table: EASO COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION REPORT: AFGHANISTAN - SECURITY SITUATION**

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<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>IDPs 2018</th>
<th>IDPs 2017</th>
<th>Returnees 2018</th>
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<td>Azra</td>
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<td>Mohammadagha</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pul-e-Alam</td>
<td>/</td>
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1749 UNHCR, Fact Sheet Afghanistan, 30 September 2018, [url](#), p. 2

1750 IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results January - March 2018, 31 March 2018, [url](#), p. 1; IOM, Displacement Survey Shows 3.5 Million Internally Displaced, Returnees from Abroad in 15 Afghan Provinces, 8 May 2018, [url](#)


1752 IOM, Baseline Mobility Assessment: Summary Results October - December 2018, 15 March 2019, [url](#), p. 5
2.23 Nangarhar

2.23.1 General description of the province

Nangarhar is located in eastern Afghanistan, on 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 districts: Achin, Batikot, Behsud, Chaparhar, Dara-e-Nur, Dehbala, Durbaba, Goshta, Hesarak, Jalalabad, Kama, Khogyani, Kot, Kuzkunar, Lalpur, Muhmand Dara, Nazyan, Pachieragam, Rodat, Sherzad, Shinwar and Surkhrod. According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Nangarhar is estimated at 1,635,872 for 2018/19 and is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Pashai, Arabs and Tajiks. Members of the Sikh and Hindu community lived in Nangarhar province, particularly in and nearby Jalalabad. According to the Afghan radio network Salam Watandar, many of them 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.

1753 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nangarhar Provincial Overview, n.d., url
1754 Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Nangarhar, 1 February 2017, url
1756 Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 2
1757 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nangarhar Provincial Overview, n.d., url
1758 Foschini, F., The Other Fold of the Turban: Afghanistan’s Hindus and Sikhs, AAN, 23 September 2013, url; Australian Institute of International Affairs, A Precarious State: the Sikh Community in Afghanistan, 11 July 2018, url
1759 Salam Watandar, Sikhs and Hindus of Nangarhar leaving Afghanistan, 23 September 2018, url
Asian Highway AH-1 passes through the districts of Surkhrod, Jalalabad, Behsud, Rodat, Batikot, Shinwar, Muhmand Dara and reaches the Afghan-Pakistani border at Torkham. The province, which borders the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan (now merged with Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province), has served as an unofficial crossing-point for local and foreign militants.

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. The decrease applied to the districts of Khogyani, Chaparhar and Lalpur, whereas an increase was observed in Kot, Shinwari and Achin. Most of the national eradication procedures also took place in Nangarhar province.

2.23.2 Conflict background and actors in Nangarhar

Nangarhar has been observing a deterioration of its political and security situation since 2011. According to a 2016 report by the AAN, the political and military vacuum that had been affecting the province for years, and paved the way for the rise of the Afghan branch of the Islamic State, the Islamic State Khorasan Province.

First, the gap between the provincial political elites and Nangarhar’s population grew deeper, as corruption, local struggles for power and the failure to provide effective services 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.

Second, the fragmented insurgency in Nangarhar, undermined by internal power struggles, undisciplined commanders and fighters involved in criminal activities, could never totally consolidate and stabilize its power within the province. Furthermore, different militant groups, Afghan and foreign, as well as Salafi fighters within the Taliban ranks, contributed to destabilising Nangarhar’s Taliban movement even more, ending with many of them joining the Afghan branch of IS. In February 2019 Andrew Quilty from AAN noted that ‘it has been almost four years since the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) captured territory in southern Nangrahar province, where it ruled with extreme brutality’ and that whilst the ISKP ‘has been driven back’, it ‘still holds some territory — and the “battle” goes on, with ISKP mainly now targeting civilians in large-scale, urban, terrorist attacks’.

According to AAN, the following Afghan militant groups were operating in the province in 2016: the mainstream Taliban under the Quetta Shura’s (or Rahbari Shura) command; the Tora Bora Jihadi Front, mostly active in Khogyani, Sherzad and Pachieragam, which was integrated into the mainstream Taliban movement in October 2015; Hezb-e Islami, mainly operating in Chaparhar, Kot and Sherzad; the abovementioned 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.

1760 Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, 16 October 2015, url
1761 Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, url
1762 International Crisis Group, Shaping a New Peace in Pakistan’s Tribal Areas, 20 August 2018, url
1763 Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, url; New Arab (The), In Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, violence is committed by all sides, 25 January 2018, url
1764 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 23
1765 Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, url; TBIJ, Nangarhar: Descent into chaos, 30 July 2018, url; New Arab (The), In Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, violence is committed by all sides, 25 January 2018, url
1766 Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, url
1767 Quilty, A., “Faint lights twinkling against the dark”: Reportage from the fight against ISKP in Nangrahar, AAN, 19 February 2019, url
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, Pachieragam and Sherzad.\(^{1768}\)

Additionally, foreign militant groups were: Al Qaeda, mostly operating around the former Khyber Agency in Pakistan and Kunar; the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, mostly operating in southern and eastern districts; Lashkar-e Islam operating mainly in Nazyan and Achin and which cooperated with the IS; Jamaat ul-Ahrar, a splinter group of TTP mostly operating in Lalpur, Goshta and Muhmand Dara; Junud-e Khorasan, another splinter group of TTP, also operating mainly in the latter districts; the Salafi oriented group Amr bil ma’ruf Wa Nahi An Al-Munkar, active in Nazyan and Achin and the Ansar ul-Islam, a Pakistani pro-government group sometimes present in Nazyan and Achin.\(^{1769}\)

As of February 2019, the UN Secretary-General described Nangarhar as one of the ISKP ‘strongholds’ in Afghanistan.\(^{1770}\) UNAMA’s 2018 annual report noted that ‘Daesh/ISKP is present in the east of Afghanistan, with an estimated 3,000 fighters currently active, primarily in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces’.\(^{1771}\)

Differences in social-tribal solidarity among the Shinwari tribe, which is prevailing in many districts of Nangarhar, were another factor that led to the rise of IS in the province. Whilst the Shaikhan tribesmen, a Shinwari sub-tribe predominant in Durbaba, showed cohesion and were able to push back the insurgency in their district, the Shinwari tribal communities in other districts were fragmented and characterised by power struggles and was therefore unable to serve as an opposition to the insurgency. As a consequence, intra-tribal fighting eroded the strength of social structures and made the communities vulnerable to pressure from local and foreign insurgents.\(^{1772}\)

Furthermore, the involvement of external actors like Pakistan, Iran, India, China, Russia and the United States complicated the already tense intra-provincial relations among warlords, strongmen, criminals, local officials, businessmen and Taliban militants.\(^{1773}\)

Pro-government military special units, also referred to as counter-terrorism pursuit teams, are reportedly operating in Nangarhar and Khost provinces. These forces, which are unofficially trained and overseen by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and in charge of combating the insurgency, have also reportedly been responsible for killing and torturing civilians.\(^{1774}\)

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Nangarhar province is under the responsibility of the 201\(^{st}\) ANA Corps, which falls under Train, Advise, and Assist Command - East (TAAC-E), led by US and Polish forces.\(^{1775}\)

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Nangarhar province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.\(^{1776}\) When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes

\(^{1768}\) Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, url
\(^{1769}\) Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, url; See also: EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report, Pakistan, Security Situation, October 2018, url
\(^{1770}\) 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
\(^{1771}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 60
\(^{1772}\) Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, AAN, 27 September 2016, url
\(^{1773}\) New Arab (The), In Nangarhar province, Afghanistan, violence is committed by all sides, 25 January 2018, url
\(^{1774}\) New York Times (The), C.I.A.’s Afghan Forces Leave a Trail of Abuse and Anger, 31 December 2018, url; Die Presse, Afghanistan vor dramatischer Wende, 28 January 2018, url
\(^{1775}\) USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, url, p. 15
a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achin</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - Medium</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batikot</td>
<td>Open Taliban Presence - high</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Control</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Gov control: 65%; TB control: 35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behsud</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - Medium</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaparhar</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dara-e-Nur</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dehbala (Hasqa Mina)</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durbaba</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
<td>Gov control: 75%; TB control: 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goshta</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
<td>Gov control: 90%; TB control: 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hesarak</td>
<td>Open Taliban Presence - high</td>
<td>INS activity</td>
<td>INS activity</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalalabad (capital)</td>
<td>Open Taliban Presence - medium/low</td>
<td>GIRoA Control</td>
<td>GIRoA Control</td>
<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kama</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>GIRoA Control</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
<td>Gov control: 85%; TB control: 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khogyani</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - high</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 65%; Gov control: 35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kot</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
<td>Gov control: 67%; TB control: 33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuzkunar</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
<td>/</td>
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</tbody>
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1777 LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
EASO COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION REPORT: AFGHANISTAN - SECURITY SITUATION

Lalpur
Open Taliban presence - Medium
Contested
Contested
Contested
TB control: 77%;
Gov control: 23%

Muhmand Dara
Open Taliban presence - Medium
GIRoA Influence
GIRoA Influence
Gov control or undetermined
TB control: 70%;
Gov control: 30%

Nazyan
Open Taliban presence - low
Contested
Contested
Contested
Gov control: 85%;
TB control: 15%

Pachieragam
Open Taliban presence - low
Contested
Contested
Contested
Gov control: 70%;
TB control: 30%

Rodat
Open Taliban presence - low
Contested
Contested
Contested
Gov control: 87%;
TB control: 13%

Shinwar
Open Taliban presence - low
GIRoA Influence
GIRoA Influence
Contested
Gov control or undetermined

Surkhrod
Open Taliban presence - Medium
GIRoA Influence
GIRoA Influence
Contested
TB control: 55%;
Gov control: 45%

Sherzad
Open Taliban presence - high
INS activity
INS activity
Contested
TB control: 95%;
Gov control: 5%

Ghani Khel
/
/
/
/
TB control: 65%;
Gov control: 35%

Khewa
/
/
/
/
Gov control: 80%;
TB control: 20%

Spin Ghar
/
/
/
/
Gov control: 65%;
TB control: 35%

2.23.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.23.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 1 815 civilian casualties (681 deaths and 1 134 injured) in Nangarhar province. This represents an increase of 111 % compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were suicide/complex attacks, followed by (non-suicide) IEDs and ground engagements. The number of civilian casualties due to IEDs (mostly non-suicide) ‘increased four-fold’ and ‘nearly reached the same levels as Kabul for the first time’.

In 2018, UNAMA recorded 17 suicide and complex attacks in Nangarhar attributed to ISKP, which caused 738 civilian casualties (222 deaths and 516 injuries).

In mid-June 2018, ISKP ‘conducted two large attacks in Nangarhar against Taliban and civilian gatherings [...], resulting in 181 civilian casualties (48 deaths and 133 injured)’.

In a map depicting ‘conflict severity’ in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Khogyani, Chaparhar, Dehbala, Batikot and Rodat in the highest category and Jalalabad, Hesarak, Surkhrod, Pachieragam, Achin, Shinwar and Muhmand Dara districts in the second highest category. Behsud, Kot,

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1778 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 68
Goshta, Lalpur, Sherzad and Nazyan are in the third highest category while Kama is in the category below. The remaining districts fall in the two lowest categories.\textsuperscript{1781}

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 754 incidents related to insurgents in Nangarhar province.\textsuperscript{1782}

Airstrikes against ISKP were carried out by pro-government forces in Achin in January 2019,\textsuperscript{1783} in Nazyan in November 2018,\textsuperscript{1784} and in Deh Bala in March 2018,\textsuperscript{1785} killing ISKP fighters;\textsuperscript{1786} as well as in Khogyani and Chaparhar districts.\textsuperscript{1787} In January 2019, airstrikes were also carried out against Taliban militants in Hesarak and ‘along a road in Nangarhar’, killing several insurgents.\textsuperscript{1788} Moreover, airstrikes killed high-ranking ISKP fighters in the province throughout 2018: Qari Riaz, one of the leaders of ISKP, in Chaparhar district\textsuperscript{1789} and the ISKP spokesman for Afghanistan, Sultan Aziz Azam, in Pachieragam district in late December 2018\textsuperscript{1790} as well as Saad Arhabi, another top leader of ISKP, in Khogyani in August 2018.\textsuperscript{1791} A night raid carried out by Afghan forces in Chaparhar district in late May 2018 purportedly caused casualties among the civilian population.\textsuperscript{1792} Clashes between Taliban militants and ISKP were reported in Nangarhar province.\textsuperscript{1793}

Suicide attacks and other acts of aggression were carried out in Nangarhar province throughout 2018: in early October 2018 an ISKP suicide attack during an election-campaign rally in Kama district killed 13 civilians and wounded 30 people.\textsuperscript{1794} Also in early October 2018, a bomb detonation took place near a cricket pitch in Batikot, wounding at least children.\textsuperscript{1795} In September 2018, a suicide attack targeted a protest in Mohmand Dara district, near the Jalalabad-Torkham highway\textsuperscript{1796} and caused casualties among the civilian population (at least 68 killed and 165 injured).\textsuperscript{1797} Moreover, also in September 2018, bombs exploded in front of girls’ schools in Jalalabad, killing one pupil and wounding 4 others, and in Behsud district.\textsuperscript{1798}

In late July 2018, casualties were recorded after insurgents stormed a government building and took people hostage.\textsuperscript{1799} In early July 2018 a suicide bombing in Jalalabad claimed by the IS killed members

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[1781] UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 2
\item[1782] Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, url, accessed 1 March 2019
\item[1783] Khaama Press, Coalition forces carry out drone strikes against ISIS-K hideouts in Nangarhar, 27 January 2019, url
\item[1784] Pajhwok Afghan News, 17 Taliban, Daesh rebels killed in Laghman, Nangarhar airstrikes, 4 November 2018, url
\item[1785] Tolonews, 14 Insurgents Killed in Kunduz, Nangarhar Airstrikes, 26 March 2018, url
\item[1787] UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, url, p. 7
\item[1788] Khaama Press, Coalition airstrike target Taliban IED planters in Nangarhar leaving 5 dead, 18 January 2018, url
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\item[1792] Al Jazeera, Afghan forces night raid kills civilians in Nangarhar, 29 May 2018, url
\item[1793] TBIJ, Nangarhar: Descent into chaos, 30 July 2018, url; UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, url, p. 7
\item[1794] RFE/RL, At Least 13 Dead, Dozens Injured In Apparent Suicide Attack At Afghan Campaign Rally, 2 October 2018, url; Reuters, Carnage at Afghan election rally as suicide bomber strikes, 2 October 2018, url
\item[1795] Reuters, Carnage at Afghan election rally as suicide bomber strikes, 2 October 2018, url; AP, At least 14 killed in suicide bombing at Afghan election rally, 2 October 2018, url
\item[1796] Tolonews, Death Toll Rises To 32 In Nangarhar Explosion, 11 September 2018, url
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\item[1798] AFP, Student killed in twin bomb attack near Afghan girls’ school: officials, 11 September 2018, url
\item[1799] Guardian (The), Afghanistan: gunmen storm government building in eastern city, 31 July 2018, url
\end{itemize}
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of the Sikh and Hindu community, among them the only Sikh candidate for parliamentary elections. During an attack on a boys’ school in Khogyani district, ISKP militants beheaded three employees and set the school building on fire in late June 2018. Due to threats by ISKP, more than 80 girls’ schools were closed in Jalalabad and its neighbouring districts in June 2018. According to UNAMA in June ‘ISKP expressly declared its intention to target schools, particularly girls’ schools [...]. Alleging that aerial operations by international and Afghan national security forces of residential areas in Deh Balah district [...] over the previous three days had killed approximately one hundred women and children, the group warned that all girls’ schools in Nangarhar province would be targets for attack thereafter’. In May 2018 explosions during a cricket match in Jalalabad killed at least eight spectators. In January 2018 a suicide attack targeting the Save the Children office in Jalalabad and claimed by the IS, killed and injured security forces and civilians.

2.23.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 12 236 persons displaced from Nangarhar, almost all of which (10 461) found refuge within the province itself and in neighbouring provinces like Kabul, Laghman, or in other provinces more distant like Khost, Paktya and Wardak.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 154 persons displaced from Nangarhar province, with all of them displaced within the province.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 11 274 persons displaced to Nangarhar province.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 154 persons displaced to Nangarhar province, from Hesarak district to Jalalabad.

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<tr>
<td>Achin</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Batikot</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>392</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behsud</td>
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<td>1 461</td>
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<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaparhar</td>
<td>1 900</td>
<td>146</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dara-e-Nur</td>
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<td>133</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dehbala</td>
<td>5 221</td>
<td>3 708</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hesarak</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>154</td>
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1800 BBC News, Afghanistan blast: Sikhs among the 19 dead in Jalalabad suicide attack, 1 July 2018, url; New York Times (The), Sikhs and Hindus Bear Brunt of Latest Afghanistan Suicide Attack, 1 July 2018, url
1801 New York Times (The), Sikhs and Hindus Bear Brunt of Latest Afghanistan Suicide Attack, 1 July 2018, url
1802 Telegraph (The), Eighty Afghan girls’ schools close over Islamic State threat, 6 June 2018, url
1803 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 15
1804 Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Jalalabad cricket match bomb attack kills eight, 19 May 2018, url; New York Times (The), Rare Attack on Cricket Match in Afghanistan Kills at Least 8, 19 May 2018, url
1805 BBC News, Save the Children offices attacked in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, 24 January 2018, url
1806 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, url
1807 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, url
1808 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, url
1809 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, url
In 2018, Nangarhar province was considered as one of ‘the main provinces of both origin and displacement of conflict-affected communities’.\textsuperscript{1810}

In at least seven UNOCHA Afghanistan Weekly Field Reports published between January 2018 and January 2019, it is reported that people have been displaced in Nangarhar because of ‘threats and intimidation’ by ‘Non State Armed Groups (NSAG) or Armed Opposition groups (AOG)’\textsuperscript{1811} For example, in February 2018, 2 114 people were displaced for these reasons during one week within the province.\textsuperscript{1812} In June 2018, UNOCHA recorded 3 000 people\textsuperscript{1813} and in September 3 400 people displaced for these reasons.\textsuperscript{1814}

Armed clashes have also resulted in displacements: armed clashes between armed groups have resulted in the displacement of 300 people from Batikot district to Jalalabad city and other areas in May 2018.\textsuperscript{1815} ANSF operations in June 2018 in Dehbala district led to the displacement of 3 500 people within the district.\textsuperscript{1816}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Jalalabad & / & 2 286 & / & 154 \\
Kama & / & 50 & / & / \\
Khogyani & 1 749 & 473 & / & / \\
Kot & 81 & / & / & / \\
Kuzkunar & / & 111 & / & / \\
Muhmand Dara & 7 & / & / & / \\
Nazyan & 77 & / & / & / \\
Pachieragam & 1 730 & 350 & / & / \\
Rodat & 98 & 213 & / & / \\
Sherzad & 460 & / & / & / \\
Shinwar & 28 & / & / & / \\
Surkhro & 35 & 1 951 & / & / \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
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\textsuperscript{1810} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 42
\textsuperscript{1812} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 12 - 18 February, 19 February 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1813} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 18 - 24 June 2018, 25 June 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1814} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 3-9 September 2018, 10 September 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1815} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 21 – 27 May 2018, 28 May 2018, url
\textsuperscript{1816} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 4 – 10 June 2018, 11 June 2018, 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{1817} The province borders Farah to the north, Helmand to the east, Pakistan to the south and

\textsuperscript{1817} Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nimroz, n.d., \url{url}
Iran to the west. The provincial capital is Zaranj. Nimroz is divided into the following districts: Chakhansur, Charburjak, Kang, Khashrod and Zaranj. Dularam, which became part of Farah province in 2009, went back under Nimroz' jurisdiction in 2013 and became a district on its own.

According to the Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan, the population of Nimroz is estimated at 176,898 for 2018/19, and is composed mainly of Balochs, followed by Pashtuns, Tajiks and Uzbeks. The province’s topography consists of flat and mostly desert terrain. In January 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. The Afghan government had plans to construct water dams on major Afghan rivers flowing towards Iran; one of the projects involved the Kamal Khan dam in Charburjak, which was targeted by a Taliban attack in November 2018, that caused the deaths of 12 guards and one insurgent. According to sources quoted by Foreign Policy magazine, Iran was trying to sabotage the dam project by supporting the local Taliban.

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. Taliban militants purportedly set up check-points along the Zaranj-Dularam highway and charged taxes on vehicles carrying goods, as reported in January 2018. The city of Zaranj hosts an airport, which was served by domestic scheduled passenger flights as of March 2019.

The province is of strategic position for smuggling because of its proximity to Iran, Pakistan and Helmand. Moreover, the Zaranj – Dularam road and the south-western highways have been used as transit routes for drugs trafficking. Furthermore, the province of Nimroz was identified as a ‘key human trafficking route’ by a Tolo News investigation from September 2018, as many Afghan migrants who intend to leave the country get to Iran by passing through Nimroz.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, poppy-cultivation in Nimroz province decreased by 21% compared to 2017. The districts with the highest rate of opium-poppy-cultivation were Khashrod and Charburjak.

According to an IWPR report from February 2018, 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

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1818 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d., url
1821 Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 3
1822 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Nimroz, n.d., url
1823 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nimroz Provincial Overview, n.d., url
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1825 Pajhwok Afghan News, Nimroz farmers in despair as drought kills livestock, 2 January 2019, url
1826 Diplomat (The), Iran’s Support for the Taliban Brings It to a Crossroads With Afghanistan, 21 May 2018, url
1827 Pajhwok Afghan News, 12 Kamal Khan Dam guards killed in Taliban attack, 13 November 2018, url
1828 Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, url
1829 Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, url, p. 5; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nimroz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
1830 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban running 'customs check-point' on Nimroz road, 20 January 2018, url
1831 Austria, BFA-Staatsdokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019
1832 IWPR, Drugs Trade Thrives in Afghan Province, 19 February 2018, url
1833 Tolonews, Nimroz Identified As Key Human Trafficking Route, 13 September 2018, url; Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, url
1834 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 33
of returnees from Iran, who started using drugs while working there.\(^{1835}\) According to governmental sources quoted by Pajhwok Afghan News, 70% of Afghans working in Iran were addicted before returning to Afghanistan. Furthermore, the number of drug addicts in Nimroz tripled in 2018, as a result of high levels of deportations of Afghan refugees from Iran and easy access to drugs.\(^{1836}\) According to Foreign Policy magazine, 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’.\(^{1837}\)

2.24.2 Conflict background and actors in Nimroz

Nimroz belongs to the ‘forgotten’ provinces of Afghanistan.\(^{1838}\) According to sources quoted by Foreign Policy magazine, the province has been among the most problematic areas of the country, partly because it has been marginal and unimportant to the government.\(^{1839}\) It has maintained this reputation even after the implementation of investments to strengthen state institutions in the post-2001 years which is perceived to have increased the influence of local strongmen, criminals and insurgents due to corruption.\(^{1840}\) Moreover, constant disputes with Iran over water sources have characterized relations for centuries.\(^{1841}\) During the last years, the tensions worsened due to supposedly surreptitious support of the Taliban movement by Iran.\(^{1842}\)

According to sources quoted by the French newspaper, Le Figaro, Iran has been supporting the Taliban financially, militarily and also by providing them with training units organised by the Qods Force, a branch of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards. In return, Taliban fighters had to intensify their operations against ISKP and US troops.\(^{1843}\) Purportedly, Iran’s influence over the province was so high, that even Afghan governmental officials were said to be spying for Iran.\(^{1844}\)

Taliban fighters loyal to Mullah Rasul, the leader of a Taliban splinter group active in western Afghanistan, have been operating in Nimroz province, perceived to be fighting against the main Taliban faction for control of drug-trafficking route.\(^{1845}\)

Even though Al Qaeda has not announced its presence in Nimroz, a US soldier was killed during a firefight with the group in late November 2018. Not announcing its presence is purportedly ‘consistent with the [Al Qaeda’s] strategy inside Afghanistan’.\(^{1846}\)

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.\(^{1847}\)

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Nimroz province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the

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1835 IWPR, Drugs Trade Thrives in Afghan Province, 19 February 2018, url; Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, url
1836 Pajhwok Afghan News, Drug addicts’ population triples in Nimroz this year, 9 July 2018, url
1837 Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, url
1838 Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, url
1839 Diplomat (The), Afghanistan’s Forgotten Province, 1 December 2010, url
1840 Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, url
1841 Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, url; Foschini, F., On the borders: Where do the attacks in Nimruz come from?, AAN, 18 August 2012, url
1842 Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, url; Diplomat (The), Iran’s Support for the Taliban Brings It to a Crossroads With Afghanistan, 21 May 2018, url
1843 Le Figaro, En Afghanistan, l’Iran accroît son aide aux talibans, 19 September 2018, url, p. 31; Foreign Policy, On the Edge of Afghanistan, 12 September 2017, url
1844 Le Figaro, En Afghanistan, l’Iran accroît son aide aux talibans, 19 September 2018, url, p. 31
1845 RFE/RL, Taliban Infighting Leaves Dozens Of Militants Dead In Afghanistan, 30 November 2018, url
1846 LWJ, Taliban continues to host foreign terrorist groups, despite assurances to the contrary, 7 February 2019, url; LWJ, US service member killed during a battle with al Qaeda in Afghanistan, 27 November 2018, url
When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

### NIMROZ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>US military (quoted by SIGAR)</th>
<th>US military (quoted by SIGAR)</th>
<th>LWJ (last accessed)</th>
<th>Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zaranj (capital)</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
<td>GIRoA control</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
</tr>
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<td>Charburjak</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chakhansur</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kang</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khashrod (Dularam)</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - Medium</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

##### 2.24.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 82 civilian casualties (18 deaths and 64 injured) in Nimroz province. This represents a decrease of 17% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by UXO/landmines and aerial attacks. In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places Khashrod in the second highest category and Zaranj in the fourth highest category. The remaining districts fall in the two lowest categories.

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 65 incidents related to insurgents in Nimroz province.

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1849 LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.

1850 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url], p. 68

1851 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url], p. 2

1852 Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url], accessed 1 March 2019
Pro-government security forces carried out military operations against Al Qaeda in Nimroz province in November 2018; one US soldier died. Moreover in November and December 2018, airstrikes were carried out in Khashrod district, killing and wounding Taliban militants. In July 2018, insurgents attacked an Afghan police check-post in Khashrod district, killing Afghan security personnel. US airstrikes targeting Taliban narcotic production factories were carried out in April 2018. Clashes between the Afghan security forces and the Taliban took place in Dil Aram and in Charburjak, causing fatalities among Taliban militants and Afghan security forces.

In November 2018, Taliban militants shot dead a supposed ‘uprising commander’ from Jawzjan province in the district of Khashrod, after having dragged him out of a passenger vehicle travelling on the Dularam-Khashrud highway. In October 2018 a community elder known for his tribal and Taliban mediation efforts was assassinated in Delaram. Also in October 2018, an Imam was shot by unidentified gunmen on his way home Chakhansor district.

According to a report on elections-related violence by UNAMA, road blockades were set up in Nimroz by insurgents during the two days of elections in October 2018 to keep locals from voting and to delay the transport of electoral material.

### 2.24.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 74 persons displaced from Nimroz province. All of them were displaced within the province itself from Khashrod/Dularam district to Zaranj.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 12 persons displaced from Nimroz. They were displaced to Herat.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 617 persons displaced to Nimroz province mainly from other provinces, they all settled in Zaranj district.

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Nimroz province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khashrod / Dularam</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1853 Guardian (The), Three members of US military killed in Afghanistan explosion, 27 November 2018, [url](url);
LWI, US service member killed during battle with al Qaeda in Afghanistan, 27 November 2018, [url](url).
1854 Pajhwok Afghan News, Airstrikes kill 15 Taliban in Farah, Nimroz, 6 December 2018, [url](url); Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 militants killed in Nimroz airstrike, 23 November 2018, [url](url).
1856 VoA, IS Leader in Afghanistan Killed; Taliban Drug Factories Targeted, 9 April 2018, [url](url).
1857 Pajhwok Afghan News, 11 ALP personnel killed in Kunduz, Nimroz clashes, 9 November 2018, [url](url).
1860 Pajhwok Afghan News, Man’s body found with Taliban letter in Nimroz, 16 November 2018, [url](url); Afghanistan, MOPW, Application of Road Numbering System National Highways, [url](url), p. 5; UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Nimroz Province – District Atlas, April 2014, [url](url).
1861 TBIJ, One day in Afghanistan, 7 October 2018, [url](url).
1862 Pajhwok Afghan News, Unknown gunmen kill Imam in Nimroz, 19 October 2018, [url](url).
1866 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](url).
| Zaranj | / | 617 | / | / |
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.1868 The provincial capital of Nuristan is Parun. The province is divided into the following districts: Barg-e-Matal, Duab, Kamdesh, Mandol, Nurgeram, Parun, Wama and Waygal.1869 Nuristan is mostly mountainous and belongs to ‘the most remote, under-served and unknown provinces’ of Afghanistan.1870 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).1871

According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Nuristan is estimated at 158,211 for 2018/191872 and it is composed mainly of Nuristani, followed by Pashai, Pashtuns, Gujars and Tajiks.1873 Although the Nuristani people are mostly considered as a single ethnic group, de facto they comprise numerous

1868 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nuristan Provincial Overview, n.d., url
1870 Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, url
1871 Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, url
1872 Afghanistan, CSO, ۷۹۳۱ﺑﺮآورد ﻧﻔﻮس ﮐﺸﻮر [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 2
1873 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Nuristan Provincial Overview, n.d., url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Background Profile of Nuristan, n.d., url
ethnic and sub-ethnic communities that speak different Indo-European languages, sometimes subsumed under the Dardic languages branch.\textsuperscript{1874}

Most of the province’s roads used to be travelable only by pack animals. Even so, Nuristan became a key support 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 US forces and the Afghan government after 2001 in order to fight the insurgency. However, in November 2018, in some areas of the province the road conditions remained poor.\textsuperscript{1875}

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Nuristan has maintained poppy-free status since 2013, with the exception of 2017, when 121 hectares were cultivated.\textsuperscript{1876}

\subsection*{2.25.2 Conflict background and actors in Nuristan}

Conservative religious groups, such as Wahabis and Salafis, have been active in the province for centuries. The Afghan-Soviet war saw a particular consolidation of the power of these groups in Nuristan.\textsuperscript{1877} Before the communist regime, religious leaders were respected and influenced politics. However, in areas of the province like the Landay Sin valley, power was shared through community democracy, with a body of elders and a body of policemen were appointed annually in order to define policies and enforce community law.\textsuperscript{1878}

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-ye Islam-ye Nuristan (Islamic Revolutionary State of Nuristan) emerged in northern Nuristan under the leadership of the religious scholar Mawlawi Muhammad Afzar, who also supported the Taliban movement and was therefore given the freedom to rule over the province. After the escalation of hostilities with Hezb-e Islami and Jamiat-e Islami in 1997, his control started to decline and Hezb-e Islami became more influential in the province.\textsuperscript{1879}

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 again expanded their control over large areas of the province due to the neglect by the Afghan government.\textsuperscript{1880} Moreover, some areas of the province, like Kamdesh’s district centre and Mandol district, were under the rule of a Hezb-e Islami commander and a security commander, respectively, both appointed by the Afghan government.\textsuperscript{1881}

According to an AAN report, in November 2018 almost all the districts of Nuristan province were somehow under control or influence of the Taliban. Villages were reported to be isolated from each other, as well as from the district centres, where governmental presence has often been defined as

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1874} Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, url
  \item \textsuperscript{1875} Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, url; Foschini, F., New Battles and Old Wants in Nuristan, AAN, 2 June 2012, url
  \item \textsuperscript{1876} UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 23
  \item \textsuperscript{1877} Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, url; Middle East Institute, Social Change in Eastern Nuristan, December 2009, url
  \item \textsuperscript{1878} Middle East Institute, Social Change in Eastern Nuristan, December 2009, url
  \item \textsuperscript{1879} Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, url
  \item \textsuperscript{1880} Ali, O., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, url
  \item \textsuperscript{1881} Foschini, F., New Battles and Old Wants in Nuristan, AAN, 2 June 2012, url
\end{itemize}
‘token’. The community elders still play an important role, as they take most of the decisions. The police’s presence is limited to district centres. 1882

ISKP has been reported to be active in Nuristan since 2016, when many of its fighters came to the province, following the loss of large parts of their territory in neighbouring Nangarhar.1883 Most of them were purportedly foreign fighters.1884 In June 2017, a governmental source quoted by AAN reported ISKP presence in the districts of Mandol, Duab, Nergeram, Waygal and Wama.1885 As of February 2019, the UN Secretary-General described Nuristan as one of the ISKP ‘strongholds’ in Afghanistan.1886 The relations between Taliban and ISKP militants were reportedly conflict-ridden, as Taliban fighters tried to clear some Afghan provinces from IS presence, including Nuristan.1887 Moreover, whilst the Taliban movement follows the Hanafi School of Islamic law, ISKP fighters belong to the Salafi movement. The ISKP could therefore count on the support of Salafi enclaves in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar and Nuristan. Furthermore, ISKP also recruited its fighters among dissident Taliban.1888

According to Khaama Press, Al Qaeda fighters have also been active in Nuristan province and operated camps there.1889

In terms of the 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.1890

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Nuristan province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.1891 When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong -as a region- to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

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1884 VoA, Islamic State Seeks Foothold in Eastern Afghan Provinces, 7 August 2017, [url]
1885 Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url]
1886 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
1887 Telegraph (The), Taliban claim to be preparing onslaught to drive Islamic State from Afghan stronghold, 7 August 2018, [url]; National (The), Taliban prepare ‘decisive’ anti-ISIS operation in eastern Afghanistan, 5 August 2018, [url]; Difesa & Sicurezza, Afghanistan, i talebani si preparano a cacciare Isis da Nangarhar, 8 August 2018, [url]
1888 taz, „Islamischer Staat” und Taliban, Der afghanische Terrorwettbewerb, 1 February 2018, [url]
1889 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]
1890 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, [url], p. 15
### Security Situation

**NURISTAN (reporting period: August-November 2017)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>US military (quoted by SIGAR)</th>
<th>US military (quoted by SIGAR)</th>
<th>LWJ (last accessed: April 2019)</th>
<th>Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barg-e-Matal</td>
<td>Open Taliban Presence - high</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 60%; Gov control: 40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duab</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - Medium</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamdesh</td>
<td>Open Taliban Presence - high</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandol</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control (completely)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurgeram</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 60%; Gov control: 40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poruns (capital)</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Gov control: 75%; TB control: 25%</td>
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<td>Wama</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - Medium</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
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<tr>
<td>Waygal</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - Medium</td>
<td>INS activity</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

**2.25.3.1 General**

In 2018, UNAMA documented 25 civilian casualties (9 deaths and 15 injured) in Nuristan province. This represents an increase of 41% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by targeted/deliberate killings and aerial attacks.**

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the districts of Barg-e-Matal, Kamdesh and Waygal in the third highest category and Nurgeram and Duab in the fourth highest category. The remaining districts fall into the two lowest categories.

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 82 incidents related to insurgents in Nuristan province.

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1892 LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
1895 Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019
Airstrikes against ISKP were carried out by international forces in January 2018 in Waygal killing fighters, as well as against the Taliban in late October 2018 in Nurgeram, when six insurgents were killed and in late June 2018 in Waygal, killing 10, six of whom civilians.

In August 2018, fighting between Taliban militants and ISKP has been reported in Nuristan province. Four members of the Afghan security forces were killed after the explosion of a roadside bomb in Nurgeram district in late October 2018.

In December 2018 unidentified gunmen stormed a local radio station in Nurgeram district and reportedly took one of the workers hostage. During the October 2018 parliamentary elections, Taliban mortar attacks against polling stations were reported in Wama, Barg-e-Matal, Kamdesh and Nurgeram districts, wounding civilians and preventing others from voting.

### 2.25.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 628 persons displaced from Nuristan. A large proportion of them (561) were displaced within the province.

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Nuristan province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reported 902 persons displaced to Nuristan province.

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Nuristan province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barg-e-Matal</td>
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<td>Kamdesh</td>
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<td>Wama</td>
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<tr>
<td>Waygal</td>
<td>184</td>
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<td>/</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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1896 Pajhwok Afghan News, Daesh fighters killed in Nuristan, Kunar airstrikes, 15 January 2018, [url](#).
1897 Salaam Times, Coalition air strike kills 6 Taliban militants in Nuristan, 24 October 2018, [url](#); Khaama Press, Taliban militants killed in U.S. drone strike in Nuristan province, 24 October 2018, [url](#).
1898 Afghanistan Times, Six civilians, five Taliban killed in Nuristan airstrike, 26 June 2018, [url](#).
1899 Difesa & Sicurezza, Afghanistan, i talebani si preparano a cacciare Isis da Nangarhar, 8 August 2018, [url](#); Telegraph (The), Taliban claim to be preparing onslaught to drive Islamic State from Afghan stronghold, 7 August 2018, [url](#).
1901 Pajhwok Afghan News, Gunmen attack, vandalize Nuristan radio station, 23 December 2018, [url](#).
1902 Ali, O., et al., The 2018 Elections Observed (5) in Nuristan: Disfranchisement and lack of data, AAN, 17 November 2018, [url](#).
1903 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#).
1904 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#).
1905 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, [url](#).
1906 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, [url](#).
According to UNOCHA, threats and intimidation by armed groups have caused displacements in 2018,\textsuperscript{1907} for example, 200 people from four Nuristan districts moved to Poruns district in March 2018 for this reason.\textsuperscript{1908} Insecurity is also a reason for displacement.\textsuperscript{1909}
2.26 Paktika

2.26.1 General description of the province
Paktika 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. The provincial capital of Paktika is Sharana. The province is divided into the following districts: Bermel, Dila (also Khushamand), Gomal, Gyan, Janikhel, Matakhan, Naka, Omna, Sarobi, Sarrawzah, Sharan, Turwo, Urgun, Wazakakh, Wormamay, Yahyakhel, Yosufkhel, Zarghunshahr (also Khairkot) and Ziruk. 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.

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. Paktika 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. Moreover, local tribal relations still play an important role in the province.

According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Paktika is estimated at 748,910 for 2018/19. The province is composed mainly of Pashtuns, with a Tajik minority in the cities of Sharana and Urgun.

A national highway connects the provinces of Ghazni and Paktika and continues to the Afghan-Pakistani border. According to Pajhwok Afghan News, in December 2018 the Ghazni-Paktika highway had been closed for six months, following Taliban attacks in Ghazni province. Moreover, according to governmental sources quoted by Pajhwok, two highways connecting Paktika province to the central region faced security problems. The security situation on the Urgun highway, which connects many districts of Paktika, had also purportedly deteriorated in late August 2018, with checkpoints, set up in parts of Sarrawzah district, often attacked by insurgents.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Paktika has maintained poppy-free status since 2014.

### 2.26.2 Conflict background and actors in Paktika

According to an AAN analysis from December 2018, the Taliban have been predominant in many areas of Paktika province. Some districts were either fully under Taliban control or contested. The districts of Naka and Omna were fully under Taliban control, whereas their presence in the other districts varied, particularly in the Katawaz region. The government’s presence was strong around the provincial capital and in Matakhan, Yosufkhel, Khairkot, Urgun and Yahyakhel. The latter district, where Taliban militants re-emerged from 2004 until 2011, was reported in 2018 to be mostly under...
the control of the ALP which enjoys support from the local community. Yahyakhel was described in the same source as being among the most peaceful districts in Paktika.1923

According to local sources quoted by AAN, in 2018 the Taliban adopted a ‘softer’ policy towards the electoral campaign and the election itself in Paktika province: whilst in the past campaigning and coverage of elections was limited, the situation was more relaxed in 2018. Even though the Taliban did not threaten any dwellers of Paktika province during the pre-election period — according to local sources quoted by AAN — they did try to oppose voting during election day in some areas by launching shells. Moreover, Paktika was among the few provinces where the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) did not request a second day of voting.1924

The Haqqani network started to expand in Loya Paktya, an area composed of Khost, Paktya and Paktika, some years before 2011;1925 its main area of operations was 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 Khost, Gyan in Paktika and Zurmat in Paktya.1926 According to an article by Long War Journal from September 2012 reporting about an assault on a base in Paktika’s Charbaran Valley, some foreign fighters linked to Al Qaeda were active in eastern Afghanistan and were known to be fighting alongside the Haqqani network in the region. Some of these groups were the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), as well as its splinter group the Islamic Jihadi Union (IJU), the Caucasus Mujahedin Khorasan, Jund al Khilafah and the Turkistan Islamic Party.1927 According to the New York Times in October 2011, Charbaran had ‘become one of the main routes for Haqqani fighters to enter Afghanistan’, and they generally entered the province on foot, stayed ‘overnight in safe houses and tent camps’ and proceeded ‘toward Kabul or other areas’ where they had been sent to fight. Also, ‘[m]id-level Haqqani leaders’ used to meet in the valley’s villages, ‘including near an abandoned school and the ruins of a government center […] that local fighters had destroyed by 2009’.1928

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Paktika province is under the responsibility of the 203rd ANA Corps, which falls under Task Force Southeast (TF Southeast), led by US forces.1929

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Paktika province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal (LWJ) and the Taliban.1930 When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

1923 Muzhary, F. and Clark, K., How to Set up a ‘Good ALP’: The experience of Yahyakhel district, Paktika and how it became more peaceful, AAN, 11 December 2018, url; Muzhary, F., The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling, AAN, 13 November 2018, url
1924 Muzhary, F., The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling, AAN, 13 November 2018, url
1925 Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Paktia and why the US preferred warlords, AAN, 24 November 2011, url
1927 LWJ, ‘Al Mujahir Jihadi Studio’ releases video of attack on base in Paktika, 7 September 2012, url
1928 New York Times (The), Americans Raid Byways of Haqqani Insurgents in Afghanistan, 2 October 2011, url
1929 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, url, p. 16
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1931 LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
2.26.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.26.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 150 civilian casualties (67 deaths and 83 injured) in Paktika province. This represents a decrease of 6% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were (non-suicide) IEDs, followed by targeted killings and ground engagements.\(^{1932}\)

In a map depicting ‘conflict severity’ in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places Urgun district in the second highest category and Gomal in the category below. Sharan, Mata Khan, Yahya Khel, Sar Rawzah, Zarghun Shahr, Jani Khel, Surobi, Nika, Barmal, Giyan and Wazakhah fall into the fourth highest category. The remaining districts are in the two lowest categories.\(^{1933}\)

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 92 incidents related to insurgents in Paktika province.\(^{1934}\)

As reported by a local source to AAN in November 2018, the Taliban had not been very active in carrying out attacks against pro-government forces in Paktika. Furthermore, ‘the most recent attack had been on Khushamand (also known as Dela) district, a week before the election. Besides that, there had not been any major attack by Taleban fighters in the province since August 2017, when they carried one out on Gomal district’.\(^{1935}\) During the parliamentary elections in October 2018 there were some security incidents in parts of Sarobi, Sarrawzah, Matakan and Sharana, which caused ‘relatively few’ casualties.\(^{1936}\)

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\(^{1932}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

\(^{1933}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

\(^{1934}\) Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

\(^{1935}\) Muzhary, F., The 2018 Election Observed (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](#)

\(^{1936}\) Muzhary, F., The 2018 ElectionObserved (4) in Paktika: Pre-election fraud and relatively peaceful polling, AAN, 13 November 2018, [url](#)
In late December 2018 Afghan security forces carried out airstrikes in Bermel district, which killed the military commission chief of the Haqqani network. According to the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MoI) quoted by Khaama Press, the senior Haqqani network leader was active in planning and coordinating attacks in Paktika and the provinces nearby.\textsuperscript{1937} Moreover, US security forces carried out airstrikes in Gomal district in December 2018, killing militants\textsuperscript{1938} and in Gyan district in November 2018, killing two Taliban militants and four civilians and wounding five others.\textsuperscript{1939}

In its annual 2018 report, UNAMA expressed concern over the increase in incidents of pro-Government armed groups deliberately targeting and killing civilians during search operations. Most of the casualties were caused by the Khost Protection Force in Khost, Paktya and Paktika.\textsuperscript{1940}

In May 2018, an Afghan National Police member shot and killed a 12-year-old boy who refused to carry water in Omna district. In retaliation, a member of the Afghani Local Police killed two members of the Police involved in the killing.\textsuperscript{1941}

In early January 2019, at least 5 civilians were killed and 7 others wounded, after an unexploded ordnance detonated in Janikhel district.\textsuperscript{1942} In October 2018 three children were killed by an unexploded ordnance in Urgun district.\textsuperscript{1943}

In December 2018, clashes between security forces and armed insurgents closed at least 35 schools in Paktika province, most of them in Khoshamand district;\textsuperscript{1944} also in Urgun district, a middle school was torched.\textsuperscript{1945} In April 2018, a tribal elder and brother of a lawmaker was killed by Taliban insurgents in Sharan district.\textsuperscript{1946}

### 2.26.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 4 052 persons displaced from Paktika, most of them (3 737) displaced within the province; the others went to Khost province.\textsuperscript{1947}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019 reporting 1393 persons displaced from Paktika province, all within the province.\textsuperscript{1948}

No conflict-induced internal displacement was reported by UNOCHA to this province for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018.\textsuperscript{1949}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019 reporting 1 393 persons displaced to Paktika, from Naka and Bermel districts to Sharan and Urgun within the province.\textsuperscript{1950}

|----------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|

\textsuperscript{1937} Khaama Press, Senior Haqqani Network leader killed in Paktika airstrike, 25 December 2018, \url{url}; Salaam Times, Afghan air strike kills Haqqani Network leader in Paktika, 26 December 2018, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1938} Khaama Press, Drone strikes leave at least 15 militants dead in Ghazni and Paktika, 13 December 2018, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1939} Pajhwok Afghan News, 9 civilians killed & wounded in Paktika airstrike, 6 November 2018, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1940} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, \url{url}, p. 35

\textsuperscript{1941} UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, \url{url}, pp. 43-44

\textsuperscript{1942} Tolonews, Explosion in Paktika Leaves Six Civilians Dead, 7 January 2019, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 civilians killed, 7 wounded in Paktika bomb blast, 7 January 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1943} Pajhwok Afghan News, Leftover bomb kills 3 children in Paktika, 11 October 2018, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1944} Pajhwok Afghan News, 35 Paktika schools closed over insecurity: official, 16 December 2018, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1945} Pajhwok Afghan News, Gunmen set on fire a middle school in Paktika, 29 December 2018, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1946} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban gun down lawmaker's brother in Paktika, 3 April 2018, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1947} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1948} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement in 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1949} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement in 2018, 28 January 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1950} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement in 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, \url{url}
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<td>Urgun</td>
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2.27 Paktya

2.27.1 General description of the province

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 districts: Ahmadaba, Alikhel (or Jaji), Chamkani, Dand Wa Patan, Gardez, Janikhel, Lija Ahmad Khel (or Laja Mangel), Sayedkaram (or Mirzaka), Shawak, Zadran and Zurmat. According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Paktya is estimated at 590,668 for 2018/19 and is composed mainly of Pashtuns, followed by Tajiks.

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 Ghulam Khan at the Afghan-Pakistani border. Taliban militants are reported to search vehicles and look for government employees on the Gardez-Kabul highway, and according to Khaama Press, they kidnapped 22 passengers on the Kabul-Gardez

1951 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Paktya Provincial Overview, n.d., url
1952 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Paktya Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
1954 Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 2
1955 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Paktya Provincial Overview, n.d., url; Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Paktia, 1 February 2017, url
highway in late July 2018.\textsuperscript{1959} Also in July 2018 and on the same highway, the Taliban purportedly attacked the convoy of Paktya’s governor and the vehicles of the provincial prosecutor.\textsuperscript{1960} Moreover, the Ghazni-Paktya highway was closed by Taliban militants after fights with the Afghan security forces in Ghazni province, in May 2018.\textsuperscript{1961}

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Paktya has maintained poppy-free status since 2013.\textsuperscript{1962}

### 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.\textsuperscript{1963} 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 Sunni \textit{tanzim}, or mujahideen-party, founded in 1979-1980 in Peshawar and operating mainly in Paktya and Logar provinces. Established as an umbrella organisation of the anti-Soviet movement, the Harakat started to operate its own armed resistance after Hezb-e Islami and Jamiat-e Islami left the organization. Harakat differed from these two mainly Muslim Brotherhood-inspired groups, as it was founded on a strong \textit{ulema} base and had arisen as a local, rural and traditional Islamist movement.

After 1993, following a change in the power structure of the mujahideen government, Nabi Muhammad, the then leader of Harakat, dissolved the party and exhorted its members to join the Taliban, which many of them did.\textsuperscript{1964} As of December 2015, the Harakat party has returned to the political scene as a more moderate movement among different \textit{tanzims}. It has thus been seen by many as a ‘bridge’ for peace talks with the Taliban, due to its ‘special relationship’ with them.\textsuperscript{1965}

According to AAN, even though Loya Paktya, composed of Khost, Paktya and Paktika, ‘had not been Taliban heartland, […] the Taliban had dealt with it reasonably well’.\textsuperscript{1966} 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 mind-set 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.\textsuperscript{1967} In June 2018 Gardez city hosted a pro-peace gathering with tribal elders from Paktya, Paktika and Khost provinces who asked the Taliban to extend the ceasefire of Eid ul-Fitr. Moreover, many dwellers of Paktya province have been said to have pleaded for the creation of safe areas for peace talks with Taliban militants.\textsuperscript{1968}

Paktya province is witnessing an active insurgency, nevertheless, it is constrained however by robust tribal affiliation and united local communities on which it has to rely in order to coordinate its operations, according to an AAN report from August 2018.\textsuperscript{1969} The fact that the hostility of ‘even a minor community’ would be counterproductive for the insurgents ‘discourages acts that would
antagonize whole communities’.\textsuperscript{1970} In October 2018 Thomas Ruttig described Paktya province as a ‘Taliban stronghold’.\textsuperscript{1971}

The Haqqani network started to expand in Loya Paktya some years before 2011\textsuperscript{1972} and has now become powerful in Paktya province.\textsuperscript{1973} According to some sources quoted by AAN, the network had tried to expand into Zurmat district; five years ago it purportedly armed and supported Kuchi nomads who claimed governmental land in the district. Moreover, the Haqqanis allegedly demanded transit rights through Zurmat valley for them and their allies, Al Qaeda foreign fighters coming from the former Soviet Union, in order to reach Gardez city and potentially Kabul.\textsuperscript{1974}

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. Most of the Dari speaking population of Paktya are Sunni Tajiks, whereas the Shia minority among them belongs to a separate group called Sadat (singular Sayyed). The Sadat from Khwajah Hassan are said to have been living in the area without conflict with the Sunni (Tajik and Pashtun) communities of the province. Actually, according to sources quoted by AAN, both religious communities have cooperated and fought alongside to defend Gardez, since the Soviet invasion. After the ISKP attack on the Shia mosque in Khwajah Hassan in August 2018, many members of Gardez Sunni community took part in the funerals of the victims and mourned for the dead.\textsuperscript{1975}

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Paktya 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{1976}

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Paktya province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.\textsuperscript{1977} When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

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<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%</td>
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\textsuperscript{1970} Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia’s Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1971} taz, Nicht nur die Taliban als Problem, 21 October 2018, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1972} Clark, K., 2001 Ten Years on (3): The fall of Loya Pakta and why the US preferred warlords, 24 November 2011, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1973} Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1974} Clark, K., Khost Protection Force Accused of Fresh Killings: Six men shot dead in Zurmat, AAN, 21 January 2019, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1975} Foschini, F., Hitting Gardez: A vicious attack on Paktia’s Shias, AAN, 18 August 2018, \url{url}

\textsuperscript{1976} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, \url{url}, p. 16


\textsuperscript{1978} LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
Chamkani | Open Taliban presence - low | GIRoA Influence | GIRoA Influence | Gov control or undetermined | TB control: 80%; Gov control: 15%
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | ---
Dand Wa Patan | Open Taliban Presence - high | Contested | Contested | Contested | Gov control: 70%; TB control: 30%
Gardez (capital) | Open Taliban Presence - high | GIRoA Influence | GIRoA Influence | Gov control or undetermined | TB control: 60%; Gov control: 40%
Lija Ahmad Khel (Laja Mangel) | Open Taliban presence - low | GIRoA Influence | GIRoA Influence | Contested | TB control: 85%; Gov control: 15%
Janikhel | Open Taliban Presence - high | Contested | Contested | Taliban control | /
Sayedkaram (Mirzaka) | Open Taliban presence - low | Sayedkaram: contested and Mirzaka: GIRoA Influence | Sayedkaram: contested and Mirzaka: GIRoA Influence | Contested | TB control: 80%; Gov control: 15%
Shawak | Open Taliban presence - low | GIRoA Influence | GIRoA Influence | Gov control or undetermined | /
Zadran | Open Taliban presence - low | GIRoA Influence | GIRoA Influence | Gov control or undetermined | TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%
Zurmat | Open Taliban Presence - high | Contested | Contested | Taliban control | TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%
Arma | / | / | / | / | TB control
Gerda Tserhi | / | / | / | / | TB control: 80%; Gov control: 15%

2.27.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.27.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 428 civilian casualties (152 deaths and 276 injured) in Paktya province. This represents a decrease of 13% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were suicide/complex attacks, followed by ground engagements and aerial attacks.1979

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places Gardez district in the highest category and Zurmat and Jani Khel districts in the second highest category. Sayed Karam, Jaji and Dand Wa Patan are in the third highest category and Ahmadaba, Zadran, Lija Ahmad Khel and Chamkani are in the fourth highest category. The remaining district falls into the lower category.1980

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In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 108 incidents related to insurgents in Paktya province.\(^{1981}\)

Throughout 2018, Afghan and foreign security forces carried out operations and airstrikes against insurgents in Chamkani in September 2018, killing 3 civilians and injuring 10, including women and children,\(^{1982}\) in July 2018, in Ahmadabad, killing Taliban militants,\(^{1983}\) and in Zurmat, killing at least 10 civilians,\(^{1984}\) and in Sayedkaram in May 2018, killing insurgents.\(^{1985}\) In December 2018, an airstrike that killed around 10 civilians and the deaths caused protests among the inhabitants of the area.\(^{1986}\)

UNAMA expressed concern over the increase in incidents of pro-Government armed groups deliberately targeting and killing civilians during search operations. Most of the casualties were caused by the Khost Protection Force in Khost, Paktya and Paktika.\(^{1987}\) In late December 2018, militants allegedly belonging to the Khost Protection Force executed six civilians, suspected of having links with the Taliban in Zurmat district.\(^{1988}\) Similar episodes had already affected the province, when KPF members conducted a military operation in Zurmat, killing 12 civilians in December 2018,\(^{1989}\) or when US soldiers killed 7 members of one family, among them 2 pregnant women in October 2018.\(^{1990}\)

In August 2018, ISKP attacked a Shia mosque in Khwajah Hassan, Gardez city, killing at least 38 worshippers and wounding around 80 others. It was the first attack directed against the Shia minority in the province.\(^{1991}\)

The Taliban were reported to have planted landmines on the Janikhel-Samkani highway in August 2018 and forcing civilians to surrender to them in Janikhel district.\(^{1992}\)

In the districts of Zurmat, Sayedkaram and Ahmadabad Taliban have allegedly closed schools, in protest against the poor state of school buildings.\(^{1993}\) According to Thomas Rutting, Taliban insurgents hindered the dwellers of Zurmat district to cast their vote during parliamentary elections in late October 2018.\(^{1994}\)

### 2.27.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 1 829 persons displaced from Paktya, most of them (1 358) displaced within the province\(^{1995}\) and the others went to Herat, Kabul, Kandahar, Khost and Logar provinces.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 1 554 persons displaced to Paktya province.\(^{1996}\)
No conflict-induced internal displacement from Paktya province and to this province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.\textsuperscript{1997}

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alikhel (Jaji)</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dand Wa Patan</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gardez</td>
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<td>1 554</td>
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<tr>
<td>Janikhel</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lija Ahmad Khel / Laja Mangel</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sayedkaram / Mirzaka</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zadran</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zurmat</td>
<td>322</td>
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</table>

According to UNOCHA, ‘insecurity’ and ‘conflict’ are the reasons of displacements from Paktya districts to its provincial capital.\textsuperscript{1998}

\textsuperscript{1997} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 17 March 2019, url
2.28 Panjsher

2.28.1 General description of the province

Panjsher is located in central Afghanistan and borders the provinces of Baghlan and Takhar to the north, Badakhshan to the north-east, Nuristan to the east, Laghman and Kapisa to the south, and Parwan to the west.\textsuperscript{1999} The provincial capital of Panjsher is Bazarak. The province is divided into the following districts: Bazarak, Dara (or Ab Shar or Hes-e-Duwumi), Khenj (Hes-e-Awal), Onaba (or Anawa), Paryan, Rukha and Shutul.\textsuperscript{2000} According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Parwan is estimated at 164,115 for 2018/19\textsuperscript{2001} and is composed mainly of Tajiks,\textsuperscript{2002} followed by Hazara, Pashai, Nuristani and Ghilzai Pashtuns.\textsuperscript{2003}

Panjsher province is connected to Kabul through a local road which passes through the district of Bagram in Parwan Province.\textsuperscript{2004} The distance between Kabul and Bazarak is 150 kilometres.\textsuperscript{2005} A deep and narrow gorge at the beginning of Panjsher Valley, which is said to be ‘tailor-made for obstruction and ambush’, has kept the province isolated and difficult to access.\textsuperscript{2006}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{1999} US, Naval Postgraduate School, Panjsher Provincial Overview, n.d., url; UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 21
\textsuperscript{2001} Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 2
\textsuperscript{2002} New York Times (The), Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, url
\textsuperscript{2004} Fox News, Afghanistan’s beautiful ‘Green Zone’ offers emeralds, peace, 23 May 2017, url
\textsuperscript{2005} Der Tagesspiegel, Das Panjshirtal in Afghanistan: Mit dem Stolz der Löwen, 4 March 2015, url
\textsuperscript{2006} New York Times (The), Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, url}
According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Panjshir has maintained poppy-free status since 2013.2007

### 2.28.2 Conflict background and actors in Panjsher

Panjsher province led the resistance against the Soviets and the Taliban insurgency during the 1980s and the 1990s. The province is home to the Tajik Ahmad Shah Massoud, the ‘Lion of Panjshir’, who fought against the Soviets and headed the Northern Alliance against the Taliban.2008 His grave, which is located in the province, has attracted many visitors over the years, among these also prominent politicians like Afghanistan’s Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Abdullah Abdullah.2009

The Panjshiris, the Tajik dwellers of the province, are known for their historical opposition to the Taliban and were therefore recruited by the first CIA operatives in Afghanistan after the 2001 attacks.2010 In 2012, about 70% of NDS personnel originated from Panjsher or was connected to the Northern Alliance.2011 Furthermore, in 2014 new and reinforced Afghan police checkpoints, which were mainly controlled by agents of the NDS, were set up across the road into Panjsher.2012

Many Panjshiris have been members of the Afghan political and military elite, like CEO Abdullah Abdullah or former NDS chief and now vice-presidential candidate Amrullah Saleh.2013

According to the Afghan news agency Pasbanan, ISKP was recruiting fighters in Panjsher province as of March 2018. Purportedly, 15 ISKP-affiliated individuals belonged to two Iraqi families, and they were operating under the shield of the pan-Islamic Tahrir Party. Moreover, they allegedly spoke Arabic as well as Persian, and they entered Panjsher province through Nangarhar and Laghman. Living in Ab Shar district, the families were purportedly interested in getting control over the emerald and Azure mines of the province.2014

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Panjsher province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.2015 When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

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2008 New York Times (The), Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, url; Washington Post (The), ‚The Lion of Kandahar‘: Was slain commander a hero or part of the problem?, 29 November 2018, url
2009 Pajhwok Afghan News, President, CEO arrive in Panjshir province,1 January 2016, url; Stars and Stripes, As Afghan war escalates, security fears grow in peaceful valley, 7 November 2016, url
2010 Christian Science Monitor (The), Why Afghanistan’s intelligence agency has a major blind spot, 23 April 2012, url
2011 Christian Science Monitor (The), Why Afghanistan’s intelligence agency has a major blind spot, 23 April 2012, url
2012 New York Times (The), Recalling Past Threats, Afghans in Tranquil Valley Work to Keep It That Way, 13 January 2014, url; Washington Post (The), ‚The Lion of Kandahar‘: Was slain commander a hero or part of the problem?, 29 November 2018, url
2014 Pasbanan, Panjshir, is threatened by ISIS recruitment, 8 March 2018, url
2.28.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.28.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented no civilian casualties in Panjsher province. In a map depicting ‘conflict severity’ in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the entire province Panjshir into the lowest category.

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 2 incidents related to insurgents in Panjsher province.

The number of Taliban attacks in Panjsher has been relatively low compared to other areas of the country. The most prominent assaults date back several years ago. In 2015 Taliban insurgents detonated suicide vests in front of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) office; in 2014 a Taliban suicide-attack took place at a check-point and killed at least 12 Afghan security forces and civilians and injured 35 more; in 2013 the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan assaulted the governor’s

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2016 LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
2021 SBS News, Panjshir attacks shows all Afghanistan, unsafe, 26 February 2015, url
2022 LWJ, Taliban claim suicide assault in Panjshir Valley, 2 May 2014, url; BBC News, Taliban in deadly Afghanistan Panjshir suicide bombing, 1 May 2014, url
According to the US-military news website Stars and Stripes, inhabitants from Panjsher began to fear a growth of Taliban presence in their lands in 2016, as fighting in neighbouring Baghlan and nearby Kunduz provinces was ongoing.

2.28.3.2 Displacement

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Panjsher province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018.

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Panjsher province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 189 persons displaced to Panjsher province, coming from neighbouring provinces Laghman, Nuristan, Badakhshan and Baghlan. These 189 IDPs were registered in the first six months of 2018. In July and December 2018, UNOCHA’s Weekly Field Reports respectively reported 600 and 840 individuals displaced to Panjsher from the four above mentioned provinces.

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Panjsher province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bazarak</td>
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<td>63</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Onaba (Anawa)</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Khenj (Hes-e-Awal)</td>
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<td>63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rukha</td>
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<td>35</td>
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According to UNOCHA the main reasons for the displacement of IDPs arriving in Panjsher province were insecurity, threat, military operations, intimidation and frequent fighting in their places of origin.

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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2023 LWJ, IMU, Taliban launched joint suicide assault in Panjshir, 1 June 2013, url
2024 Stars and Stripes, As Afghan war escalates, security fears grow in peaceful valley, 7 November 2016, url
2026 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, url
2028 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, url
2030 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, url
2031 UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Panjsher Province - Meeting Summary, 3 April 2018, url, p. 1; UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Panjsher Province - Meeting Summary, 15 July 2018, url, p. 1
2.29 Parwan

2.29.1 General description of the province

Parwan is located in the central part of Afghanistan. It borders Baghlan in the north, Panjshir and Kapisa in the east, Kabul and Wardak in the south and south-east and Bamyan in the west. Its provincial capital is Charikar. The province is divided into the following districts: Bagram, Charikar, Ghorband (or Siya Gird), Jabalussaraj, Koh-e-Safi, Salang, Saydkhel, Shekhali, Shinwari and Surkh-e-Parsa.

According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Parwan is estimated at 711,621 for 2018/19 and is composed mainly of Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Qizilbash, Kuchi and Hazara.

The Salang Pass Tunnel, which is located between Parwan and Baghlan provinces, connects Kabul to northern Afghanistan. A highway from Kabul runs through the districts of Charikar, Jabalussaraj and Salang to Kunduz province; moreover, another highway connecting Parwan and Bamyan provinces runs through Charikar, Shinwari, Ghorband, Shekhali and the Shibar Pass. The Parwan-Bamyan highway has occasionally been closed due to clashes between Taliban militants and Afghan security forces.

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2033 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Parwan Provincial Overview, n.d., url
2034 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Parwan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
2035 Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 2
2036 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Parwan Provincial Overview, n.d., url
2037 Tolonews, Road Works Underway On Salang Pass, 1 September 2018, url
2038 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Parwan Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
forces. An abduction perpetrated by the Taliban took place along the Kabul-Bamyan route in Shekhali district in August 2018. Parwan province hosts Bagram Air Base, the largest NATO military base in Afghanistan.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Parwan has maintained poppy-free status since 2013.

2.29.2 Conflict background and actors in Parwan

According to Khaama Press, Parwan was considered ‘relatively calm’ until the security situation started deteriorating in some of the province’s districts. In 2011, the insurgency started to expand its activities into Siya Gird, Shinwari, which are Pashtun majority districts, and Surkh-e-Parsa, where the Sunni Hazara majority sympathized with Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin forces due to the fact that it was ‘at odds’ with the Shia Hazara in neighbouring Bamyan province. Moreover, the Pashtun areas of Ghorband valley supported HIG-forces during the civil war. Some of these forces were absorbed by the Taliban during their subsequent rule.

In 2011, the Taliban started their spring offensive and appointed shadow district governors for Shinwari, Siya Gird and even Also Koh-e-Safi, which was traditionally a bastion of HIG. The province has also been affected by a long-established rivalry between Jamiat-e Islami and HIG, as Tajik ethnic groups affiliated with Jamiat were powerful strongmen and had important networks throughout the area. Many of them were in control of Parwan’s administration. The Taliban also appointed Tajiks into their ranks to avoid limiting the insurgency exclusively to the Pashtun ethnicity.

As reported by LWJ in August 2018, Taliban insurgents have been active in Koh-e-Safi, Saydkhel, Shinwari, Siya Gird Ghorband and Surkh-e-Parsa, from where they planned attacks on Charikar and Bagram Air Base. Moreover, in the past Taliban militants collaborated with Al Qaeda in order to attack the NATO facility in Bagram also in 2018.

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Parwan province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban. When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

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2040 Killid Group (The), Taliban Kidnap 9 Passengers in Parwan, 30 July 2018, url
2041 LWJ, Taliban suicide bomber kills 3 Czech soldiers, 5 August 2018, url
2042 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 21
2043 Khaama Press, Taliban’s military chief for Parwan province has been killed in an infighting, 22 December 2018, url
2044 Khaama Press, Taliban’s military chief for Parwan province has been killed in an infighting, 22 December 2018, url
2045 Ruttig, T., Ghorband – A Valley Once Friendly, AAN, 19 July 2011, url
2046 Ruttig, T., Ghorband – A Valley Once Friendly, AAN, 19 July 2011, url
2047 LWJ, Taliban suicide bomber kills 3 Czech soldiers, 5 August 2018, url
2048 LWJ, Taliban suicide bomber kills 3 Czech soldiers, 5 August 2018, url
2.29.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

### 2.29.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 41 civilian casualties (20 deaths and 21 injured) in Parwan province. This represents a decrease of 47% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagement, followed by suicide/complex attacks and ground engagements [sic].

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements – UNOCHA places Ghorband district in the second highest category and Bagram and Shinwari in the fourth highest category. The remaining districts fall into the two lowest categories.

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 49 incidents related to insurgents in Parwan province.

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2050 LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
2051 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](p. 68)
2052 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](p.2)
Afghan and foreign forces carried out a night raid in Jabalussaraj district in November 2018, killing three civilians. In September 2018 US forces carried out an airstrike targeting Taliban insurgents who were allegedly trying to attack Bagram airbase, killing four of them.

Fighting between Taliban and Afghan security forces took place in several districts of Parwan province in 2018, such as Siya Gird, Shinwari and Shekhali, causing casualties mostly among the insurgents. In late December 2018, the Taliban shadow military chief for Parwan province was killed in Jabalussaraj district after a supposed fight among the insurgents themselves. Taliban fighters were attacking Afghan and international security forces, killing NATO soldiers near the provincial capital in August 2018. In early January 2019 unidentified militants kidnapped the district court chief of Shinwari district.

In mid-February 2019, unidentified gunmen shot dead an appellant court employee in Charikar district. In January 2019, suspected militants kidnapped the court chief of Shinwari district. Also in January 2019, the Taliban seized 45 schoolteachers in Siya Gird district. Moreover, the Taliban abducted nine people along the Kabul-Bamyan route in Shekhali district in August 2018.

A 16-year-old boy was shot and killed by an unidentified gunman in Sayedkhel in April 2018. According to the district administrative chief, the teenager had been threatened before on the phone by ISKP militants for not assisting them.

A December 2018 study on Charikar municipality found that around 100 businessmen, heads of government institutions, law makers and NGOs had left Parwan province due to insecurity, extortion and armed robberies.

According to a report on elections-related violence by UNAMA, road blockades were set up in Parwan by insurgents during the two days of elections in October 2018 to keep locals from voting and to delay the transport of electoral material.

2.29.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 84 persons displaced from Parwan province, displaced within the province itself or to the neighbouring province of Kapisa.
No conflict-induced internal displacement from Parwan province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019.\textsuperscript{2068}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 - 31 December 2018, reporting 1 113 persons displaced to Parwan province, mainly coming from Kapisa, Kunar and Laghman provinces, from Baghlan province and a small number from within the province itself.\textsuperscript{2069}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 - 28 February 2019 reporting 105 persons displaced to Parwan province coming from Kapisa and Laghman provinces.\textsuperscript{2070}

\begin{table}[h]
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{District} & \textbf{Displaced from (2018)} & \textbf{Displaced to (2018)} & \textbf{Displaced from (2019)} & \textbf{Displaced to (2019)} \\
\hline
Shinwari & 49 & / & / & / \\
Ghorband & 35 & / & / & / \\
Bagram & / & 364 & / & / \\
Charikar & / & 595 & / & 105 \\
Jabalussaraj & / & 154 & / & / \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

According to UNOCHA the main reasons for the displacement of IDPs arriving in Parwan were insecurity, threats, military operations and armed conflict in their places of origin.\textsuperscript{2071}

In March and October 2018, UNOCHA reported on ongoing military operations by ANSF in Tagab and Alasay districts of Kapisa province leading to the displacement of a significant number of civilians to secure districts of nearby provinces, including Parwan.\textsuperscript{2072} Another group of IDPs coming from Shigal Wal Sheltan and Dangam districts of Kunar province arrived in Parwan in October 2018, due to being continuously under the attack of heavy artillery fire from ANSF.\textsuperscript{2073}

In March and July 2018 UNOCHA’s Weekly Field Reports and OCT Meeting Summaries reported on IDP’s from Nuristan, Samangan and Sar-e-Pul province arriving in Parwan.\textsuperscript{2074} According to the Afghan authorities a group of more than 900 displaced individuals arrived in Parwan province in October 2018, coming from insecure districts in Kabul, Kapisa and Kunar provinces.\textsuperscript{2075}

At the end of February 2019, the head of Directorate of Refugees and Repatriations reported during an OCT meeting in Parwan that 180 displaced families that arrived in different districts in the province in the past two to three months, coming from insecure areas in Laghman, Kunar, Nangarhar, Kapisa, Baghlan and Takhar provinces.\textsuperscript{2076}

\textsuperscript{2073} UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Parwan Province - Meeting Summary, 3 October 2018, \url{https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/afghanistan-oc-t-meeting-summary-2018-10-03.pdf}, p. 1
2.30 Samangan

2.30.1 General description of the province

The northern province Samangan borders Balkh to the north and the north-east, Baghlan to the east, Bamyan to the south and Sar-e Pul to the west. The provincial capital of Samangan is Aybak. The province is divided into the following districts: Aybak, Dara-e-Suf-e-Payin (Lower Dara-e-Suf), Dara-e-Suf-e-Bala (Upper Dara-e-Suf), Feroznakhchir, Hazrat-e-Sultan, Khuram Wa Sarbagh and Ruy-e-Duab. According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Samangan is estimated at 415,343 for 2018/19 and composed of Tajiks, Uzbeks, Pashtuns, Hazaras, Arabs, Tatars and Aimaq.

The province lies strategically, to the north of the Hindu Kush. A section of 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. Taliban militants attacked check points along the road which connects Dara-e-Suf to Mazar-e Sharif in January 2019 and kidnapped
passengers travelling on the road running through Upper Dara-e-Suf district, which connects the district’s mines with local Afghan markets in December 2018.\textsuperscript{2085}

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-e-Suf and Upper Dara-e-Suf.\textsuperscript{2086}

\subsection*{2.30.2 Conflict background and actors in Samangan}

According to governmental sources quoted by Pajhwok Afghan News in April 2018, ‘dozens’ of illegal armed groups were active in Samangan,\textsuperscript{2087} as were pro-government militias.\textsuperscript{2088}

Moreover, Taliban insurgents have been operating in the province throughout 2018.\textsuperscript{2089}

As reported by the United States Institute of Peace, ISKP used to recruit militants in Samangan province in 2016.\textsuperscript{2090}

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Samangan province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Corps, which falls under Train Advise Assist Command-North (TAAC-N), led by German forces.\textsuperscript{2091}

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Samangan province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.\textsuperscript{2092} When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\hline
\textbf{Aybak (capital)} & Open Taliban presence – low & GIRoA Influence & GIRoA Influence & Gov control or undetermined & Gov control: 80\%; TB control: 20\% \\
\hline
\textbf{Dara-e-Suf-e-Bala} & Open Taliban presence – low & GIRoA Influence & GIRoA Influence & Gov control or undetermined & TB control: 60\%; Gov control: 40\% \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

\textsuperscript{2085} Tolonews, Taliban Abducts 40 Passengers In Samangan, 2 December 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, Mineral resources of Samangan province, 23 July 2014, url
\textsuperscript{2086} UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 25
\textsuperscript{2087} Pajhwok Afghan News, Dozens of illegal armed group active in Samangan, 8 April 2018, url
\textsuperscript{2088} Al Jazeera, Taliban launch deadly attacks as they attend Afghan peace talks, 5 February 2019, url
\textsuperscript{2089} Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban closing in on Dara-i-Sauf Payeen district, 29 November 2018, url; Tolonews, Two Policemen Killed In Samangan Clash, 6 January 2019, url; Khaama Press, Samangan’s Security chief, several soldiers killed in Taliban attack, 16 October 2018, url; AP News, Taliban attack Afghan security forces in north, killing 52, 10 September 2018, url
\textsuperscript{2090} USIP, The Islamic State in Afghanistan, Assessing the Threat, 7 April 2016, url, p. 2
\textsuperscript{2091} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, url, p. 16
\textsuperscript{2093} LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
### 2.30.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

#### 2.30.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 46 civilian casualties (19 deaths and 27 injured) in Samangan province. This represents an increase of 21% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were (non-suicide) IEDs, followed by targeted/deliberate killings and ground engagements.\(^{2094}\)

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places Aybak district in the third highest category and Lower Dara-e-Suf, Upper Dara-e-Suf and Khuram Wa Sarbagh in the fourth highest category. The remaining districts fall into the two lowest categories.\(^{2095}\)

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 43 incidents related to insurgents in Samangan province.\(^{2096}\)

The Taliban attacked a pro-government militia in Dara-e-Suf district, killing and wounding militants as well as civilians in February 2019. According to local sources quoted by Al Jazeera, the Taliban targeted local villagers, among them women and children; since Dara-e-Suf is a remote area there is no police presence in some villages;\(^{2097}\) and residents have their own local militia to enhance security.\(^{2098}\)

Moreover, Taliban insurgents attacked Afghan security force posts in Lower Dara-e-Suf district throughout 2018, killing, among other soldiers, Samangan’s security chief in October;\(^{2099}\) the Taliban also suffered casualties among their own ranks.\(^{2100}\)

At least ten civilian casualties were reported in Lower Dara-e-Suf in February 2019, as a result of clashes with the Taliban who were attempting to get *usher* and *zakat* (taxes) from them.\(^{2101}\)

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\(^{2094}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

\(^{2095}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p. 2

\(^{2096}\) Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

\(^{2097}\) Tolonews, 10 Civilians Killed In Samangan Clash, 4 February 2019, [url](#)

\(^{2098}\) Al Jazeera, Taliban launch deadly attacks as they attend Afghan peace talks, 5 February 2019, [url](#)


\(^{2100}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Police retake 40 Samangan villages from Taliban, 15 October 2018, [url](#); AP News, Taliban attack Afghan security forces in north, killing 52, 10 September 2018, [url](#)

\(^{2101}\) Tolonews, 10 Civilians Killed In Samangan Clash, 4 February 2019, [url](#)
December 2018, 60 drivers of coal-supplying trucks in Dara-i-Suf Payan district were abducted by Taliban militants. The Taliban demanded tax from drivers who refused to make the payment. The truck conductors were also abducted, but were released soon afterwards. In late April 2018, in Aybak district, the Taliban shot dead a mullah who was known for preaching against the Taliban, while he was at a wedding party, as well as another woman, and injured two more. In February 2018, four employees of a construction firm were kidnapped by unidentified gunmen, allegedly by the Taliban in Aibak, the provincial capital.

2.3.0.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 3997 persons displaced from Samangan province, mainly within the province itself, but also to Kabul province. No conflict-induced internal displacement from Samangan province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 3 836 persons displaced to Samangan province, coming mainly from within the province itself. No conflict-induced internal displacement to Samangan province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aybak</td>
<td>2 884</td>
<td>3 584</td>
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<td>Dara-e Suf-e-Bala</td>
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<td>Dara-e-Suf-e-Payin</td>
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<td>Khuram Wa Sarbagh</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ruy-e-Duab</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>/</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In February 2019, around 50 families were displaced from Faryab to Aibak city owing to conflict between the Taliban and security forces.

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2102 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban abduct 60 coal truck drivers in Samangan, 2 December 2018, url
2103 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 29
2104 Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 construction firm workers kidnapped in Samangan, 25 February 2018, url
2105 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, url
2106 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, url
2107 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, url
2108 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, url
2109 Pajhwok Afghan News, 50 families displaced in Samanga due to conflict, 23 February 2019, url
2.31 Sar-e Pul

2.31.1 General description of the province
Sar-e Pul is located in the northern part of Afghanistan. It became province of its own in 1988, when Jawzjan ceded it. Sar-e Pul borders Jawzjan in the north, Balkh in the north-east, Samangan in the east, Bamyan and Ghor in the south and Faryab in the west. The provincial capital is Sar-e Pul. The province is divided into the following districts: Balkhab, Gosfandi, Kohestanat, Sancharak, Sar-e Pul, Sayad and Sozmaqala. According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Sar-e-Pul is estimated at 599,137 for 2018/19 and is composed mainly of Uzbeks, followed by Hazaras, Tajiks, Pashtun, Arabs, Aimaq and Balochs.

A Highway from Sheberghan, Jawzjan province, connects the provincial capital of Sar-e Pul with the Mazar-e Sharif–Herat section of Highway One. Taliban militants purportedly attacked multiple checkpoints in the outskirts of Sar-e Pul city from Highway One in early January 2019. An abduction of passengers travelling to Mazar-sharif perpetrated by Taliban militants in Balkhab district was reported in late November 2018. In September 2018, the Sar-e Pul–Jawzjan highway was occasionally closed due to clashes between the insurgents and the Afghan security forces. Taliban militants had set up check points along it.

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, Sancharak 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.

### 2.3.1.2 Conflict background and actors in Sar-e Pul

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. Since 2012 the province has become a ‘Taliban stronghold’. 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

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the districts. For instance, in Kohestanat, the movement was mainly led by Aimaq and Tajiks, whereas in Sozmaqala it was mostly controlled by Uzbeks.2125

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 in offering military training to new Taliban recruits.2126

According to several sources including an April 2018 Jamestown Foundation report,2127 Long War Journal report of July 2018,2128 TASS Russian News Agency reporting in August 20182129 and BBC research between August and November 2017, fighters of the Islamic State were active in parts of the province.2130 Contravening these declarations, AAN found no evidence of the presence of militants affiliated with the IS or the ISKP in Sar-e Pul province, as of September 2018; noting that existing reporting and locals may have confused IS with the IJU.2131

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Sar-e Pul province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Corps, which falls under Train Advise Assist Command-North (TAAC-N), led by German forces.2132

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Sar-e Pul province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.2133 When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balkhab</td>
<td>Gov control</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Gov control or undetermined</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gosfandi</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - low</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kohestanat</td>
<td>Taliban control</td>
<td>High INS Activity</td>
<td>High INS Activity</td>
<td>Taliban control</td>
<td>TB control</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2125 Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban in the North (2): Case studies of Uzbek Taleban in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, AAN, 17 March 2017, url
2126 Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, url
2127 Jamestown Foundation, Islamic State a Deadly Force in Kabul, Terrorism Monitor Volume: 16 Issue: 7, 6 April 2018, url
2128 LWJ, Taliban, Islamic State continue battle in northern Afghanistan, 18 July 2018, url
2129 TASS Russian News Agency, Russia records unidentified helicopters delivering weapons to Taliban, IS in Afghanistan, 23 August 2018, url
2130 BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, url
2131 Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, url
2132 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, url, p. 16
2134 LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
### EASO COUNTRY OF ORIGIN INFORMATION REPORT: AFGHANISTAN - SECURITY SITUATION

#### Sancharak
- Open Taliban presence - low
- Contested
- Contested
- Contested
- TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%

#### Sar-e-Pul (capital)
- Sancharak
- Open Taliban presence - low
- Contested
- GI RoA Influence
- GI RoA Influence
- Contested
- TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%

#### Sayad
- Open Taliban presence - Medium
- Contested
- Contested
- Contested
- TB control: 75%; Gov control: 5%

#### Sozmaqala
- Open Taliban presence - low
- Contested
- Contested
- Contested
- TB control: 75%; Gov control: 5%

#### Al Badr
- /
- /
- /
- /
- TB control

#### Al Fath
- /
- /
- /
- /
- TB control

#### Sheram
- /
- /
- /
- /
- TB control

#### Sayedabad
- /
- /
- /
- /
- TB control: 70%; Gov control: 30%

#### Andkhoi
- /
- /
- /
- /
- Gov control

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

#### 2.31.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 101 civilian casualties (22 deaths and 79 injured) in Sar-e Pul province. This represents a decrease of 6% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by UXO/landmines and (non-suicide) IEDs and targeted or deliberate killings.\(^{2135}\)

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places Sar-e Pul, Sayad, and Sancharak in the second highest category and Sozmaqala in the fourth highest category, while the remaining districts fall into the category below.\(^{2136}\)

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 71 incidents related to insurgents in Sar-e Pul province.\(^{2137}\)

In 2018, security conditions in Sar-e Pul province were considered 'serious'\(^{2138}\) and the province was described as 'contested'.\(^{2139}\) Insurgents were active in the districts of Kohestanat\(^{2140}\) - which fell under Taliban's rule in 2015,\(^{2141}\) and districts of Sayad and Sozmaqala.\(^{2142}\) During the 2018 electoral process, people did not register in Kohestanat and some registration centres were closed in Sayad and Sozmaqala.\(^{2143}\)

The provincial capital of Sar-e Pul nearly fell to Taliban insurgents in September 2018\(^{2144}\) and its outskirts were attacked in January 2019,\(^{2145}\) resulting in casualties, mostly among Afghan security forces.

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2135 UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 68
2139 Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, url
2141 Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, url
2144 Tolonews, Center of Sar-e Pul on Verge of Collapse, Heavy Clashes Ongoing, 10 September 2018, url; Reuters, Dozens killed in heavy fighting in northern Afghanistan, 10 September 2018, url
2145 Tolonews, Over 20 Soldiers Killed In Sar-e-Pul clashes, 1 January 2019, url; MENAFN, Afghanistan- Taliban attacks in Sar-e Pul kill at least 21 security forces, 2 January 2019, url
forces, but also among the militants themselves, according to Afghan government officials. The attack in early January 2019 was purportedly aimed at securing an oil-rich area near the provincial capital.

In February 2019, Taliban militants gunned down the executive director of Gosfandi district in Qalqola locality. In December 2018 the district police chief of Sayad was killed following clashes between the Taliban and Afghan security forces in the area.

According to Tolonews, the Taliban kidnapped 25 people travelling from Balkhab district to Mazar-e-Sharif, Balkh province, in late November 2018. In July 2018, 15 civilians and seven Taliban militants were killed in a suicide blast at a fateha service for a deceased in Sayyad district. No group had claimed the attack, however, some sources held ISKP responsible for the suicide bombing. Also in July 2018, three members of a farmer’s family were killed and one was injured when the Taliban attacked his house in Sancharak district.

2.3.1.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 12 033 persons displaced from Sar-e Pul province. Most of them were displaced within the province itself (10 207), while 1 610 persons were displaced to Balkh province, and 266 persons to Jawzjan.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 9 590 persons displaced from Sar-e Pul province. They were mainly (9 548) displaced within the province itself.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 10 073 persons displaced to Sar-e Pul province.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 9 548 persons displaced to Sar-e Pul province and all of them originated from the province itself.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balkhab</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kohestanat</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sancharak</td>
<td>4 998</td>
<td>1 477</td>
<td>8 890</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sar-e-Pul</td>
<td>2 219</td>
<td>8 596</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>9 548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sayad</td>
<td>4 515</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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2146 Tolonews, Over 20 Soldiers Killed In Sar-e-Pul clashes, 1 January 2019, url; MENAFN, Afghanistan - Taliban attacks in Sar-e Pul kill at least 21 security forces, 2 January 2019, url; Reuters, Dozens killed in heavy fighting in northern Afghanistan, 10 September 2018, url
2147 Tolonews, Over 20 Soldiers Killed In Sar-e-Pul clashes, 1 January 2019, url
2148 Reuters, Taliban threaten oil fields in northern Afghanistan, 4 January 2019, url; Tolonews, Sar-e-Pul Oil Reservoirs Under Taliban Threat: Officials, 3 January 2019, url; Tolonews, Over 20 Soldiers Killed In Sar-e-Pul clashes, 1 January 2019, url
2149 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban gun down district’s executive head in Sar-i-Pul, 3 February 2019, url
2150 Tolonews, District Police Chief Killed In Taliban Attack In Sar-e-Pul, 4 December 2018, url
2151 Tolonews, Taliban Abducts 40 Passengers In Samangan, 2 December 2018, url
2152 Pajhwok Afghan News, 22 dead, many injured in Sar-i-Pul suicide attack, 17 July 2018, url
2153 Pajhwok Afghan News, Three Members Of One Family Killed In Taliban Attack In Sar-e-Pul, 7 July 2018, url
2154 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, url
2155 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, url
2156 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, url
2157 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, url
In November\textsuperscript{2158} and December\textsuperscript{2159} 2018, around 2 000 families were displaced from Sancharak to Sar-e Pul and Balkh province due to clashes between security forces and Taliban in their home district.

\textsuperscript{2158} Pajhwok Afghan News, 1,500 Sar-i-Pul families flee fresh violence to Balkh, 18 November 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2159} Pajhwok Afghan News, Hundreds flee Sar-i-Pul’s Tabar area, clash continues, 14 December 2018, \url{url}
2.32 Takhar

2.32.1 General description of the province
Takhar province is located in the north-east of Afghanistan. Its provincial capital is Taloqan.\textsuperscript{2160} Takhar borders on Tajikistan to the north, Badakhshan to the east, Panjshir and Baghlan to the south and south-west and Kunduz to the west.\textsuperscript{2161} The province is divided into the following districts: 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.\textsuperscript{2162} According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Takhar is estimated at 1,053,852 for 2018/19\textsuperscript{2163} and is composed mainly of Uzbeks, Tajiks, Pashtuns, Hazaras\textsuperscript{2164} and Arabs.\textsuperscript{2165}

The Kunduz-Takhar Highway runs through the districts of Kalafgan, Taloqan and Bangi.\textsuperscript{2166} In August 2018, Taliban militants were reported to have abducted passengers travelling through Takhar.\textsuperscript{2167} In the past, the highway has been closed occasionally because of clashes between the Taliban and Afghan security forces.\textsuperscript{2168}

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.\textsuperscript{2169} Drug smuggling routes leading into Central Asia run through some districts of Takhar province.\textsuperscript{2170}

### 2.32.2 Conflict background and actors in Takhar

According to Tajik authorities’ estimates, the 1,360 kilometre-long border with Tajikistan includes at least 300 kilometres that are not controlled by Afghan government forces. The number of Taliban militants near Tajikistan accounts to around 7,000, according to Tajik border troops.\textsuperscript{2171}

Besides the Taliban, militants from ISKP, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, drug runners and criminals are active along the Tajik border,\textsuperscript{2172} as well as members of the terrorist movement Jundullah, a splinter group of IMU, mainly composed of non-Pashtun Afghans.\textsuperscript{2173} Purportedly, a small number of Islamic Jihad Union fighters, a movement mainly composed of Uzbeks from Uzbekistan, are active in parts of the province. These fighters are part of an independent front called Imom Buxoriy Katiba (Imam Bukhari’s Battalion), which operates in northern and north-eastern Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{2175}

\textsuperscript{2160} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Takhar province, n.d., \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2161} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2162} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, \url{url}; Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Takhar province, n.d., \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2163} Afghanistan, CSO, \textsuperscript{2164} [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, \url{url}, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{2165} Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Takhar province, n.d., \url{url}; US, Naval Postgraduate School, Takhar Provincial Review, n.d., \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2166} Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Takhar, 1 February 2017, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2167} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Takhar Province – District Atlas, April 2014, \url{url}; Diplomat (The), Kabul’s Plan to Realize Afghanistan’s Geographic Dividend, 5 December 2017, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2168} Khaama Press, Taliban militants kidnap 170 passengers from Kunduz-Takhar highway, 20 August 2018, \url{url}; Bakhtar News, Taliban Abduct Commuters of Three Buses in Kunduz-Takhar Highway, 20 August 2018, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2169} Tolonews, ‘Heavy Clashes’ Close Kunduz-Takhar Highway To Traffic, 5 May 2017, \url{url}; Middle East Press, Kunduz – Takhar Highway Blocked For Traffic, 17 August 2016, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2170} UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, \url{url}, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{2171} Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taliban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, \url{url}; RFE/RL, In The Dark: Tajik Border Residents Live Not Knowing What Lies Beyond, 22 November 2018, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2172} RFE/RL, In The Dark: Tajik Border Residents Live Not Knowing What Lies Beyond, 22 November 2018, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2173} RFE/RL, In The Dark: Tajik Border Residents Live Not Knowing What Lies Beyond, 22 November 2018, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2174} Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taliban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2175} Ali, O., Precarious Consolidation: Qari Hekmat’s IS-affiliated ‘island’ survives another Taleban onslaught, AAN, 4 March 2018, \url{url}.
\textsuperscript{2176} Ali, O., New Confusion about ISKP: A case study from Sar-e Pul, AAN, 7 September 2018, \url{url}.
As reported by AAN in 2017, the Taliban have been unable to ‘establish a stronger foothold’ in Takhar, despite some territorial gains starting in 2014. This has prevented them from ‘connecting their fronts in [...] the west and southwest on the one hand, and [...] the east on the other’.\textsuperscript{2176}

Former mujahideen commanders used to have significant influence over Takhar province following the fall of the Taliban regime.\textsuperscript{2177} The major ethnic groups in the province are Uzbeks and Tajiks, many of whom were connected to the local Jombesh and Jamiat-e Islami parties, which were led by strongmen with political ties to the Afghan government. Furthermore, the insurgents’ network was fragmented, as non-Pashtun militants, mainly Uzbeks, refused to fight under Pashtun commanders.\textsuperscript{2178}

Taliban insurgents started to emerge in 2010 in Darqad, a Pashtun dominated district, and spread first to the provinces bordering Kunduz and Baghlan, until they also expanded their territorial control to other districts. 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 insurgents 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.\textsuperscript{2179}

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.\textsuperscript{2180} 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, insurgents 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.\textsuperscript{2181}

In 2017 Taliban militants were mostly active in a region called Mawara-ye Kokcha, which includes the districts Khwaja Bahawuddin, Dasht-e-Qala, Darqad, Yangi Qala, Chahab and Rostaq. As most of the districts, apart from Rostaq, border on Tajikistan, there were concerns about a possible infiltration of insurgents into Central Asia and Russia.\textsuperscript{2182} According to different sources, in 2018 Taliban militants have been active in Darqad, Khwaja Ghar, Khwaja Bahawuddin, Yangi Qala, Eshkamesh\textsuperscript{2183} and Chahab\textsuperscript{2184} districts.

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Takhar province is under the responsibility of the 209th ANA Corps, which falls under Train Advise Assist Command-North (TAAC-N), led by German forces.\textsuperscript{2185}

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Takhar province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
District & Taliban & Government & Other & Not Active & Total \\
\hline
Darqad & & & & & \\
\hline
Khwaja Bahawuddin & & & & & \\
\hline
Dasht-e-Qala & & & & & \\
\hline
Yangi Qala & & & & & \\
\hline
Chahab & & & & & \\
\hline
Rostaq & & & & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{2176} Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, url
\textsuperscript{2177} Hewad, G., Ethnic Revolt or Mujahedin Solidarity? A look at the power shuffle in Takhar (amended), AAN, 17 July 2013, url; Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, url
\textsuperscript{2178} Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, url
\textsuperscript{2179} Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, url
\textsuperscript{2180} Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, url
\textsuperscript{2181} Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, url
\textsuperscript{2182} Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (3): The Takhar case study, AAN, 29 July 2017, url
\textsuperscript{2183} 1TV News, Taliban closes 27 schools in Takhar, 29 May 2018, url
\textsuperscript{2184} Ariana News, 16 policemen killed in Taliban raid in Takhar, 28 June 2018, url
\textsuperscript{2185} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, url, p. 16
Taliban.\textsuperscript{2186} When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

\begin{table}[h]
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\begin{tabular}{|l|l|l|l|l|l|}
\hline
\textbf{TAKHAR} & \textbf{BBC (reporting period: August-November 2017)} & \textbf{US military quoted by SIGAR (assessment as of July 2018)} & \textbf{US military quoted by SIGAR (assessment as of October 2018)} & \textbf{LWJ (last accessed:\textsuperscript{2187} April 2019)} & \textbf{Taliban (assessment as of December 2018)} \\
\hline
Baharak & Gov control & Contested & Contested & Contested & / \\
Bangi & Gov control & Contested & Contested & Contested & / \\
Chahab & Gov control & Contested & Contested & Contested & Gov control: 80%; TB control: 20% \\
Chal & Gov control & GIRoA Influence & GIRoA Influence & Gov control or undetermined & / \\
Darqad & Open Taliban presence - low & INS activity & INS activity & Contested & TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5% \\
Dasht-e-Qala & Gov control & Contested & Contested & Contested & TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20% \\
Eshkashem & Open Taliban presence - low & INS activity & INS activity & Contested & TB control: 50%; Gov control: 50% \\
Farkhar & Gov control & GIRoA Influence & GIRoA Influence & Gov control or undetermined & / \\
Hazarsumuch & Gov control & GIRoA Influence & GIRoA Influence & Gov control or undetermined & / \\
Khwajabahawuddin & Gov control & Contested & Contested & Contested & TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10% \\
Khwajaghar & Open Taliban presence - low & INS activity & INS activity & Contested & TB control: 80%; Gov control: 20% \\
Kalafgan & Gov control & GIRoA Influence & GIRoA Influence & Gov control or undetermined & / \\
Namakab & Gov control & GIRoA Influence & GIRoA Influence & Gov control or undetermined & Gov control: 60%; TB control: 40% \\
Rostaq & Gov control & GIRoA Influence & GIRoA Influence & Gov control or undetermined & / \\
Taloqan (capital) & Gov control & GIRoA Influence & GIRoA Influence & Gov control or undetermined & Gov control: 95%; TB control: 5% \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
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\textsuperscript{2187} LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
Warsaj
Gov control
Gov control or undetermined

Yangi Qala
Open Taliban presence - low
INS activity
Contested
TB control: 90%; Gov control: 10%

2.32.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.32.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 113 civilian casualties (26 deaths and 87 injured) in Takhar province. This represents an increase of 15% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by (non-suicide) IEDs and threat/intimidation/harassment.\(^{2188}\)

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places the district of Darqad in the second highest category and Dasht-e-Qala district in the third highest category. Eshkamesh, Khwaja Ghar and Farkhar are in the fourth highest category while the remaining districts fall into the two lowest categories.\(^{2189}\)

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 88 incidents related to insurgents in Takhar province.\(^{2190}\)

In January 2019, battles between the Taliban and the Afghan security forces were ongoing in Takhar, in an attempt by the insurgents to gain territory.\(^{2191}\) For instance, eight policemen and 10 fighters were killed after clashes occurred in Khwaja Ghar district.\(^{2192}\) Taliban have attacked a security post in Khwaja Ghar in September 2018, killing and setting on fire eight policemen.\(^{2193}\) In June 2018 Taliban insurgents attacked a security post in Chahab district and killed at least 16 members of the border police.\(^{2194}\)

In late October, the Taliban fired mortars towards a polling centre located at a school in Eshkamish district. One mortar missed the polling centre and landed on a home, killing three girls, one boy and a woman, and injuring a girl and a woman.\(^{2195}\) In mid-October 2018 in Rostaq district, a bomb explosion targeted an election rally killing 22 people and injuring 36 others.\(^{2196}\) In June 2018 the Taliban captured a female potential candidate in the forthcoming elections along with her brother in Darqad district.\(^{2197}\)

In February 2019, two radio station employees, a presenter and a journalist, were killed in Taliqan city, the capital of Takhar province by unknown gunmen who entered the station and opened fire on the staff.\(^{2198}\) In February 2019, 11 people were injured and three were killed when a mortar shell hit their home in Dasht-e-Qala district.\(^{2199}\) Still in Dasht-e-Qala, 5 members of a family were killed and 5 others were injured when a mortar shell landed on their home in August 2018.\(^{2200}\) In May 2018, the Taliban were accused by the Afghan government of having ‘attacked civilians, burned down their houses, then

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\(^{2188}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 68
\(^{2189}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, url, p. 2
\(^{2190}\) Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, url, accessed 1 March 2019
\(^{2191}\) Bloomberg, Afghan Taliban Mounts Fresh Attacks Amid Ongoing Peace Talks, 13 January 2019, url
\(^{2192}\) Xinhua News Agency, Gun Battle kills 18 including 8 police in Afghan northern Takhar province, 10 January 2019, url
\(^{2193}\) 1TV News, Eight Afghan police killed, set on fire by Taliban in Takhar, 6 September 2018, url
\(^{2194}\) Ariana News, 16 policemen killed in Taliban raid in Takhar, 28 June 2018, url
\(^{2195}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, url, p. 48
\(^{2196}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 22 dead, 36 injured in blast at Takhar election rally, 13 October 2018, url
\(^{2197}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban capture female potential candidate in Takhar, 6 June 2016, url
\(^{2198}\) Tolonews, Two Radio Station Employees Gunned Down in Takhar, 6 February 2019, url
\(^{2199}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 of a family killed, 11 wounded in Takhar mortar strike, 12 February 2019, url
\(^{2200}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 of a family killed in Takhar mortar strike, 13 August 2018, url
looted their stores’ in Takhar province, targeting them for cooperating with the government. The killing of three nurses in a clinic, which had been reported by government officials, was denied by the Taliban.

In August 2018, Taliban militants kidnapped 170 passengers travelling to Kabul through Takhar, near Khan Abad district, in Kunduz. Moreover, Taliban insurgents purportedly closed schools in Darqad, Yangi Qala, Khwaja Bahawuddin and Khwaja Ghar, as of late May 2018.

### 2.3.2.3 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data, for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 21 532 persons displaced from Takhar province, all within the province itself.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 9 562 persons displaced from Dasht-e-Qala district in Takhar province, all within the province itself.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 22 995 persons displaced to Takhar province. 21 532 of these IDPs came from within the province itself and mainly went to Taloqan city and Khwajabahawuddin and Darqad districts. In November 2018, UNOCHA registered 1 463 IDPs in Khwajaghar district, all coming from Dasht-e-Archi district in Kunduz province.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 9 562 persons displaced to Takhar province, all coming from within the province itself from Dasht-e-Qala district.

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<tr>
<td>Baharak</td>
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<td>Darqad</td>
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<td>Dasht-e-Qala</td>
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<td>903</td>
<td>9 562</td>
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<td>Eshkashem</td>
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<td>Farkhar</td>
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<td>Khwajaghar</td>
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<td>Rostaq</td>
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<td>Taloqan</td>
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<td>13 580</td>
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<td>2 975</td>
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Due to military operations in Darqad district during the first months of 2018 UNOCHA reported displacements from Darqad and Yangi Qala districts to the provincial capital Taloqan and to Khwajabahawuddin district, with peaks of 5 200 displaced people in March 2018 and 1 100 families in

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According to reporting of the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) of Takhar province in December 2018 the Taliban forced young people in Darqad district to join them, which caused displacement from the district to Taloqan city and neighbouring districts.2211

At the end of May 2018 UNOCHA reported that almost 2 000 people were displaced due to fighting over the control of Dasht-e-Qala district centre which was taken over by the Taliban for one day.2212 The IDPs were displaced within the district itself, in Rostaq and Khwajaghar districts and in the provincial capital Taloqan.2213 In September 2018, UNOCHA registered another 84 families displaced from Dasht-e-Qala district to Taloqan city.2214

In August 2018, UNOCHA appointed Baharak, Dasht-e-Qala and Khwajaghar districts as conflict areas with a daily increase of the number of displaced families.2215 In September 2018 380 families were reported displaced from Juda Bulaq village of Anbar Koh area of Baharak district to neighbouring village Qush Bulaq.2216

In November and December 2018, UNOCHA registered 572 families (4 004 individuals) displaced from different parts of Takhar province to the provincial capital Taloqan city.2217

In the Humanitarian Response Plan of December 2018, UNOCHA classified Takhar as one of the 12 provinces with large concentrations of IDPs and returnees who are most affected by the ongoing conflict and drought.2218 The Afghanistan Protection Cluster mentioned Takhar as one of the six top hosting provinces for IDPs in August 2018.2219 IOM ranked Khwajaghar 13th (January - March 2018) and 18th place (April - June 2018) of the top 20 districts hosting the most returnees and IDPs up to June 2018.2220
2.33 Uruzgan

2.33.1 General description of the province

Uruzgan province is located in the central part of Afghanistan and is also known by the name ‘Rozgan’ or ‘Uruzganis’. Uruzgan borders on Daykundi in the north, Ghazni in the east, Zabul and Kandahar in the south and Helmand in the west. The provincial capital is Tirinkot (also known as Tarinkot). Uruzgan is divided into the following districts: Chora (also Chinarto), Dehrawud, Khas Uruzgan, Shahid-e-Hassas, and Tirinkot. The district of Gizab, which was formerly part of Daykundi province, now falls within the administration of Uruzgan. Chinarto and Surab are two new districts of the province; their status has not been officially recognised yet. According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Uruzgan is estimated at 420,964 for 2018/19 and is composed mainly of Pashtuns, as well as Hazaras and Kuchi nomads.

The Kandahar-Uruzgan Highway runs through the districts of Chora and Tarinkot. Taliban militants purportedly set up checkpoints along the highway and searched or abducted travellers. Moreover,
passengers complained about the ‘shabby condition’ of the road, which extended the travel time and had a negative impact on vehicles and security. Military operations were ongoing in February 2019, in order to clear the road from Taliban insurgents. The city of Tirinkot hosts an airport, which was served by domestic scheduled passenger flights as of March 2019.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, poppy-cultivation in Uruzgan province decreased by 13% in 2018, compared to 2017, but it remains the country’s third leading opium-cultivating province. The districts with the highest rate of opium-poppy-cultivation were Tarinkot, Dehrawud, and Shahid-e-Hassas. According to the Jordanian news website Al Bawaba, the illegal crop was very common in the province in 2017; many dwellers relied economically on poppy-cultivation and the number of addicts, including women and children, reached up to 15,000.

2.33.2 Conflict background and actors in Uruzgan

Uruzgan is home to Pashtuns and Hazaras and, according to the news agency Reuters, the two ethnic groups have had an ‘uneasy co-existence’ for a long time. In some districts of the province, like Khas Uruzgan, Hazaras have lived in self-governed enclaves under local agreements with the Taliban, which so far have ensured stability.

The precarious relations between the two ethnic groups date back to the 1980s, when an intense conflict arose in the district. After one year of fighting, peace was negotiated through external mediation and was ensured by continuous efforts on the part of the village elders. As the communities took opposite sides in the post-2001 counterinsurgency campaigns, the preservation of the status quo became harder. The creation of counterinsurgency groups like the Afghan Security Guards (ASG), which were mainly composed of Hazaras, and the Afghan Local Police, in which many former Taliban commanders participated, fostered the already existing hostilities between the ethnic groups. Moreover, many Pashtuns were affiliated with Taliban insurgents through kinship and other ties, which caused distrust among the Hazara. On the other hand, the appointment of the ethnic Hazara Abdul Hakim Shujai from the ASG into the Pashtun dominated ALP in 2011 agitated the tense inter-ethnic relations even more. During his activities as ASG member and ALP commander, Shujai was accused of many abuses and extrajudicial killings of Pashtuns in the area.

As reported by multiple sources, the increased violence against the Shia community in Afghanistan risks triggering sectarian conflicts. The battles that affected Uruzgan and Ghazni in October and November 2018 outraged many Hazara, as well as Afghan citizens from other ethnic groups, and caused protests in Kabul City.

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2229 Pajhwok Afghan News, Dilapidated Kandahar road gives passengers bumpy ride, 14 November 2018, url
2230 Khaama Press, Militants suffer heavy casualties in ANDSF operations in Kandahar and Zabul, 7 February 2019, url
2231 Austria, BFA-Staatendokumentation, Afghanistan - Airports [Map], 25 March 2019
2232 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN , Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 30
2233 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN , Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 6
2234 UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN , Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, url, p. 30
2235 Al Bawaba, In Uruzgan, Afghan Mothers Feed Their Children Opium to Make Them Sleep, 2 November 2017, url
2236 Reuters, Afghan Shi'ite militia battles Taliban, raising sectarian fears, 3 November 2018, url
2237 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
2238 van Bijlert, M., Security at the Fringes: the case of Shujai in Khas Uruzgan, AAN, 6 April 2013, url
2239 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
2240 Reuters, Afghan Shi'ite militia battles Taliban, raising sectarian fears, 3 November 2018, url; Jamestown Foundation (The), How Islamic State-Khurasan is Driving Afghanistan Toward Sectarian Conflict, 12 October 2018, url
2241 Tolonews, Hundreds Protest In Kabul Over Ghazni, Uruzgan Insecurity, 12 November 2018, url; Khaama Press, Protesters gather near Presidential Palace in Kabul over recent wave of violence, 12 November 2018, url
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.\textsuperscript{2242}

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.\textsuperscript{2243}

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Uruzgan province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal (LWJ) and the Taliban.\textsuperscript{2244} When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

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<tr>
<td>Dehrawud</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - Medium</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 94%; Gov control: 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chora (Chinarto)</td>
<td>Open Taliban Presence - high</td>
<td>INS Activity</td>
<td>INS Activity</td>
<td>Taliban control</td>
<td>Chora: TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5% and Chinarto: TB control: 94%; Gov control: 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shahid-e-Hassas</td>
<td>Open Taliban Presence - high</td>
<td>INS Activity</td>
<td>INS Activity</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khasuruzgan</td>
<td>Open Taliban Presence - high</td>
<td>INS Activity</td>
<td>INS Activity</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 94%; Gov control: 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tirinkot (capital)</td>
<td>Open Taliban presence - Medium</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>GIRoA Influence</td>
<td>Contested</td>
<td>TB control: 95%; Gov control: 5%</td>
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<td>Chahr Chino</td>
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<td>/</td>
<td>TB control: 97%; Gov control: 3%</td>
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\subsection{2.3.3.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population}

\subsubsection{2.3.3.3.1 General}

In 2018, UNAMA documented 173 civilian casualties (46 deaths and 127 injured) in Uruzgan province. This represents a decrease of 70\% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground

\textsuperscript{2242} Pajhwok Afghan News, Uruzgan: 3 women from Chora district join Daesh, 18 April 2018, \url{url}
\textsuperscript{2243} USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, \url{url}, p. 15
\textsuperscript{2245} LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.
engagements, followed by (non-suicide) IEDs and aerial attacks. Further, the same source recorded 126 civilian casualties caused by ground engagements in Uruzgan province which is a 62 % decrease compared to 2017.

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018 combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places Tirinkot in the highest category and Dehrawud, Chora and Khas Uruzgan in the second highest category. Shahid-e-Hassas is placed in the fourth highest category and the remaining districts fall in the two lowest categories.

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 220 incidents related to insurgents in Uruzgan province.

Throughout 2018, Taliban militants were active in the province. They extended their operations to areas which until then had been spared, like the district of Khas Uruzgan, fomenting intense battles between Shujai's militia and the Taliban. The fighting, accounting for many casualties and internally displaced people, mostly among the Hazara civilian population, went on for almost one month until late November. There are many theories about the reasons for the Taliban expansion into new areas: some 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.

Airstrikes were reported in Uruzgan throughout 2018, mainly causing Taliban casualties, including in the outskirts of Tirinkot in Chinarto district and in Khas Uruzgan. Two children were killed, their father and another child were injured by a mortar shell landing on their house during a security operation in Tirinkot, in March 2018.

Five passengers were kidnapped and later killed by gunmen in the Urdo-Balagh locality of the Uruzgan-Kandahar highway in April 2018. In the same locality the Taliban intercepted a vehicle and kidnapped 30 passengers, after closing the Uruzgan-Kandahar highway in February 2018.

According to a report on elections-related violence by UNAMA, the Taliban tried to discourage the inhabitants of Gizab district from voting by transmitting threats through loudspeakers in local mosques. Moreover, according to a dataset from August 2018 quoted by UNOCHA, 95 percent of
the male population in Uruzgan did not feel safe when travelling to work, the mosque, health and education facilities or the market.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, \url{url}, p. 9}

\subsection*{2.3.3.2 Displacement}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 8,459 persons displaced from Uruzgan province. Among these IDPs, 7,367 were displaced within the province itself. The major part of the rest of the IDPs was displaced to Kandahar.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, \url{url}}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 161 persons displaced from Uruzgan province and all of them were originating from Dehrawud district.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, \url{url}}

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 7,410 persons originating from Uruzgan and settled in Tirinkot district of the province itself.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, 28 January 2019, \url{url}}

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Uruzgan province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, \url{url}}

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<td>Shahid-e-Hassas</td>
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<td>Tirinkot</td>
<td>5,673</td>
<td>7,410</td>
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According to UNOCHA, villagers were forced to flee their places of origin for improved safety. As of April 2018, more than 1,700 IDPs arrived to Tirinkot City due to military operations in Chora/Chinarto, Khasuruzgan and Tirinkot district.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report (26 March – 1 April 2018), 1 April 2018, \url{url}} In June 2018, IDPs continued to arrive individually or in small groups to the areas around of Tirinkot City because of fighting across the southern region provinces.\footnote{ERM, Household Assessment Report, 17 December 2018, \url{url}} Around 2,660 persons were displaced, following armed conflict in Khasuruzgan district, to Ghazni province, according to the November 4th 2018 UNOCHA Weekly Field Report.\footnote{UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 29 October - 4 November 2018, 5 November 2018, \url{url}}
2.34 Wardak

2.34.1 General description of the province

Wardak province, also known as Maidan Wardak, borders Parwan and Bamyan to the north, Kabul and Logar to the east and Ghazni to the south and west. The province is divided into the following districts: Chak, Daymirdad, Hesa-e-Awal-e-Behsud, Jaghatu, Jalrez, Markaz-e-Behsud, Maydanshahr (also Maidan Shahr), Nerkh, Saydabad. The capital city is Maidan Shahr, which is located approximately 40 kilometres south-west of Kabul. According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Wardak is estimated at 637,634 for 2018/19 and is composed of Tajiks, Pashtuns and Hazaras.

The Kabul-Kandahar highway crosses the province’s districts of Maidan Shahr, Narkh and Saydabad. A provincial road runs west from Maidan Shahr to Bamyan through the districts of Jalrez, Hesa-e-Awal-e-Behsud and the Hajigak pass; the Taliban purportedly set up check-points on this road. Afghanistan National Army soldiers have also been reported to harass and beat up locals. The Taliban also collect ushr on local roads in the province. Furthermore, as reported by the UN Secretary-General in December 2018, Taliban insurgents temporarily captured strategic posts.


2270 Afghanistan Post (The), Taliban blocks major Afghan highway in expanding attacks, 26 October 2016, url; Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Maidan Wardak, 1 February 2017, url.


2275 Pajhwok Afghan News, ANA soldiers accused of harassing civilians, 11 April 2018, url.

2276 Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban gunmen take taxes on Kabul-Bamyan highway, 5 November 2018, url.
along main roads to Kabul in Saydabad and Daymirdad districts, restricting movement between
provinces. Following clashes between Taliban and Afghan security forces, electricity was cut off in
the province and the Kabul-Kandahar highway has been closed occasionally. Moreover, demining operations took place in January 2018 on the southern highway through Maidan Wardak province.

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, Wardak province has maintained poppy-free status since 2013.

2.34.2 Conflict background and actors in Wardak

Wardak is considered a ‘relatively volatile’ province by Khaama Press, with Taliban active in some of
its districts. The Haqqani network expanded to the province in the past and used to cooperate with
jihadist groups operating south of Kabul. The Haqqani network has mainly provided indirect support
in form of funds, training, and appointing local Islamist militant leaders.

According to an article by the Jamestown Foundation, a US based institute for research and analysis,
increased violence against the Shia community risks triggering sectarian conflicts. In Wardak province,
for instance, a militia composed of 1 000 armed Hazara allied itself with Hazara groups in Ghazni and
other Hazara dominated areas in 2016, in order to create its own protection force for the central
region.

In terms of the presence of government security forces, Wardak province is under the responsibility
of the 203rd ANA Corps, which falls under the Task Force Southeast, led by US forces.

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Wardak province based on
information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the
Taliban. When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes
a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised
by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made
in a separate footnote.

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2277 UN Secretary-General, The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 7 December 2018, p. 6
2278 AP, Afghan officials say highway reopened after Taliban assault, 7 October 2018, Pajhwok Afghan News, Ghazni in
darkness since 5 days after power cables cut, 7 October 2018, url
2279 Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 people killed, 37 wounded in Wardak car bombing, 27 October 2018, AP, Afghan
officials say highway reopened after Taliban assault, 7 October 2018, url
2280 Tolonews, A Night With Deminers Clearing The Maidan Wardak Highway, 23 January 2018, url
2281 UNODC and Afghanistan, Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, p. 19
2282 Khaama Press, NDS Special Forces storm Taliban’s military compound in Wardak leaving 10 dead, 30 December 2018, url
2283 Stanford University, Mapping militant organizations, Haqqani Network, 8 November 2017, url
2284 Jamestown Foundation (The), How Islamic State-Khurasan is Driving Afghanistan Toward Sectarian Conflict, 12 October
2018, url; Khabarnama, 20 October 2016. url
2285 USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, p. 16
2286 BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United
States Congress, 30 October 2018, pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019,
pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, End of year report
(2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, url
2.34.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.34.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 224 civilian casualties (88 deaths and 136 injured) in Wardak province. This represents an increase of 170% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by suicide attacks and (non-suicide) IEDs.\(^{2288}\)

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places Jalrez and Saydabad in the second highest category and the districts Chak and Narkh in the third highest category. Maydan Shahr and Jaghatu are in the fourth highest category and the remaining districts are in the two lowest categories.\(^{2289}\)

\(^{2287}\) LWJ is a living map that is frequently updated.


In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 90 incidents related to insurgents in Wardak province.\(^{2290}\)

The province has seen intensive night raids and airstrikes that have caused casualties among civilians, the most prominent one in Jaghatu district at the end of September 2018 which killed 12 persons.\(^{2291}\) Moreover, Nerkh\(^{2292}\) and Jalrez\(^{2293}\) districts were also affected by air strikes and military operations that caused at least 11 fatalities among civilians.\(^{2294}\) Two civilians have been killed and nine others were wounded in mortar shell attacks allegedly carried out by the Taliban in the capital Maidan Shahr in late June 2018.\(^{2295}\) According to residents of Saydabad district in March 2018, four civilians were killed in a night raid by the Afghan security forces in the Tangi Dara area.\(^{2296}\)

Military operations conducted by Afghan security forces took place in Saydabad\(^{2297}\) and Chak\(^{2298}\) districts, also killing high ranking Taliban members.\(^{2299}\) Members of the Haqqani network were purportedly arrested in the province.\(^{2300}\)

Taliban insurgents carried out suicide attacks outside a police compound in the provincial capital in October 2018, as well as in January 2019, resulting in casualties among Afghan security forces, civilians and among the insurgents themselves.\(^{2301}\) The most prominent attack was a Taliban car-bomb on a National Directorate of Security base near the provincial capital, which killed between 12 and 126 Afghan security forces in January 2019.\(^{2302}\) Sources described it as 'one of the deadliest attacks against the intelligence service in the 17-year war with the Taliban'.\(^{2303}\) Furthermore, the Taliban took Afghan security force members hostage after fights between the two sides in June 2018,\(^{2304}\) they overran several government check-points in Jalrez district\(^{2305}\) and carried out battles in Daymirdad,\(^{2306}\) causing victims among the security forces and the insurgents themselves.\(^{2307}\)

In September 2018 four people were killed when their vehicle struck a landmine in the Khanjan Khel area of Nerkh district. The Taliban in the area had warned residents against traveling on the road from

\(^{2290}\) Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, url, accessed 1 March 2019
\(^{2291}\) Tolonews, Preliminary Findings Indicate Wardak Airstrike Killed 12 Civilian, 26 September, 2018, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 12 of a family killed in Wardak raid, claim residents, 24 September 2018, url; Afghanistan Times, Hundreds of Civilians Killed by Airstrikes in Past Three Months in Wardak, 9 October 2018, url
\(^{2292}\) Afghanistan Times, Hundreds of Civilians Killed by Airstrikes in Past Three Months in Wardak, 9 October 2018, url
\(^{2293}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 civilians killed in Miadan [sic!] Wardak airstrike, 23 January 2019, url
\(^{2294}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 6 civilians killed in Miadan [sic!] Wardak airstrike, 23 January 2019, url; Afghanistan Times, Hundreds of Civilians Killed by Airstrikes in Past Three Months in Wardak, 9 October 2018, url
\(^{2295}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 civilians killed, 9 hurt in Maidan Wardak mortar shells attack, 23 June 2018, url
\(^{2296}\) Tolonews, Wardak Residents Claim 4 Civilians Killed In Govt Forces Raid, 30 March 2018, url
\(^{2297}\) Khaama Press, NDS Special Forces storm Taliban’s military compound in Wardak leaving 10 dead, 30 December 2018, url
\(^{2298}\) Khaama Press, NDS Special Forces storm Taliban’s military compound in Wardak leaving 10 dead, 30 December 2018, url
\(^{2299}\) Khaama Press, Taliban’s shadow governor of Maidan Wardak killed in ANDSF operations, 20 October 2018, url
\(^{2300}\) Xinhua News Agency, One Haqqani militant killed, 5 arrested in eastern Afghanistan, 11 March 2018, url
\(^{2301}\) Tolonews, Blast Targets Afghan Forces Base in Wardak, 21 January 2019, url; Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 people killed, 37 wounded in Maidan Wardak car bombing, 27 October 2018, url; RFE/RL, Afghans Vote In Kandahar Elections Delayed By Violence, 27 October 2018, url
\(^{2302}\) New York Times (The), After Deadly Assault on Afghan Base, Taliban Sit for Talks With U.S. Diplomats, 21 January 2019, url; Guardian (The), Taliban kill ‘more than 100 people’ in attack on Afghan military base, 21 January 2019, url
\(^{2303}\) New York Times (The), After Deadly Assault on Afghan Base, Taliban Sit for Talks With U.S. Diplomats, 21 January 2019, url; Il Messaggero, Afghanistan, sangue sul disimpegno Usa: autobomba die talebani contro scuola militare, 130 vittime, 22 January 2019, url
\(^{2304}\) DW, Taliban take Afghan security forces hostage in Maidan Wardak, 23 June 2018, url
\(^{2305}\) Tolonews, 11 Security Forces Killed in Wardak Clashes, 9 September 2018, url
\(^{2306}\) VoA, Dozens of Afghan Forces Killed in Taliban Attacks, 9 September 2018, url
8pm to 4 am. In another similar incident in May 2018 four people were killed and two injured when their vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb in Tangi Dara area of Saydabad district. According to a report on elections-related violence by UNAMA, Wardak is one of the provinces where threats by the Taliban during the electoral process took place in form of ‘night letters’ to citizens, road blockages and indirect fire.

2.34.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 3 199 persons displaced from Wardak province, mainly displaced within the province itself or in neighbouring provinces Kabul and Ghazni.

No conflict-induced internal displacement from Wardak province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 2 205 persons displaced to Wardak province, mainly coming from within the province itself (2 156 IDPs) and a small number from Chaparhar district in Nangarhar province.

No conflict-induced internal displacement to Wardak province was reported by UNOCHA for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019.

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<td>Markaz-e-Behsud</td>
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In February and March 2018, UNOCHA reported on displacement out of Nerkh, Chak, Saydabad and Jalrez districts due to insecurity and conflict between Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin and the Taliban. The majority of these IDP families went to the capital of Maydanshar and the Dashte Top area of Saydabad district. In the same period, UNOCHA’s Weekly Field Reports reported on displacements from different districts in Wardak to the provincial capital of Maydanshar, due to insecurity, clashes between members of non-state armed groups and a pro-government militia and armed clashes between armed opposition groups.

2308 Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 civilians killed in Wardak roadside bombing, 7 September 2018, url
2309 Pajhwok Afghan News, 4 civilians killed, 2 injured in Maidan Wardak bombing, 24 May 2018, url
2311 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, url
2312 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, url
2313 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 28 January 2019, url
2314 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, url
2315 UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Maidan Wardak Province - Meeting Summary, 27 February 2018, url, p. 1
2316 UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Maidan Wardak Province - Meeting Summary, 27 February 2018, url, p. 1
On the 13 August, following the Taliban attack on Ghazni City, UNOCHA reported on large numbers of civilians fleeing the city to neighbouring Wardak province via the embattled Highway 1, although these reports were not confirmed by the authorities.\textsuperscript{2318} In November 2018, heavy fighting was reported in Malestan and Jaghuri districts of Ghazni province. An escalation of the conflict with intensified ground operations and airstrikes triggered displacement into Wardak, Bamyan and Kabul provinces.\textsuperscript{2319}

In October 2018 the head of DoRR reported during an OCT meeting in Wardak that the number of IDPs in the province was expected to increase, as the joint ANSF military operations were going on in different locations.\textsuperscript{2320} Furthermore, 1 600 displaced people from insecure districts within the province reportedly arrived in Maydanshar that same month.\textsuperscript{2321}

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’.\textsuperscript{2322}

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\textsuperscript{2318} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Conflict, Update No. 1, 13 August 2018, \url{url}, p. 1
\textsuperscript{2319} UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Ghazni Armed Clashes, Flash Update No. 1, 14 November 2018, \url{url}, p. 1
\textsuperscript{2320} UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team (OCT) - Maidan Wardak Province - Meeting Summary, 8 October 2018, \url{url}, p. 1
\textsuperscript{2321} UNOCHA, Afghanistan Weekly Field Report, 8 - 14 October 2018, 14 October 2018, \url{url}, p. 1
\textsuperscript{2322} UNHCR, Returnee and Internally Displaced Persons Monitoring Report - Final Report, May 2018, \url{url}, p. 19
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). Zabul is divided into the following districts: the provincial capital Qalat, Arghandab, Atghar, Daychopan, Kakar (also known as Khake Afghan), Mizan, Nawbahar, Shahjoy, Shinkay, Shomulzay, Tarnak wa Jaldak (also known as Shahr Safa). According to the Afghanistan CSO, the population of Zabul is estimated at 371,043 for 2018/19 and it is composed mainly of Pashtuns and Baloch.

The Kabul-Kandahar Highway, also known by the name ‘Highway One’, runs through the districts of Tarnak wa Jaldak, Qalat and Shahjoy. The road has a significant strategic relevance, as it connects the capital city with Kandahar, a city that is considered to be the native region of the Taliban movement. It passes through remote areas of the province, many of which are not under government control.

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2323 US, Naval Postgraduate School, Zabul Provincial Overview, n.d., url
2325 Afghanistan, CSO, [Estimated population of the country 2018-2019], June 2018, url, p. 3
2326 Afghanistan, Office of the President, Provincial Profile Zabul, 1 February 2017, url; US, Naval Postgraduate School, Zabul Provincial Overview, n.d., url
2327 Pajhwok Afghan News, Background profile of Zabul, n.d., url
2328 Telegraph (The), Kabul-Kandahar highway is a symbol of what’s gone wrong in Afghanistan, 9 September 2012, url
2329 UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Zabul Province – District Atlas, April 2014, url
control. It is a key supply route for the south.\textsuperscript{2330} Conflict-related security incidents such as illegal armed groups attacking police check-posts and detonations of improvised explosive devices are reported to have taken place along some highway sections in Zabul province.\textsuperscript{2331}

According to the 2018 UNODC Opium Survey, poppy-cultivation in Zabul province increased by 21\% in 2018, compared to 2017. The districts with the highest rate of opium-poppy-cultivation were Tarnak wa Jaldak and Mizan, where security conditions were reportedly bad.\textsuperscript{2332} The opium trade represents one of the main sources of income for the insurgency.\textsuperscript{2333}

### 2.35.2 Conflict background and actors in Zabul

In the 1980s, during the Soviet occupation, the mujahideen movement mainly infiltrated Afghanistan from Pakistan through Zabul province. Located along the ‘conservative Pashtun belt’, 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 the Hotak tribe, one of the two main tribes in the province.\textsuperscript{2334}

Nowadays considered a ‘Taliban stronghold’ in the ‘volatile south’, the province sees a weak presence of the Afghan government, which is limited to the capital city, while the majority of the population lives across numerous villages in rural areas. Among the inhabitants of Zabul the ‘feeling of being forgotten by the government’ is reportedly one of the reasons for the considerable Taliban presence in the area.\textsuperscript{2335} According to the Survey of the Afghan People 2018 by the Asia Foundation, 58.5\% of Zabul dwellers sympathized ‘a lot’ with the Taliban, the most of any province of Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{2336} Furthermore, 63\% claimed to have no fear when encountering them, while many of the respondents were sceptical of the performance by the ANA and ANP.\textsuperscript{2337}

Besides local Taliban insurgents, ISKP fighters are purportedly active in several districts of the province.\textsuperscript{2338} According to the Saudi-Arabian newspaper Arab News, confrontations about the right to lead the Afghan insurgency arose within the Taliban movement in 2015, after it was disclosed that Mullah Omar had died in 2013. This situation fuelled the hopes of ISKP, which wished to exploit these divisions in order to become the dominant faction in the southern region. After clashes between the Taliban Red Unit and the Taliban splinter group of Mullah Mohammad Rasool in the western region of Afghanistan, which caused the latter’s expulsion to Pakistan, his successor, Mullah Mansour Dadullah declared allegiance to ISKP and moved to Khak-e Afghan district in Zabul province. The ISKP group has been composed of Afghans from across the country and Uzbek militants, most of them being members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.\textsuperscript{2339} Thus, throughout 2015 ISKP had increased its influence in the province and it even targeted Highway One and abducted Hazaras and Shia Muslims. This caused the official Taliban movement to launch a military reaction, supported by the Red Unit, ending with their victory over IS in the same year.\textsuperscript{2340}

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\textsuperscript{2330} Telegraph (The), Kabul-Kandahar highway is a symbol of what’s gone wrong in Afghanistan, 9 September 2012, \url{...}; RFE/RL, The Forgotten Afghan Province That Is A Key Taliban Stronghold, 16 December 2018, \url{...}; Jamestown Foundation (The), Islamic State a Deadly Force in Kabul, 6 April 2018, \url{...}

\textsuperscript{2331} 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{...}

\textsuperscript{2332} UNODC and Afghanistan, MCN, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018, November 2018, \url{...}, p. 30

\textsuperscript{2333} RFE/RL, The Forgotten Afghan Province That Is A Key Taliban Stronghold, 16 December 2018, \url{...}

\textsuperscript{2334} RFE/RL, The Forgotten Afghan Province That Is A Key Taliban Stronghold, 16 December 2018, \url{...}

\textsuperscript{2335} RFE/RL, The Forgotten Afghan Province That Is A Key Taliban Stronghold, 16 December 2018, \url{...}

\textsuperscript{2336} Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2018, December 2018, \url{...}, p. 61

\textsuperscript{2337} Asia Foundation (The), A Survey of the Afghan People 2018, December 2018, \url{...}, p. 47

\textsuperscript{2338} Jamestown Foundation (The), Islamic State a Deadly Force in Kabul, 6 April 2018, \url{...}; Arab News, In Afghanistan, the Taliban’s anti-Daesh squad gains a reputation for ruthlessness, 27 June 2018, \url{...}

\textsuperscript{2339} Arab News, In Afghanistan, the Taliban’s anti-Daesh squad gains a reputation for ruthlessness, 27 June 2018, \url{...}; AAN, Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taleban, 24 November 2015, \url{...}

\textsuperscript{2340} Arab News, In Afghanistan, the Taliban’s anti-Daesh squad gains a reputation for ruthlessness, 27 June 2018, \url{...}
In terms of the presence of government security forces, Zabul province is under the responsibility of the 205th ANA Corps, which falls under the Train Advise Assist Command-South (TAAC-S), led by US forces.\footnote{USDOD, Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan, June 2018, \url{url}, p. 15}

The following table provides an overview of control of the districts in Zabul province based on information provided by the BBC, the US military (quoted by SIGAR), the Long War Journal and the Taliban.\footnote{BBC News, Taliban threaten 70% of Afghanistan, BBC finds, 31 January 2018, \url{url}; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 October 2018, \url{url}, pp. 219-229; SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 January 2019, \url{url}, pp. 240-250; LWJ, Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, n.d., \url{url}; Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, End of year report (2018) about Mujahideen progress and territory control, 31 December 2018, \url{url}} When a source does not provide information on a district, the field is left blank. Sometimes a district is only mentioned by one source (the Taliban). These districts are not always recognised by the government or sometimes belong, as a region, to another district. If found, clarification is made in a separate footnote.

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{ZABUL} & \textbf{BBC} & \textbf{US military} & \textbf{US military} & \textbf{LWJ} & \textbf{Taliban} \\
& (reporting period: August-November 2017) & (quoted by SIGAR) & (quoted by SIGAR) & (last accessed: April 2019) & (assessment as of December 2018) \\
\hline
Atghar & Open Taliban presence - low & Contested & Contested & Contested & TB control: 99%; Gov control: 1% \\
\hline
Arghandab & Open Taliban presence - Medium & INS Activity & INS Activity & Taliban control & TB control \\
\hline
Daychopan & Open Taliban presence - low & INS Activity & INS Activity & Contested & TB control \\
\hline
Kakar (Khak-e-Afghan) & Taliban control & High INS activity & High INS activity & Taliban control & TB control \\
\hline
Mizan & Open Taliban presence - low & Contested & Contested & Contested & TB control: 96%; Gov control: 4% \\
\hline
Nawbahar & Open Taliban presence - Medium & INS Activity & INS Activity & Contested & TB control \\
\hline
Qalat (capital) & Gov control & GIRoA control & GIRoA control & Gov control or undetermined & TB control: 75%; Gov control: 25% \\
\hline
Shahjoy & Open Taliban presence - Medium & INS Activity & Contested & Contested & TB control: 97%; Gov control: 3% \\
\hline
Shinkay & Open Taliban presence - low & Contested & Contested & Contested & TB control: 85%; Gov control: 15% \\
\hline
Shomulzay & Open Taliban presence – Medium & Contested & Contested & Contested & TB control: 88%; Gov control: 12% \\
\hline
Tarnak Wa Jaldak & Open Taliban presence - Medium & Contested & Contested & Contested & / \\
\hline
Seyuri & / & / & / & / & TB control: 98%; Gov control: 2% \\
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\end{tabular}
2.35.3 Recent security trends and impact on the civilian population

2.35.3.1 General

In 2018, UNAMA documented 293 civilian casualties (57 deaths and 236 injured) in Zabul province. This represents a decrease of 12% compared to 2017. Leading causes of casualties were ground engagements, followed by (non-suicide) IEDs and UXO/landmines.\(^{2344}\)

In a map depicting 'conflict severity' in 2018, combining three indicators: armed clashes and air strikes, civilian casualties, and conflict-induced displacements, UNOCHA places Shahjoy in the highest category and Qalat in the category below. Daychopan, Mizan and Arghandab are in the third highest category and Tarnak Wa Jaldak, Shinkay, Nawbahar and Shamul Zayi districts are in the fourth category. The remaining districts are in lower category.\(^{2345}\)

In the period from 1 January 2018 to 28 February 2019, open media sources used by the Global Incidents Map website reported 117 incidents related to insurgents in Zabul province.\(^{2346}\)

The province has seen intense fighting and military operations such as night raids and air strikes, which have caused casualties among civilians.\(^{2347}\) Taliban insurgents have been carrying out activities related to terrorism such as shootings and suicide attacks in some districts of Zabul province, resulting in casualties among the Afghan security forces and the insurgents themselves.\(^{2348}\) Furthermore, airstrikes by US forces took place in June 2018 and killed Taliban leaders and commanders.\(^{2349}\)

Three civilians were killed in July 2018 by a blast in the Juldak area of Qalat city when their vehicle was hit by a bomb allegedly planted by the Taliban.\(^{2350}\) Still in July, two children were killed and two others and a woman were injured in July 2018 when their house in Shajoy district was hit by a mortar shell fired by the Taliban.\(^{2351}\) Furthermore, a woman was killed and two others were injured when their car hit an IED in the Kam Karez area of Sayori district in February 2018.\(^{2352}\)

According to a report about 2018 elections-related violence by UNAMA, citizens from some districts of Zabul were threatened through Taliban's ‘night letters’ and asked to show their *tazkiras* on road blockades.\(^{2353}\)

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\(^{2344}\) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, 24 February 2019, [url](#), p. 68

\(^{2345}\) UNOCHA, Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019, 6 December 2018, [url](#), p.2

\(^{2346}\) Global Incident Map displaying Terrorist Acts, Suspicious Activity, and General Terrorism News, [url](#), accessed 1 March 2019

\(^{2347}\) RFE/RL, The Forgotten Afghan Province That Is A Key Taliban Stronghold, 16 December 2018, [url](#)


\(^{2349}\) Khaama Press, Taliban executioner killed in U.S. drone strike in Zabul province, 14 December 2018, [url](#); Xinhua News Agency, Airstrikes kill 2 Taliban commanders in Southern Afghanistan, 1 January 2018, [url](#)

\(^{2350}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 civilians killed in Zabul bomb blast, 7 July 2018, [url](#)

\(^{2351}\) Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 children killed in Nangarhar, Zabul incidents, 12 July 2018, [url](#)

\(^{2352}\) Tolonews, Woman Killed in Zabul Roadside Explosion, 22 February 2018, [url](#)

2.35.3.2 Displacement

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 1 897 persons displaced from Zabul province. Among them, 1 872 persons were displaced within the province itself, while the 25 other persons were displaced to Kandahar.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 1 005 persons displaced from Zabul province within the province itself.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018, reporting 2 102 persons displaced to Zabul province.

UNOCHA collected data for the period 1 January 2019 – 28 February 2019, reporting 1 152 persons displaced to Zabul province.

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According to UNOCHA, on 9 December 2018, 900 IDPs came to Qalat district from several districts because of armed conflicts in their places of origin.

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2354 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, url
2355 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2018, last updated: 20 January 2019, url
2356 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Displacement 2019, last updated: 31 March 2019, url
2357 UNOCHA, Afghanistan Conflict Induced Displacements in 2018, last updated: 28 January 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