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Country Report on Terrorism 2019 - Chapter 1 - Afghanistan

Overview: The United States partners with Afghanistan in a bilateral CT effort through Operation Freedom’s Sentinel. The U.S. military, along with 38 other Coalition nations, also supports the ANDSF through the NATO Resolute Support “Train, Advise, and Assist” mission. In 2019, the Taliban and the affiliated HQN increased terrorist attacks targeting Afghan civilians, government officials, and members of the international community. Additionally, ISIS-K continued to attack civilians and especially targeted religious minorities. The enemy-initiated attack trend in 2019 defied its usual seasonal pattern; while in most years, such attacks decrease in cold-weather months, they remained consistently high following the summer fighting season. ISIS-K, elements of al-Qa’ida, including affiliate AQIS, and terrorist groups targeting Pakistan, such as TTP, continued to use the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region as a safe haven. Afghanistan is also the only member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS from South and Central Asia.

2019 Terrorist Incidents: Attacks attributed to terrorist activity continued to increase in 2019. While the majority of attacks occurred in Kabul, Jalalabad, and other major population centers, incidents also targeted Highway 1 (Afghanistan’s national Ring Road highway). Militants conducted high-profile attacks through complex assaults involving multiple attackers wearing suicide vests to target ANDSF, Afghan government buildings, foreign governments, and soft civilian targets to include international organizations. According to Resolute Support Mission reporting, between January 1 and September 30, insurgent and terrorist attacks were responsible for 1,618 civilians killed and an additional 4,958 wounded. Among the significant terrorist incidents in 2019 were:

- On May 8, the Taliban attacked USAID-funded, U.S.-based aid organization Counterpart International in Kabul, killing four civilians and a policeman, and wounding 24 others. All attackers were killed after a six-hour battle with Afghan security forces.
- On July 1, a Taliban attack against the Afghan National Army Logistic and Armory Directorate involved a VBIED and five gunmen attacking the compound. The attack killed 40 civilians and wounded more than 100, including men, women, and children, in an adjacent school.
- On August 17, ISIS-K conducted a suicide bombing that targeted Shi’ite celebrants in a wedding hall in Kabul, killing at least 80 people and injuring more than 140.
- On September 2, the Taliban detonated a suicide car bomb at a facility in Kabul that housed numerous international organizations, killing 16 people and injuring more than 119. Those killed included five Nepalis, two Britons, and a Romanian diplomat.
- On September 5, the Taliban detonated a suicide car bomb in Kabul killing 12 people, including an American paratrooper and a Romanian soldier. The explosion also injured more than 40.
- On December 11, the Taliban conducted an attack on a hospital adjoining Bagram Airfield killing two and wounding 80 others, mostly civilians. No Coalition fatalities were reported.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: The Afghan Attorney General’s Office investigates and prosecutes violations of the laws prohibiting membership in terrorist or insurgent groups, violent acts committed against the state, hostage taking, murder, and the use of explosives against military forces and state infrastructure. These laws were codified into one Afghan Penal Code for national security crimes on May 15, 2017, in Official Gazette #1260. These laws include Crimes against the Internal and External Security of the State (1976 and 1987), Combat Against Terrorist Offences (2008), and Firearms, Ammunition, and Explosives (2005).

Specialized police Crisis Response Units located in the Afghan cities of Kabul, Kandahar, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat continue to thwart and successfully respond to militant attacks.

Afghanistan continued to face significant challenges in protecting its borders, particularly those with Pakistan and Iran. Under the bilateral Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS), which met for the first time in July 2018, Afghan and Pakistani officials agreed in principle to create a mechanism for communication between security forces on each side of the border. On June 10 at the APAPPS Review Session in Islamabad, the Afghan and Pakistani deputy foreign

ministers met to discuss trade, transit, the peace process, refugees, and closer border security coordination. Despite this review and discussions between the two governments to utilize APAPS, progress through this forum remains slow.

Afghanistan continued to process traveler arrivals and departures at major ports of entry using U.S.-provided PISCES border security management system, which currently operates at 13 ports of entry, including the airports of Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, and Mazar-e-Sharif. The most recent implementation of PISCES was in October at the Gulum Khan border crossing of Khost province.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Afghanistan is a member of the APG. In line with FATF recommendations, Afghanistan’s FIU, the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Center of Afghanistan (FinTRACA), conducted a money laundering and terrorist-financing risk assessment in 2019. On May 15, the UN 1267 Sanctions Committee designated ISIS-K as the first ISIS affiliate to be designated by the UN.

Afghan Peace Process: Throughout 2019, the United States sought to negotiate an agreement with the Taliban that would commit the Taliban to take action against international terrorist groups, including not allowing those groups to recruit, train, or raise funds on Afghan territory, and to not host those groups. In return for these commitments and for the start of intra-Afghan negotiations that would include the Afghan government, other Afghan leaders, and the Taliban, the United States would agree to a timeline for the conditions-based withdrawal of international troops from Afghanistan. Although the United States suspended talks following Taliban attacks in early September that were inconsistent with multiple rounds of serious negotiations, these talks were restarted in December following a series of goodwill gestures by the Taliban and Afghan government, including the release of one American and one Australian hostage, the release of Taliban-held ANDSF hostages, and the release of Afghan-held Taliban prisoners.

Countering Violent Extremism: A landmark July 6-8 intra-Afghan dialogue, hosted in Doha, Qatar, and organized by Germany, brought together representatives of the Afghan government, other Afghan leaders, civil society groups (including women’s groups), and the Taliban. Participating in their personal capacities, the attendees agreed on the conditions necessary to reach a sustainable peace, and a roadmap for achieving peace.

From April 28 to May 3, a Loya Jirga chaired by Mujahedin leader and Islamic scholar Abdul Rab Rassoul Sayyaf included 3,200 religious leaders, politicians, and representatives who met to discuss peace and called for an immediate ceasefire between the government and militants. The Jirga’s 3,200 delegates were divided into 51 committees that developed 23 recommendations urging a cease in violence between Afghan security forces and militants. The Taliban condemned the Jirga as unrepresentative of the Afghan people.

International and Regional Cooperation: Afghanistan is a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. In May, Afghan President Ghani agreed to participate in a trilateral meeting with Pakistan and the United States to discuss not only security but also prospective cooperation on economic growth and regional connectivity.

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