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EASO

Country of Origin Information Report

Afghanistan
Individuals targeted by
armed actors in the conflict



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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 crosschecked.

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 of this report was finalised on 27 November 2017. Any event taking place after this date 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: <http://www.easo.europa.eu>.

Glossary and Abbreviations

AAN	Afghanistan Analysts Network
AGEs	Anti-Government Elements: UNAMA defines 'Anti-Government Elements' as 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 including the Haqqani Network, Hezb-e Islami, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Islamic Jihad Union, Lashkari Tayyiba, Jaysh Muhammed, groups identifying themselves as ' <i>Daesh</i> ' (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 of a party to the conflict
AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
ALP	Afghan Local Police; a security initiative to include armed militias in the police force, under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior.
Amir al-Mu'minin	'Commander of the Believers'. Taliban leader
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces, including Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan National Police (ANP) and National Directorate of Security (NDS)
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
<i>Daesh</i>	See ISKP
<i>Dar ul hifaz</i>	School specialised in teaching memorisation of the <i>Quran</i> by heart
Ghost teachers	Educators that don't show up or don't exist and who's salaries are pocketed by themselves or by others, without actual performance
Haqqani Network	An armed insurgent movement under the leadership of Sirajuddin Haqqani, based in

	south-east Afghanistan and North Waziristan (Pakistan)
Hezb-e Islami	Afghan opposition movement of which the main faction is led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, which signed a peace accord with the Afghan government in 2016
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamist armed group with initial focus on Central Asia, but also active in Pakistan and Afghanistan
Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan	The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was the state in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 under the Taliban regime. The Taliban still uses this name
ISK or ISKP	Islamic State in Khorasan Province; affiliates of ISIL based in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Often referred to as <i>Daesh</i> in Afghanistan
<i>Istakhbarati Karwan</i>	Targeting teams of the Taliban.
<i>Jihad</i>	‘Holy War’, also used to refer to the insurgency against the communist regime and Soviet occupation (1979-89)
<i>Jihadi</i>	The fighters from the insurgency against the communist regime and Soviet occupation (1979-89) are still referred to as <i>mujahideen</i> or <i>jihadi</i>
<i>Jirga</i>	A gathering of tribal elders
Kangaroo court	Extrajudicial tribunal
<i>Layeha</i>	Taliban code of conduct
<i>Maktab</i>	Government supported school
<i>Madrassa</i>	Islamic religious school
<i>Mullah</i>	Islamic cleric (teachers and preachers) who studied in a <i>madrassa</i> . In Afghanistan, they are very prevalent outside the cities and usually the single religious authority in a village. They can often read Arabic and the <i>Quran</i>
NDS	National Directorate of Security, Afghanistan’s intelligence service
NUG	National Unity Government; a coalition government formed after the 2014 elections with Ashraf Ghani as President and Abdullah Abdullah as CEO

Rahbari Shura	The Leadership Council, the overall decision making body of the Taliban
<i>Saranwal</i>	State prosecutor or attorney
<i>Sharia</i>	Islamic law, used and interpreted by the schools of jurisprudence (Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki, Shafii and Ja'fari). Art. 130 of the Afghan Constitution designates Hanafi jurisprudence as the default one
<i>Shura</i>	Community council
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction; an independent oversight body on US-funded reconstruction programs
Taliban	Armed Islamic insurgent movement in Afghanistan under the leadership of Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada and the Rahbari Shura. The movement originated in the Afghan refugee communities in Pakistan and in Kandahar in the Mujahideen era (1980s and 90s), took control of Kabul in 1996 and, by 2001, controlled most of the country. See also: Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan
Twelver	Largest Shia Muslim branch; The term 'Twelver' is based on the belief that twelve male descendants from the family of the prophet Muhammad, starting with Ali ibn Abi-Talib and ending with Muhammad al-Mahdi, are Imams who have religious and political authority. The twelfth last Imam, the Mahdi, is still alive, lives in occultation and will reappear
<i>Ulema</i>	Body of Muslim scholars who are recognised as having specialist knowledge of Islamic law and theology
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
USIP	United States Institute for Peace
Voice of Jihad	Official news website of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, or, the Taliban

Warlord	A military leader with autonomy and capability of exercising control by force in a territory.
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Introduction

This report was drafted by COI officers from the COI sector of the Information and Analysis Unit in the European Asylum Support Office (EASO). To cover all topic areas of the Terms of Reference, EASO created two COI reports: One covering targeting directly related to the armed actors in the conflict and another for targeting linked to broader societal issues.

This report covers topics on individuals targeted by armed actors within the context of the conflict in Afghanistan. This report is written in conjunction with a report on targeting of individuals in society titled, *EASO COI Report - Afghanistan: Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms* ⁽²⁾.

Terms of Reference

The report aims to provide relevant information for the assessment of international protection status determination (PSD, including refugee status and subsidiary protection).

The terms of reference of this report were defined by EASO based on discussions held and input received from policy experts in EU+ countries³ and UNHCR within the framework of a Country Guidance Network pilot exercise to develop a Country Guidance Note on Afghanistan. The report was drafted for the purpose of developing a chapter on the application of Refugee Status and Subsidiary Protection (a and b).

On targeting by insurgents, this report primarily focusses on targeting by the Taliban, with a separate subchapter for the Islamic State in Khorasan Province group (ISKP) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). These three groups are deemed the main insurgent groups active in Afghanistan, and their targeting to some extent is representative of most of the insurgent targeting taking place in Afghanistan.

On the side of the (pro-)government actors in the conflict, this report looks into their conduct towards those suspected of being an anti-government element, and towards journalists and humanitarian workers.

Terms of Reference for this report can be found in [Annex II: Terms of Reference](#).

Methodology

The information is a result of desk research of public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources until 27 November 2017. In addition, during the research, EASO researchers conducted extensive interviews with the following sources:

- **Borhan Osman**, a former journalist with Pajhwok and researcher/analyst with the Kabul-based Afghanistan Analysts Network. Now Osman is a senior analyst at the International Crisis Group. He specialises in insurgent groups and armed conflict in Afghanistan. His research and reporting has mostly been based on fieldwork across Afghanistan.

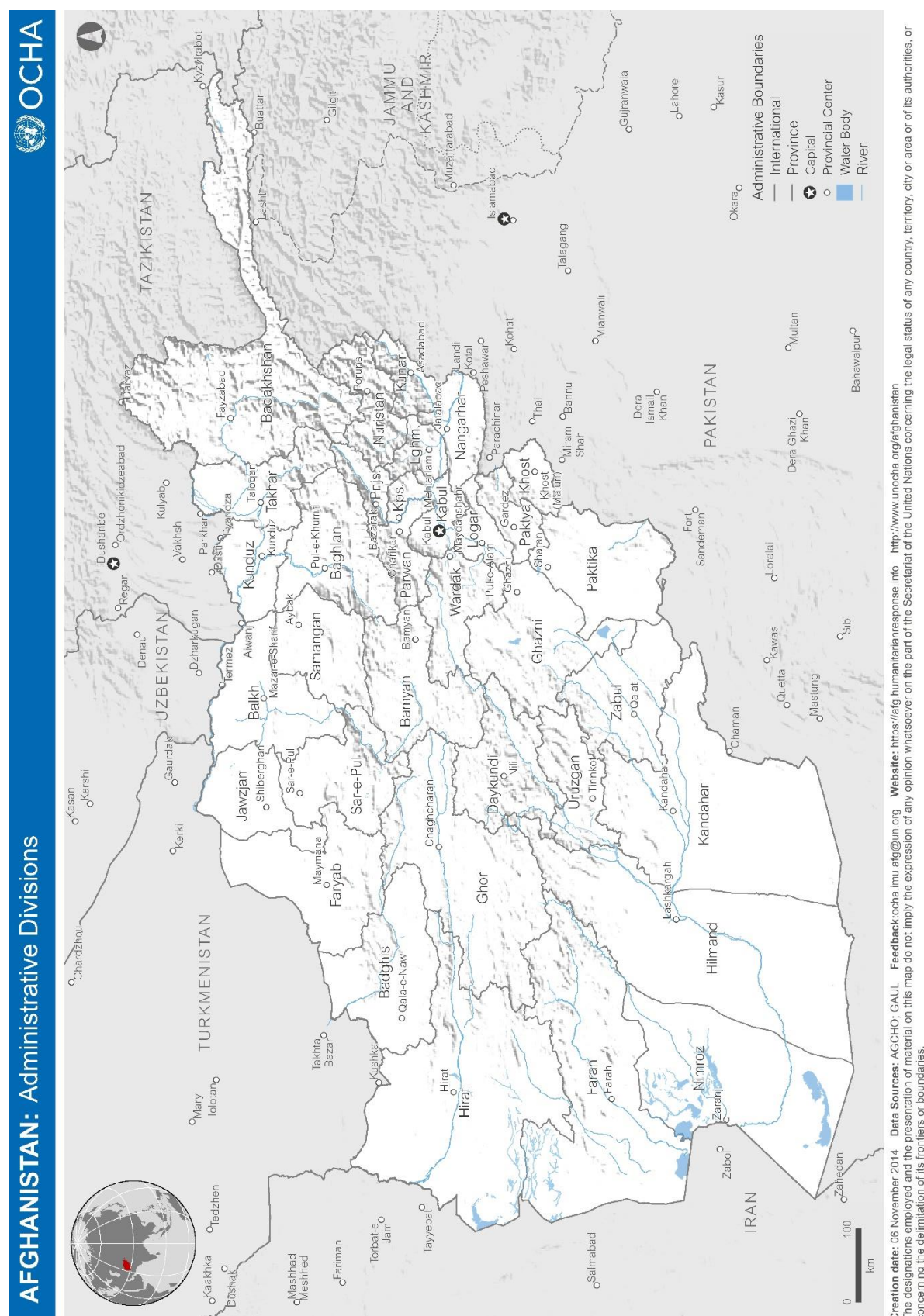
⁽²⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan. Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms, December 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁾ All EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland.

- **Abubakar Siddique**, a senior correspondent specializing in coverage of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the editor of RFE/RL's 'Gandhara' website. In addition to his reporting, Siddique speaks frequently at prominent Western think tanks and has contributed articles, chapters, and research papers to a range of publications. Siddique is also the author of *The Pashtun Question: The Unresolved Key to the Future of Pakistan and Afghanistan* (2014).
- **Anand Gopal**, program fellow with the International Security Program at New America Foundation. Gopal is also a journalist with over ten years of experience in Afghanistan, writing for the Wall Street Journal, Christian Science Monitor, Harper's Magazine and other media outlets. He is also the author of the book *No Good Men Among the Living: America, the Taliban and the War Through Afghan Eyes* (2014).

To verify whether the writers respected the EASO COI Report Methodology, a peer review was carried out by COI specialists from the departments listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#) section. In addition, a review of the report was carried out by **Dr. Neamat Nojumi**, a scholar on Central and Southwest Asia and senior policy analyst on Afghanistan. The **Human Rights Service at the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)** reviewed all content. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report. EASO performed the final quality review and edited the text. This quality process led to the inclusion of some additional information, in response to feedback received during the respective reviews, until 27 November 2017.

Map of Afghanistan



Map 1: Afghanistan - administrative divisions, source: UN OCHA © United Nations

1. Insurgent targeting of civilians

1.1 Modus Operandi of the Taliban

1.1.1 Formal structure of Taliban

In 2015, the UN Security Council published the following regarding the structure of the Taliban movement, based on Taliban messages ⁽⁴⁾:

1. The Taliban central structure consists of:

A. Office of Amir al-Mu'minin ('Commander of the Believers'): the leader of the Taliban movement. This office oversees the leadership council, the judiciary, the executive commissions and other administration organs. According to the US Council on Foreign Relations (CFR): 'The Taliban's leader has the power to appoint, shuffle, and sack shadow governors of Afghanistan's provinces and districts, commanders, and squad leaders' ⁽⁵⁾. Under the leader, there are two deputies ⁽⁶⁾. (See 1.1.2 [Taliban leadership and degree of unity](#))

B. The leadership council or *Rahbari Shura*: According to the BBC, this council is 'responsible for strategy, policy and overall decision making. [and is] [m]ade up of ex-Taliban ministers, diplomats, governors, military commanders and religious figures' ⁽⁷⁾. This council is also commonly referred to as the **Quetta Shura** ⁽⁸⁾.

This council has 18-20 members ⁽⁹⁾. However, Harvard University Fellow, Michael Semple, an Afghanistan expert on human rights with more than 20 years of experience in the country, states that

'Insofar as there are ever any meetings that conform to the title Rehbari shura (leadership council), there are occasional meetings of a relatively stable group of a dozen or so senior figure who convene to consider sensitive issues. But the peer group with occasional input into decision making is rather larger and less stable in composition' ⁽¹⁰⁾.

According to a 2017 report by Dr. Antonio Giustozzi, an independent researcher and visiting professor at King's College London and author of several articles, papers and books on the Taliban, there is more than one *shura* leading the Taliban. Next to the Quetta Shura, there is a Shura of the North, headquartered in Badakhshan, a Mashhad Shura, based in Iran and the Rasool Shura, or High Council of the Islamic Emirate, reportedly based in Farah. None of these recognise the leadership of the Quetta Shura. Yet at times, there seems to be some sort of

⁽⁴⁾ 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.

⁽⁵⁾ CFR, The Taliban, 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁾ Ruttig, T., The New Taleban Deputy Leaders: Is there an obvious successor to Akhtar Mansur?, 10 February 2016 ([url](#)); CFR, The Taliban, 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁾ BBC News, Who are the Taliban?, 26 May 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁸⁾ CFR, The Taliban, 2015 ([url](#)); Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽⁹⁾ BBC News, Who are the Taliban?, 26 May 2016 ([url](#)); 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.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Semple, M., Rhetoric, Ideology and Organizational Structure of the Taliban Movement, 5 January 2015 ([url](#)), p. 19.

coordination or cooperation between these Shuras. Under the Quetta Shura, two networks, the Peshawar Shura and the Miran Shah Shura, or Haqqani network, operate partly independently, while recognising the authority of the Quetta Shura ⁽¹¹⁾.

C. The Taliban courts and judges. These are mobile and static courts in areas where insurgents maintain a significant presence ⁽¹²⁾.

2. Taliban commissions and ‘organs’: These are independent directorates ⁽¹³⁾ and can be considered a cabinet of ministers ⁽¹⁴⁾. It functions de facto as ‘a shadow government that mirrors the structure of its toppled regime and attempts to portray the movement as a government-in-exile’ ⁽¹⁵⁾. According to a 2017 BBC report from Helmand, the idea that a government should provide public services, such as healthcare and education, is now expected by the people, and accepted by the Taliban ⁽¹⁶⁾. According to the 2015 UN Security Council report ⁽¹⁷⁾, these are the Taliban commissions:

1. Military commission
2. Political commission
3. Cultural commission
4. Financial and economic commission
5. Health commission
6. Education commission
7. Outreach and guidance commission
8. Prisoners’ commission
9. Non-governmental organization commission
10. Organ for the prevention of civilian casualties
11. Organ for Martyrs’ and disabled people
12. Organ for collecting and organizing special revenue

The Military commission claims to have its own terms of reference and organises training of Taliban forces ⁽¹⁸⁾. According to the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), there are two military commissions, one based in Quetta, the other based in Peshawar ⁽¹⁹⁾. According to other sources, there are two more military councils: one based in Miran Shah, North Waziristan, corresponding to the Haqqani Network, and one in Gerdi Jangal, Baluchistan ⁽²⁰⁾.

According to UNAMA, the Taliban established an ‘Independent Organ of the Islamic Emirate for the Prevention of Civilian Casualties and Enquiry of Grievances’, as an independent

⁽¹¹⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 6, 11.

⁽¹²⁾ CFR, The Taliban, 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁾ 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.

⁽¹⁴⁾ BBC News, Who are the Taliban?, 26 May 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁾ CFR, The Taliban, 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁾ BBC News, Taliban territory: Life in Afghanistan under the militants [video], 7 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁾ 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. 19-20.

⁽¹⁸⁾ 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.

⁽¹⁹⁾ CFR, The Taliban, 2015 ([url](#)); Semple, M., Rhetoric, Ideology and Organizational Structure of the Taliban Movement, 5 January 2015 ([url](#)), p. 18.

⁽²⁰⁾ Landinfo, Temanotat Afghanistan: Taliban – organisasjon, kommunikasjon og sanksjoner (del I), 16 June 2016 ([url](#)), p. 16; Roggio, B., ISAF targets Quetta military shura leader in southern Afghanistan, 21 January 2011 ([url](#)); Roggio, B., Islamic State Khorasan province’s emir targeted in US raid, 28 April 2017 ([url](#)) [comment section].

commission, in addition to the above mentioned commissions ⁽²¹⁾. See [1.1.5.1 Restrictions](#) for more information.

3. Field commanders and shadow governors ⁽²²⁾. The Military commission appoints, according to the UN Security Council, provincial shadow governors, deputy shadow governors for all 34 provinces, district shadow governors, and in each district, group commanders and squad leaders ⁽²³⁾. Each of the above mentioned *Shuras* is composed of local groups or 'fronts' ⁽²⁴⁾. In 2015, the UN Security Council published the names of all Taliban shadow governors ⁽²⁵⁾.

1.1.2 Taliban strength

According an April/May 2017 report on Taliban recruitment by the Norwegian Country of Origin service, LandInfo, which is based on published sources and field interviews, the Taliban has two types of fighters: 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 ⁽²⁶⁾. According to Giustozzi, the total Taliban manpower exceeds 200,000, of which 150,000 are fighters. These fighters can be divided in around 60,000 members of full time mobile units, the rest being local militias ⁽²⁷⁾. Afghanistan researcher and former Chatham House expert and analyst at the Afghanistan Analyst Network, Matt Waldman, quoted by Voice of America (VOA), also estimated the core Taliban force to be over 60,000 in 2014 ⁽²⁸⁾. The militias hail from local communities that support the Taliban, the mobile units are composed of full time fighters and bear the brunt of the fighting ⁽²⁹⁾. For more information on the command structure and the local Taliban fronts, please refer to the EASO Country of Origin Information Report *Afghanistan – Recruitment by armed groups* from September 2016 ⁽³⁰⁾ and Landinfo's Report *Afghanistan: Recruitment to Taliban*, dated 29 June 2017 ⁽³¹⁾.

1.1.3 Taliban leadership and degree of unity

In July 2015, the Taliban announced the death of its leader Mullah Omar. He led the movement from its inception in the nineties and probably died two years earlier, in 2013 ⁽³²⁾. The leadership of the movement was subsequently taken up by Mullah Mansour, who is believed to have led the movement for quite some time, at least since the death of Mullah

⁽²¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 76.

⁽²²⁾ BBC News, Who are the Taliban?, 26 May 2016 ([url](#)); Reuters, Afghan Taliban's new chief replaces 24 'shadow' officials, 27 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²³⁾ 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.

⁽²⁴⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 8.

⁽²⁵⁾ See annex to: 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.

⁽²⁶⁾ Landinfo, Afghanistan: Recruitment to Taliban, 29 June 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 8-9.

⁽²⁷⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 12-13.

⁽²⁸⁾ VoA, Despite Massive Taliban Death Toll No Drop in Insurgency, 6 March 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁹⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 12-13.

⁽³⁰⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Recruitment by armed groups, September 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 14-16.

⁽³¹⁾ Landinfo, Report Afghanistan: Recruitment to Taliban, 29 June 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 8-11.

⁽³²⁾ Guardian (The), Taliban officially announce death of Mullah Omar, 30 July 2015 ([url](#)); Soufan Group (The), TSG IntelBrief: The Death of Mullah Omar, 30 July 2015 ([url](#)); CFR, The Taliban, 2015 ([url](#)).

Omar in 2013 ⁽³³⁾. The rule of Mullah Mansour was rivalled by different factions within the Taliban movement, the biggest challenge posed by a group around Mullah Mohammad Rasool ⁽³⁴⁾. Mullah Mansour was subsequently killed in a US drone strike in Pakistan's Baluchistan province in May 2016 ⁽³⁵⁾. The new Taliban leader, Mawlawi Haibatullah Akhundzada, is an Islamic judge. Sources consider Haibatullah more a religious scholar than a military commander, and is perceived as weak, ineffective and having little influence in the movement ⁽³⁶⁾.

Although since 2001 the Taliban was never considered a solidly united movement, there was a degree of hierarchy and structure in the organisation ⁽³⁷⁾. 'Obedience to the Amir' (Taliban leader) used to be a central theme in the Taliban's internal organisation ⁽³⁸⁾. However, since the death of Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader is not seen as 'infallible' anymore and the leader's actions can be questioned, according to Borhan Osman, a senior analyst at International Crisis Group (ICG) and former researcher at the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) who specialises in the insurgency and insurgent groups ⁽³⁹⁾. According to Giustozzi, since 2015 the Amir 'has become a source of division and controversy, rather than a unifying figure' ⁽⁴⁰⁾. According to a 2017 briefing paper on the Taliban after a decade of war, published by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)⁴¹ and written by Afghanistan scholars Michael Semple and Theo Farrell, professor at King's College London, under the current leadership of Mawlawi Haibatullah the governance structure of national, provincial and district commissions for military and political affairs is falling apart. Farrell and Semple stated that the current leader is cut off from important financial resources (such as narcotics) and several senior members, such as the Helmand shadow governor, act independently ⁽⁴²⁾.

Other insurgent networks besides the Haqqani network, such as a network around Qayum Zaker or the network around the deceased Mullah Mansour's brother Obeidullah Ishaqzai and other smaller networks that function as Pakistan's proxies, have carved out a certain autonomy within the Taliban movement ⁽⁴³⁾. Besides Pakistan's role, alleged Saudi, Iranian and Russian ⁽⁴⁴⁾ involvement in the Taliban is also feeding factionalism by providing resources,

⁽³³⁾ Osman, B., Taleban in Transition: How Mansur's death and Haibatullah's ascension may affect the war (and peace), 26 May 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁴⁾ Osman, B., Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taleban, 24 November 2015 ([url](#)); Giustozzi, A. and Mangal, S., An Interview with Mullah Rasool on Reconciliation Between the Taliban and the Afghan Government, 16 March 2016 ([url](#)); CFR, The Taliban, 2015 ([url](#)); Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽³⁵⁾ Guardian, (The), US drone strike in Pakistan kills Taliban leader Mullah Mansoor, 22 May 2016 ([url](#)); CFR, The Taliban, 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁶⁾ Osman, B., Taleban in Transition: How Mansur's death and Haibatullah's ascension may affect the war (and peace), 26 May 2016 ([url](#)); New York Times (The), Taliban's New Leader, More Scholar Than Fighter, Is Slow to Impose Himself, 11 July 2016 ([url](#)); Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 4-5.

⁽³⁷⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan. Taliban Strategies – Recruitment, July 2012 ([url](#)), p. 18; Franco, C. and Giustozzi, A., 'Revolution in the Counter-Revolution: Efforts to Centralize the Taliban's Military Leadership', in Central Asian Affairs, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 249–286.

⁽³⁸⁾ Semple, M., Rhetoric, Ideology and Organizational Structure of the Taliban Movement, 5 January 2015 ([url](#)), pp. 10-11.

⁽³⁹⁾ Osman, B., Taleban in Transition 2: Who is in charge now?, 22 June 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽⁴¹⁾ RUSI is an international, independent, defence and security research institution based in the UK.

⁽⁴²⁾ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5; Reuters, Afghan Taliban's new chief replaces 24 'shadow' officials, 27 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴³⁾ Osman, B., A Black Week in Kabul (2): Who are the most likely perpetrators?, 7 June 2017 ([url](#)); Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 6.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ 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

in cash and weaponry, for certain groups in the movement, while others are left out ⁽⁴⁵⁾. Because different foreign actors, often with opposing agendas, support different factions of the Taliban, Dr. Giustozzi states in his 2017 report for LandInfo that this fragmentation in the foreseeable future is likely to continue ⁽⁴⁶⁾. According to some sources, in addition to support from neighbouring countries ⁽⁴⁷⁾, certain Taliban breakaway factions have allegedly received support from the Afghan national authorities ⁽⁴⁸⁾.

Besides narcotics and funding from foreign actors, local Taliban commanders generate their own income through illegal trade in Afghanistan's valuable minerals, as well as investing in companies, engaging in money-laundering, kidnapping for ransom, extortion and other criminal activities ⁽⁴⁹⁾. Experts Farrell and Semple report on a worry within the Taliban ranks that the Taliban are creating a 'new war lord system, with local commanders breaking with the central chain of command, consolidating their local power and competing with one another over resources' ⁽⁵⁰⁾. According to Michael Semple and Theo Farrell, commanders are currently, much more than before, running the war from their own sources of income ⁽⁵¹⁾.

Several oral sources interviewed by the Research Directorate of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) described regional differences in unity and cohesion within the Taliban. In general, sources stated that local Taliban seem to have a lot of 'discretionary power' when carrying out their activities. In certain remote areas local commanders have little relationship with the central Taliban leadership, while in others, there is more command and control over the troops ⁽⁵²⁾.

Growing factionalism within the Taliban movement has analytical consequences. According to RUSI experts Farrell and Semple, 'it no longer makes sense to ask 'what is the Taliban position on ... ?' Instead analysis must be sufficiently nuanced to capture a wide range of Taliban positions on issues surrounding the conflict' ⁽⁵³⁾. In a 2016 article about the Taliban's views on the future of Afghanistan, analysts on the Taliban movement, Borhan Osman and Anand Gopal also state that the Taliban movement is 'too disparate and fragmented (both horizontally and vertically) for there to be any unity of thought' ⁽⁵⁴⁾. According to Borhan Osman, for these semi-autonomous networks, although nominally and officially under and partly dependent from the Rahbari Shura (the Leadership Council) for resources ⁽⁵⁵⁾,

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 Russian direct involvement. See: Atlantic (the), Is Russia Really Arming the Taliban?, 25 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁵⁾ CNN, Videos suggest Russian government may be arming Taliban, 26 July 2017 ([url](#)); Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 8.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Kolenda, C., Five Myths to Dispel About An Afghan Peace, 21 January 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁸⁾ New York Times (The), Afghan Government Quietly Aids Breakaway Taliban Faction, 19 June 2017 ([url](#)); Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 12.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ UN Security Council, Letter dated 2 February 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 2 February 2015 ([url](#)), p. 4; Rubin, B., in an introduction to: Osman, B. and Gopal, A., Taliban Views on a Future State, July 2016 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 12.

⁽⁵¹⁾ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 8.

⁽⁵²⁾ IRB, Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue individuals after they relocate to another region; their capacity to track individuals over the long term; Taliban capacity to carry out targeted killings (2012-January 2016), 15 February 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵³⁾ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 10.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ Osman, B. and Gopal, A., Taliban Views on a Future State, July 2016 ([url](#)), p. 10.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ Osman, B., A Black Week in Kabul (2): Who are the most likely perpetrators?, 7 June 2017 ([url](#)).

‘the official policy towards a certain issue does not always matter. They are bound only to the Taleban’s universal red lines – for example, that they cannot engage in sectarian attacks, beheadings and rapes – in order to keep their pledge of allegiance to the movement, and benefit from the name. There is a wide grey area in which these networks can operate in some divergence from official Taleban policies’ ⁽⁵⁶⁾.

Borhan Osman attributes a number of assassinations or assassination attempts, to these networks. Targets include politicians, tribal elders, especially in the south, *ulema* and even other Taliban members ⁽⁵⁷⁾.

1.1.4 Taliban objectives

According to Afghanistan scholar Neamat Nojumi, the aim of the Taliban is to demolish the current Afghan state, topple the national government as the agent of the state, dissolve the Constitution and reinstate their notion of an Islamic Emirate ⁽⁵⁸⁾.

In announcing their 2017 spring offensive ‘Operation Mansouri’, the Taliban described both military and political objectives ⁽⁵⁹⁾. Militarily, ‘the Taliban combines efforts to overrun the countryside with a relentless terrorism campaign in the cities’, according to journalist Abubakar Siddique ⁽⁶⁰⁾. A key objective for the Taliban since the end of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (ISAF) and the withdrawal of the majority of the foreign troops in 2014, has been to seize one or more provincial capitals ⁽⁶¹⁾. While this report focusses on the targeting of individuals, it is beyond the scope of this report to discuss all aspects of the Taliban strategy. For other aspects, such as the waging of a conventional war in rural or urban areas, refer to the *EASO COI Report: Afghanistan: Security Situation* ⁽⁶²⁾.

1.1.4.1 The aim of the Taliban targeting campaign

According to program fellow with the International Security Program at New America Foundation, award-winning author and journalist Anand Gopal, the overall aim of the Taliban is to recapture power, or put enough pressure on the Afghan government to get a favourable position for talks ⁽⁶³⁾. According to analyst Borhan Osman ⁽⁶⁴⁾, the aim is to topple the current

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Osman, B., The Attack on the American University in Kabul (2): Who did it and why?, 5 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁷⁾ Osman, B., The Attack on the American University in Kabul (2): Who did it and why?, 5 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Nojumi, N., e-mail, 22 September 2017. Neamat Nojumi made this comment during the review of this report.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ UN Secretary-General (UNSG), The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 June 2017 2017, available at: ([url](#)), p. 4; Foxley, T., Taliban announce 2017 Spring Offensive, afghanhindsight [weblog], posted on: 28 April 2017, ([url](#))

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Siddique, A., The Taliban’s Spring Offensive: Afghanistan Faces a Crucial Year, 19 May 2017 ([url](#))

⁽⁶¹⁾ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 8.

⁽⁶²⁾ Find the latest update on <https://www.easo.europa.eu/information-analysis/country-origin-information/country-reports>

⁽⁶³⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017. Anand Gopal is a journalist and author with over ten years’ experience in Afghanistan.

⁽⁶⁴⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017. Borhan Osman is senior analyst with the International Crisis Group, focussing his research on insurgent groups.

‘morally corrupt’ Afghan government ⁽⁶⁵⁾ and build institutions of the Taliban’s notion of ‘social justice’ and development ⁽⁶⁶⁾.

According to scholar Neamat Nojumi, defining the Afghan government as ‘morally corrupt’ forms the basis for the Taliban’s field commanders and fighters justification for violence against civilians, particularly those working for the Afghan government, such as civil servants, teachers and their families ⁽⁶⁷⁾. While not excluding corruption involving bribes and personal enrichment, moral corruption is in the Afghan context often confused with mere financial gain ⁽⁶⁸⁾. Often depicted as ‘puppets of the foreign invasion’, the current Afghan government is depicted by the Taliban as ‘trampling on Afghan culture and tradition and aiming to destroy the country’s Islamic system’ ⁽⁶⁹⁾. The Taliban, in contrast, consider themselves as fighting for a just cause in a disciplined and honest way ⁽⁷⁰⁾. This cause can be interpreted as a combination of defending tradition, national sovereignty and Islam ⁽⁷¹⁾.

Neamat Nojumi also observed that,

‘the overall objective of the Taliban for governance (not government) in Afghanistan has been an effort toward dismantling both modern and traditional social and political way of lives. In this direction, they view clerics as the leading moral force. [...] During my engagements with senior Taliban officials in recent years, I found that the Taliban position toward state, governance and education remain fully intact as it was during the 1990s. I also noticed that the younger generation of the Taliban is even more sentimental/irrational (in comparison to the older generation) toward the objectives of the movement. [...] The insurgency in Afghanistan has a dominant religious-based extreme ideological dogma. The reinforcement of this ideological dogma has so far deprived the Taliban leaders from arriving at a needed political maturity essential for organizational and leadership development. This dominant ideological trend has easily convinced fighters to target any profile that stands against their stated doctrine’ ⁽⁷²⁾.

Yet, Borhan Osman explained that, in their rhetoric, they are consistently and increasingly portraying themselves as a parallel government and try to project themselves as ‘caring for the communities under their control’ ⁽⁷³⁾. According to analyst Osman, this propaganda discourse does impact on the behaviour of the Taliban on the ground, in determining who is a legitimate target and who is not ⁽⁷⁴⁾.

In an interview with EASO for this report, Anand Gopal described three main goals of the Taliban’s targeting campaign:

1. To delegitimise the government. By targeting those individuals who support the government, the Taliban are making it more difficult for the government to exercise its core functions in service delivery to the population. ‘If the government cannot do

⁽⁶⁵⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ Siddique, A., The Taliban’s Spring Offensive: Afghanistan Faces a Crucial Year, 19 May 2017 ([url](#)); AP, Taliban Announce Spring Offensive, Vow to Build Institutions, 28 April 2017, available at: ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁷⁾ Nojumi, N., e-mail, 22 September 2017. Neamat Nojumi made this comment during the review of this report.

⁽⁶⁸⁾ Arbabzadah, N., ‘Corruption’ confusion in Afghanistan, 1 December 2009 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁹⁾ Gopal, A. and Strick van Linschoten, A., Ideology in the Afghan Taleban, June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 33.

⁽⁷⁰⁾ Semple, M., Reconciliation in Afghanistan, USIP, Washington DC, 2009, p. 37; see e.g. Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan – Voice of Jihad, Open letter by Spokesman of Islamic Emirate to the American President Donald Trump, 25 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷¹⁾ Gopal, A. and Strick van Linschoten, A., Ideology in the Afghan Taleban, Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 33.

⁽⁷²⁾ Nojumi, N., e-mail, 22 September 2017. Neamat Nojumi made this comment during the review of this report.

⁽⁷³⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽⁷⁴⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

its job, it gets delegitimized’ ⁽⁷⁵⁾. According to Neamat Nojumi, this serves to ultimately weaken the government ⁽⁷⁶⁾. Also according to Giustozzi, the main rationale of the targeting campaign is to undermine the functioning of the Kabul government and to tie individuals to the Taliban by forcing them to cooperate ⁽⁷⁷⁾. High government officials, including the army, police and National Directorate of Security (NDS) personnel, are recruited to cooperate and spy for the Taliban, in exchange for money and being granted immunity from targeting ⁽⁷⁸⁾.

2. Targeting collaborators: i.e. ‘people who spy or are perceived to be spying. At the very least to create an atmosphere where it is very dangerous to collaborate’ ⁽⁷⁹⁾. Journalist and author Abubakar Siddique stated in an interview for this report that the main aim of the targeting campaign by the Taliban is to spread fear among the population and to target their opposition, particularly those who have the power to oppose them ⁽⁸⁰⁾. Analyst Borhan Osman corroborates that it is often members of local uprising forces - that are hard to defeat - who are individually targeted. In addition, the combination of being influential and being critical of the Taliban often makes a target. Someone who can change minds ⁽⁸¹⁾.
3. A third category of targeting comes, according to Anand Gopal, out of information deficit. He reasons that targeting in Afghanistan mainly happens in contested areas, where civilians are ‘on the fence’, trying to accommodate to both sides, and thus, loyalties are unclear for both sides. The objective here is to try and assert complete social control over areas and populations one does not completely control. Anand Gopal gave the view that, areas under complete Taliban control tend to see a lot less targeting, as either all suspected elements have left or have shown loyalty to the insurgents. Likewise, in areas under firm government control, there too tends to be less targeting, as the reach of the Taliban there is limited ⁽⁸²⁾. Neamat Nojumi found it hard to assess the totality of this assertion, and suggested this is only true for some contested areas ⁽⁸³⁾.

The Taliban statement at the announcement of their 2017 spring offensive – called Operation Mansouri – declared that ‘[i]n those areas where the Mujahideen do not have full control, the enemy will be targeted, harassed, killed, or captured until they are compelled to abandon their few remaining posts’. In clarification of who the enemy is, the statement continues ‘[t]he main focus of Operation Mansouri will be on foreign forces, their military and intelligence infrastructure and in eliminating their internal mercenary apparatus’ ⁽⁸⁴⁾.

⁽⁷⁵⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽⁷⁶⁾ Nojumi, N., e-mail, 22 September 2017. Neamat Nojumi made this comment during the review of this report.

⁽⁷⁷⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 12.

⁽⁷⁸⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 7.

⁽⁷⁹⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽⁸⁰⁾ Siddique, A., Skype interview, 2 August 2017. Abubakar Siddique is a senior journalist and author on the Afghanistan-Pakistan region.

⁽⁸¹⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽⁸²⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽⁸³⁾ Nojumi, N., e-mail, 22 September 2017. Neamat Nojumi made this comment during the review of this report.

⁽⁸⁴⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan – Voice of Jihad, Statement of the Islamic Emirate regarding the Inauguration of the Spring Offensive ‘Operation Mansouri’, 28 April 2017 ([url](#)).

1.1.5 Taliban targeting of civilians

1.1.5.1 Restrictions

The Taliban definition of a ‘civilian’ differs from the definition used by UNAMA or in International Humanitarian Law. Civilians with certain profiles can be assessed as legitimate targets by the Taliban, while protected under International Humanitarian Law ⁽⁸⁵⁾.

Although the Taliban officially has restrictions on targeting civilians and destroying certain civilian infrastructure ⁽⁸⁶⁾, UNAMA attributes 61 % percent of all civilian casualties in 2016 (11,418 dead and wounded in 2016), to insurgents, mainly the Taliban ⁽⁸⁷⁾. According to Farrell and Semple, resistance against this ‘reckless conduct of military operations by many commanders’ is growing within the Taliban ranks ⁽⁸⁸⁾. A leaked internal letter from a senior figure in the Taliban to the Taliban leadership reveals harsh criticism of Taliban’s excessive use of violence and targeting of civilians. The letter allegedly says: “All the mujahedin fighters should be ordered to cease killing our opponents inside mosques and stop killing prisoners,” [...] “Stop killing people under suspicion traveling on roads. Stop bombing bridges, roads, and other similar places. Stop killing aid and construction workers who are helping our nation and building our homeland”. ⁽⁸⁹⁾.

An analyst affiliated with the Afghanistan Analyst Network (AAN), interviewed by the IRB, stated in 2016 that given the multi-layered conflict dynamics and often competing agendas of local armed groups, civilians are increasingly targeted to signal strength or control over an area ⁽⁹⁰⁾. RUSI scholars Farrell and Semple report on a competition among commanders to deploy suicide bombers that will cause the maximum number of casualties ⁽⁹¹⁾.

Borhan Osman says that the rhetoric of the Taliban to be ‘less brutal’ towards the civilian population has an impact on the behaviour of the Taliban on the ground ⁽⁹²⁾. On the other hand, Afghanistan expert Barnett Rubin argued there also may be important divisions between the Taliban leaders and fighters on the ground. ‘Even when the leadership issues contrary instructions, fighters who capture territory by force of arms (e.g., Kunduz in September 2015) often revert to [...] looting and carrying out revenge killings of those associated with the government or progressive social policies’ ⁽⁹³⁾. Field commanders only get general directives from the Taliban leaders to ‘protect public infrastructure, treat the local population well, [and] not to hinder the activities of humanitarian organizations’ ⁽⁹⁴⁾. These

⁽⁸⁵⁾ Clark, K., The Layha. Calling the Taleban to Account, 4 July 2011 ([url](#)), pp. 20-26; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 78.

⁽⁸⁶⁾ Clark, K., The Layha. Calling the Taleban to Account, 4 July 2011 ([url](#)), pp. 14-15; UN Secretary-General (UNSG), The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 June 2017 2017, available at: ([url](#)), p.4

⁽⁸⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 3, 6.

⁽⁸⁸⁾ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 9.

⁽⁸⁹⁾ RFE/RL, Gandhara, Exclusive: Former Leader’s Bombshell Letter Exposes Internal Taliban Struggles, 21 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁰⁾ IRB, Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue individuals after they relocate to another region; their capacity to track individuals over the long term; Taliban capacity to carry out targeted killings (2012-January 2016), 15 February 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹¹⁾ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017 ([url](#)), p.10.

⁽⁹²⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽⁹³⁾ Rubin, B., in an introduction to: Osman, B. and Gopal, A., Taliban Views on a Future State, July 2016 ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽⁹⁴⁾ Osman, B. and Gopal, A., Taliban Views on a Future State, July 2016 ([url](#)), p. 15.

directives are according to Farrell and Semple, ‘widely flouted’ ⁽⁹⁵⁾. For example, during the brief takeover of the city of Kunduz in 2015, NGO-workers were systematically singled out during house searches by the Taliban, despite the specific statements by (then) Taliban leader Mullah Mansour for NGO-workers to continue their work normally and report problems and complaints to the Taliban ‘Commission for Control and Administration of NGOs and Companies’ ⁽⁹⁶⁾.

Borhan Osman suggests that, although there are categories of protected civilian sites, certain institutions can become legitimate targets again, such as the American University in Kabul for its links to the US, or, other targets such as Tolo TV and 1TV for their reporting on incidents in Kunduz in October 2015 (see [1.2.10 Media workers and civil society representatives](#) for more details on this incident). Certain humanitarian organisations and cultural activities could also lose their position of ‘safeguarded’ and be made legitimate targets again ⁽⁹⁷⁾. In general though, if a person is not active in the fight against the Taliban, in propaganda or on the battlefield, it is, according to Osman, not of interest for the Taliban to target such a person and hamper their efforts to appear as a viable alternative to the current government ⁽⁹⁸⁾. Yet, according to Giustozzi, local Taliban may target certain individuals outside the general rules set out by the Taliban leadership and therefore not seek approval by the leadership to target this person ⁽⁹⁹⁾.

Despite their ‘internal guidelines’ (*layeha*) against kidnapping for ransom, the Taliban is found to increasingly target financially well-off Afghan civilians. A UN report found that the mantle of ideological or political demands is used cover for pure moneymaking in many of these cases. However, not only rich Afghans are being kidnapped for ransom. Between 2003 and 2014, the UN reports that at Taliban checkpoints, individuals believed to be unsupportive of the insurgency are either executed on the spot or kidnapped in order to extract payments from their relatives ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾. (See [1.1.5.4 Checkpoints](#))

The Taliban has established an ‘Independent Organ of the Islamic Emirate for the Prevention of Civilian Casualties and Enquiry of Grievances’, also referred to as the ‘Department for Prevention of Civilian Casualties and Complaints’ (see [1.1.1 Formal Structure of Taliban](#)). This commission is tasked with investigating and recording civilian casualties caused by all parties to the conflict ⁽¹⁰¹⁾. This Commission is active countrywide and regularly issues public statements and reports on civil casualties. To UNAMA’s understanding, this is a standalone Commission, not an organ of the Taliban ⁽¹⁰²⁾.

1.1.5.2 Targeting

In 2016, UNAMA documented at least 2,719 civilian casualties – 871 deaths and 1,848 injured – as a result of attacks intentionally directed at civilians and civilian objects, representing 24

⁽⁹⁵⁾ Farrell, T. and Semple, M., Ready for Peace? The Afghan Taliban after a decade of War, January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 9.

⁽⁹⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Special Report on Kunduz Province, December 2015 ([url](#)), pp. 3, 16-17, 26.

⁽⁹⁷⁾ Osman, B., The Attack on the American University in Kabul (2): Who did it and why?, 5 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁹⁸⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽⁹⁹⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 18.

⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ UN Security Council, Letter dated 2 February 2015 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 2 February 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 76.

⁽¹⁰²⁾ UNAMA, e-mail, 3 October 2017. UNAMAs Human Rights Service made this comment during the review of this report.

per cent of all civilian casualties in 2016, or 39 per cent of all casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements (AGEs). This included tactics such as suicide attacks targeting peaceful protestors and those praying in mosques, as well as the targeted killing of specific individual civilians perceived not to support the AGEs, mostly by shooting or detonation of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) ⁽¹⁰³⁾. In the first six months of 2017, UNAMA recorded even higher percentages of civilian casualties from attacks intentionally targeting civilians, noting that the 1,413 civilian casualties resulted from attacks carried out by AGEs intentionally targeting civilians. The 1,413 civilian casualties from such attacks comprised 27 per cent of all civilian casualties in the first half of 2017, or 40 per cent of all casualties attributed to AGEs. UNAMA noted that these figures are conservative as they do not count attacks directed at police or unknown targets, some of which may have been considered civilian objects at the time of targeting ⁽¹⁰⁴⁾.

Not only did insurgents kill and wound civilians in 2016, they were responsible for 350 incidents of abduction, involving a total 1,858 targeted persons, frequently based on the suspicion of having a connection to the government, including government employees and off-duty Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) members. Most of these abductees were released after payment of ransom or negotiations by elders, but 84 were also killed and 46 injured, mostly the off-duty members of ANSF, their family members, government staff, and people perceived to be government ‘spies’. Insurgents regularly conducts mass abductions of traveling people, to sift out the government and ANSF personnel from the group. Abductees who were wounded during these episodes were mostly injured due to beatings and ‘torture’ states UNAMA ⁽¹⁰⁵⁾. In certain instances, the insurgents killed the suspected ANSF or government personnel on the spot. For example, in July 2017, 16 bus passengers were stopped and abducted by the Taliban. Seven were killed on the spot on the accusation of being government and army personnel. The others were abducted for further interrogation ⁽¹⁰⁶⁾. Refer to the sub-chapter on [Checkpoints](#) for more information.

UNAMA documented parallel justice punishments carried out on people accused of having family or working relations with the ANSF or the government ⁽¹⁰⁷⁾.

Osman and Gopal both highlighted that in Afghanistan; a lot of the targeting originates from personal disputes, feuds and rivalries. In many cases, the conflict offers an opportunity to target one’s rival ⁽¹⁰⁸⁾. Giustozzi notes that intelligence, both on the government side and the Taliban side, is also often affected by faulty information driven by feuds and vendettas ⁽¹⁰⁹⁾.

1.1.5.3 Targeting procedure

Sources provided varying information regarding the procedures used by the Taliban in targeting. Dr. Antonio Giustozzi describes in his report for LandInfo from August 2017 – a report that relies heavily oral sources, mostly Taliban interviewees ⁽¹¹⁰⁾ – a very systematic procedure of identifying and targeting individuals: after being identified and located, (except

⁽¹⁰³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 71-73.

⁽¹⁰⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 44-46.

⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 67.

⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban gun down 7 passengers in Farah, 12 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 69.

⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017. Borhan Osman is political analyst in the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), focussing his research on insurgent groups; Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽¹⁰⁹⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 16-17.

⁽¹¹⁰⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 5.

for the high profiles) an individual should be warned at least twice. If this individual does not follow up on the threats, they can potentially be interrogated before a Taliban court. If still failing to comply with Taliban injunctions, only then is an individual included on a Taliban black list. People who are to be added as targets on the blacklist have to be cleared by the Taliban leadership (or the leadership of the respective Taliban network), before being included in a Taliban hit list. Subsequently, in each province, a specialised team (*Istakhbarati Karwan*) of around twenty members is responsible for executing the assassinations. Besides these nationally approved blacklists, local Taliban may have their own blacklists, not necessarily endorsed by the leadership ⁽¹¹¹⁾. Abubakar Siddique gave the opinion that the Taliban keeps a blacklist of priority targets ⁽¹¹²⁾. However, when asked about the existence of Taliban blacklists, Borhan Osman stated he had not seen evidence of such a centrally organised system of drawing up blacklists, nor of specialised hit teams. He believed local commanders did have a blacklist of who they want to eliminate in their area, and that they will just try to kill these individuals, without having designated killings squads to do this ⁽¹¹³⁾. Anand Gopal also stated that he had not found any evidence of such specialised Taliban hit teams ⁽¹¹⁴⁾.

Nevertheless, UNAMA indicated that, during the brief takeover of Kunduz city in September 2015,

‘According to numerous accounts received by UNAMA, within a few hours of entering Kunduz city on 28 September, Taliban commenced house to house searches using pre-prepared lists containing the names and addresses of human rights defenders, and in particular women, women active in public life, NGO workers, United Nations staff, journalists and Government officials, including lawyers, judges and prosecutors’ ⁽¹¹⁵⁾.

Insurgents are also known to strike at locations or moments where they think their targets are gathering, such as during funerals, in mosques or other social gatherings ⁽¹¹⁶⁾. Examples include:

- In 2014, a suicide bomber attacked a crowd watching a volleyball game in Paktiya, killing 45 attendees and wounding 50 more ⁽¹¹⁷⁾.
- In February 2017, insurgents attacked a mosque where ALP-personnel were offering Friday prayers, killing an ALP commander and his wife, amongst others ⁽¹¹⁸⁾.
- During a funeral ceremony for the son of a prominent politician in Kabul in June 2017, two suicide bombers detonated IEDs amidst the attendees, which included many government and security officials. UNAMA verified four civilians killed and 49 injured ⁽¹¹⁹⁾.
- In July 2017, the Taliban entered a mosque in Balkh province and killed at least thirteen attendees in a shooting spree. While the Taliban have claimed they attacked a gathering of militiamen, the local government claimed the victims were all civilians. Local sources told Khaama Press that the victims were related to a local former Jihadi

⁽¹¹¹⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 10, 16, 19.

⁽¹¹²⁾ Siddique, A., Skype interview, 2 August 2017.

⁽¹¹³⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽¹¹⁴⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽¹¹⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Special Report on Kunduz Province, December 2015 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽¹¹⁶⁾ Ruttig, T., The ‘Humvee Bomb’ Series: The October wave of Taleban attacks in 2017 context, 7 November 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁷⁾ Reuters, Suicide bomber kills 45 at volleyball match in Afghanistan, 14 November 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, ALP commander among 10 killed in Jawzjan clash, 25 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹¹⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 35.

commander ⁽¹²⁰⁾. Local officials quoted by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) later stated that all thirteen were part of a militia under the authority of the Ministry of Interior, used to defend the area ⁽¹²¹⁾.

- In October 2017, unknown gunmen stormed a mosque in Ghor killing up to 30 attendees and wounding dozens more. Among those killed was a local pro-government militia commander ⁽¹²²⁾.

1.1.5.4 Checkpoints

In an interview for this report, Borhan Osman explained that there are three different sorts of checkpoints created by insurgents, in his view ⁽¹²³⁾:

- Checkpoints erected for a specific target: based on intelligence, the Taliban may erect a checkpoint for a brief period of time in order to catch someone specific traveling on the road at that time ⁽¹²⁴⁾.
- Checkpoints as a show of force: in order to demonstrate that they are in control over an area and in order to disturb communication lines, the Taliban sets up checkpoints, sometimes all day ⁽¹²⁵⁾. According to Anand Gopal, the rationale behind setting up checkpoints, for both government forces and Taliban, is primarily controlling an area and collecting information on who goes in and out the area under their control. Government employees and those associated with the government are a risk of being filtered out at these Taliban checkpoints, although much depends on the place and time ⁽¹²⁶⁾. In targeting civilians at their checkpoints, the Taliban also undermine the authority and legitimacy of the government in the eyes of the population, showing it cannot provide security ⁽¹²⁷⁾.
- Checkpoints driven by financial motives: local Taliban sometimes erect checkpoints for extortion, in spite of Taliban general rules. Here too, government employees and influential persons are targeted, not for killing, but for ransom taking ⁽¹²⁸⁾.

Taliban searches of vehicles along the roads are said to happen more frequently from evening until dawn, when ANSF are not present on the roads ⁽¹²⁹⁾. A Kabul based security analyst, who requested to remain anonymous for security reasons, shared with EASO his analysis of a sample of 217 incidents of illegal checkpoints across 23 provinces, all in 2017. According to his findings, the majority of the incidents happened during daytime, especially early morning and late afternoon. At night, illegal checkpoints were more associated with criminality. The target of the AGE checkpoints were private vehicles and taxis. Public busses were rarely targeted.

⁽¹²⁰⁾ Khaama Press, Taliban kill 13 in an attack on a mosque in Balkh province, 2 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban execute 13 Balkh youth in mass shooting, 2 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²¹⁾ RFE/RL, Afghan Official Says Taliban Killed 13 Local Militiamen In Ambush, 2 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²²⁾ Ruttig, T., The 'Humvee Bomb' Series: The October wave of Taleban attacks in 2017 context, 7 November 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²³⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽¹²⁴⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽¹²⁵⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽¹²⁶⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽¹²⁷⁾ Reuters, Facing fewer checkpoints, Taliban make Afghan road trips more risky, 13 June 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹²⁸⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽¹²⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban control Kunduz-Takhar highway at night, 9 March 2017 ([url](#)); Reuters, Facing fewer checkpoints, Taliban make Afghan road trips more risky, 13 June 2016 ([url](#)).

The intent of the AGEs was mainly to identify government officials and off-duty ANSF personnel. The majority of the abductees however were civilians ⁽¹³⁰⁾.

Abubakar Siddique explained that, in his view, the ‘primary target’ at the checkpoints are off-duty ANSF personnel ⁽¹³¹⁾ (see [1.2.1 Members of the Afghan security forces and pro-government militias](#)). Sources indicate that off-duty ANSF personnel hide their identity papers when travelling ⁽¹³²⁾.

1.1.5.5 Urban-rural divide

Inside the cities, insurgents do not have the capacity to set up checkpoints to screen random passengers for certain profiles, except occasionally in Kunduz or the outskirts of Kunduz ⁽¹³³⁾. Instead, insurgents regularly attack civilian objects and places in the cities where they assume certain types of potential targets will be gathering ⁽¹³⁴⁾. Such attacks include attacks on judicial buildings ⁽¹³⁵⁾, government buildings ⁽¹³⁶⁾, embassies and consulates ⁽¹³⁷⁾, media outlets ⁽¹³⁸⁾, places of worship of religious minorities ⁽¹³⁹⁾ and bank franchises ⁽¹⁴⁰⁾.

According to analyst Borhan Osman, insurgents will also target certain individuals inside the cities in drive-by shootings, often involving motorbikes. The victims of these shootings often do not have a very high public profile, states Osman, and the targeting is often intended to intimidate other individuals under threat by showing their reach. Victims of targeting include people such as traffic police or alleged spies or mid-level human rights activists, and are often people who received death threats before ⁽¹⁴¹⁾. For example, a number of targeted assassinations of government officials and ANSF members took place in Kandahar in the period 2016-2017, including shootings from motorbikes and the use of explosive devices ⁽¹⁴²⁾. Gopal observed that the Taliban’s ability to trace, penetrate and target individuals with success is in his assessment, much greater in cities where the insurgents have a base, such as

⁽¹³⁰⁾ Anonymous source, briefing, 23 November 2017. The source is a Kabul based security official, specialised in security in Afghanistan.

⁽¹³¹⁾ Siddique, A., Skype interview, 2 August 2017.

⁽¹³²⁾ Reuters, Facing fewer checkpoints, Taliban make Afghan road trips more risky, 13 June 2016 ([url](#)); Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 14.

⁽¹³³⁾ Siddique, A., Skype interview, 2 August 2017.

⁽¹³⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 72.

⁽¹³⁵⁾ Al Jazeera, Suicide blast near Kabul Supreme Court kills dozens, 7 February 2017 ([url](#)); Reuters, Taliban attack kills five at Afghan court, 5 June 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁶⁾ Guardian (The), Afghanistan: dozens dead in Kabul bombing targeting government workers, 24 July 2017 ([url](#)); BBC News, Suicide bomber hits Afghan defence ministry in Kabul, 9 March 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁷⁾ Al Jazeera, ISIL claims attack on Iraqi embassy in Kabul, 31 July 2017 ([url](#)); Independent, Suicide bomb kills at least 90 and wounds more than 400 in Afghanistan, 31 May 2017 ([url](#)); Al Jazeera, Taliban attacks German consulate in Afghanistan, 11 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁸⁾ Tolo News, Seven TOLO TV Employees Killed In Wednesday Attack, 21 January 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Death toll rises to six in RTA TV attack, 17 May 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Blast at Pajhwok Jalalabad office widely condemned, 12 July 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽¹³⁹⁾ UNAMA, UNAMA condemns killing of civilians in Herat mosque attack, 2 August 2017 ([url](#)); Reuters, Four killed in attack on mosque in Kabul, 15 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 40.

⁽¹⁴¹⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽¹⁴²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kandahar official gunned down by unidentified assailants, 4 September 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 policeman dead, 3 hurt in Kandahar suicide bombing, 29 October 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 women workers of Kandahar airport gunned down, 17 December 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Children among 5 hurt in Kandahar explosions, 22 December 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost’s deputy police chief killed in Kandahar, 12 February 2017 ([url](#)).

Kandahar, Kunduz or Khost, in comparison to other cities where the insurgents lack a presence, such as Herat or Mazar-e Sharif. In Kabul, the insurgents have a presence inside the city, members of which often collude with the growing criminal scene in the city. Yet their presence is not as open as in places like Kunduz, Kandahar or Khost. Although not easy to execute, targeted assassinations do take place in Kabul city ⁽¹⁴³⁾. For example, in April 2017 two Anti-Corruption Criminal Justice Center (ACJC) employees and an officer from the Directorate for the Protection of VIPs were killed in targeted assassinations in Kabul city ⁽¹⁴⁴⁾. Targeted assassinations in Kabul are, according to Giustozzi, carried out by a targeting team of more than 20 people and take place primarily away from the city centre, where the wealthy and powerful live ⁽¹⁴⁵⁾. However, neither Osman nor Gopal have found any information on such specialised killing teams ⁽¹⁴⁶⁾. For further information on the insurgent capacities to track and target individuals that relocated to a large city, please refer to [1.4 Escaping targeting](#).

Because detaining ‘wanted’ individuals for interrogation or trial is not as easy for the Taliban to do in Kabul, the Taliban, according to Giustozzi, can either proceed with assassination or may monitor an individual until they leave the city and detain them when travelling ⁽¹⁴⁷⁾.

A number of these incidents will be discussed under the respective subchapters of [1.2 Targeted profiles](#).

⁽¹⁴³⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ Tolo News, Rise In Assassinations In Kabul Sparks Concern, 10 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 10, 16.

⁽¹⁴⁶⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017. Borhan Osman is political analyst in the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), focussing his research on insurgent groups; Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽¹⁴⁷⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 16.

1.2 Targeted individuals

Targets of deliberate killings or abduction by insurgents in 2016 include, according to UNAMA, tribal elders, judicial staff, civilian government administration staff and civilians alleged to be government spies, but also civilians who refused to comply with insurgent instructions ⁽¹⁴⁸⁾. In 2017, UNAMA added to this list ‘civilians perceived to oppose Anti-Government Element values’ ⁽¹⁴⁹⁾.

Dr. Antonio Giustozzi summarised the targets of the Taliban as individuals the Taliban considers to be ‘misbehaving’. These include many of the individuals listed by UNAMA above and in addition, Giustozzi adds ‘individuals of any category selected by the Taliban as useful or necessary to their war effort, and who have refused to collaborate’ ⁽¹⁵⁰⁾. For example, the Taliban are known to have cut off the fingers of people participating in the elections of 2014 and targeted staff of the Independent Election Commission ⁽¹⁵¹⁾.

According to scholar Neamat Nojumi, the targeting by the Taliban goes beyond those working for the Afghan government. One’s adherence to the Afghan Constitution or a liberal social or cultural view can also make a person a legitimate target. He explained that this is why the Taliban target those who participate in the elections or promote women’s rights ⁽¹⁵²⁾.

In the following sections, and without being exhaustive, this report will highlight a number of instances and patterns of individual targeting by insurgent groups.

1.2.1 Members of the Afghan security forces and pro-government militias

A number of attacks throughout Afghanistan in the spring of 2017 specifically targeted ANSF personnel, on duty or off-duty alike. For example:

- In April 2017, the Taliban conducted a largescale attack on an army base in Mazar-e Sharif, killing more than 130 soldiers ⁽¹⁵³⁾. In their statement claiming responsibility, the Taliban called this attack ‘a reminder to the regime soldiers that they should not needlessly sacrifice their lives for foreign occupiers and either join the ranks of the Mujahideen or else desert ranks and go back to their homes’ ⁽¹⁵⁴⁾.
- In May 2017, militants attacked a branch of the Kabul Bank in Gardez, Paktia, killing two police officers and injuring more than 30 ⁽¹⁵⁵⁾.
- On 18 June 2017, a suicide bomber attacked a police headquarters in Gardez, Paktia, killing around five police officers, and injuring dozens of civilians ⁽¹⁵⁶⁾.
- On 22 June 2017, the Taliban attacked a branch of the New Kabul Bank in Lashkar Gah, killing around 30 people, targeting civilians and members of the security forces who

⁽¹⁴⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 64.

⁽¹⁴⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 43.

⁽¹⁵⁰⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 11.

⁽¹⁵¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2014, July 2014 ([url](#)), pp. 64-65.

⁽¹⁵²⁾ Nojumi, N., e-mail, 22 September 2017. Neamat Nojumi made this comment during the review of this report.

⁽¹⁵³⁾ BBC News, Mazar-e Sharif attack: Afghanistan mourns deadly Taliban assault, 22 April 2017 ([url](#)); Al Jazeera, Taliban fighters attack Afghan army base, ‘killing 140’, 22 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan – Voice of Jihad, The duties and responsibilities of Shaheen Corps, 23 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ RFE/RL, Two Afghan Police Killed, More Than 30 People Wounded In Attack, 20 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ Reuters, Six police killed in attack on Afghanistan police headquarters, 18 June 2017 ([url](#)); Guardian (The), Suicide bombers attack Afghan police HQ, killing or wounding dozens, 18 June 2017 ([url](#)).

were waiting to collect their pay ⁽¹⁵⁷⁾. The Taliban spokesperson claiming the attack again referred to the victims as ‘hirelings’ ⁽¹⁵⁸⁾.

- In August 2017, a suicide bomber again targeted a branch of the New Kabul Bank in central Kabul, near the US Embassy, killing five and wounding eight persons. Claiming responsibility for the attack, the Taliban said it targeted security forces personnel withdrawing their salaries ⁽¹⁵⁹⁾.

Besides targeting places where ANSF personnel gather, the Taliban also deliberately target ANSF personnel in targeted killings or abductions, in the rural and urban areas alike ⁽¹⁶⁰⁾. The following examples were found, although not all were publicly claimed by the Taliban:

- In September 2016, the head of police from Kapisa province escaped a remote controlled bomb blast ⁽¹⁶¹⁾.
- In March 2017, two police officers were shot in Kabul city ⁽¹⁶²⁾.
- In May 2017, a staff member of the police headquarters, a police officer and a soldier were targeted in separate attacks in Kandahar city ⁽¹⁶³⁾.
- In June 2017, an army official escaped an abduction attempt in Logar, after killing the insurgent responsible for the kidnap operation ⁽¹⁶⁴⁾.
- In July 2017, the head of the provincial Crime branch of the ANP was abducted when leaving his home and killed the same day by the Taliban in Logar ⁽¹⁶⁵⁾.
- In July 2017, The New York Times reported on a wave of attacks in Kandahar, in which Taliban specifically try to kill as many ANSF personnel as possible ⁽¹⁶⁶⁾.
- In July 2017, a senior police officer was targeted by a suicide bomber in Kandahar province ⁽¹⁶⁷⁾.

According to a New York Times article, ‘Taliban pressure [on soldiers to leave the army] includes fines on families of soldiers, physical punishment of soldiers who return home, and even confiscation of land and homes’ ⁽¹⁶⁸⁾.

According to Giustozzi, the priority targets for Taliban targeting are officers of the security services, National Directorate of Security (NDS) ⁽¹⁶⁹⁾; according to Borhan Osman, members of ‘local uprising’ militias against the Taliban, Afghan Local Police (ALP) and other enemies that the Taliban find ‘hard to defeat’ are in this category ⁽¹⁷⁰⁾. Examples include:

- In March 2016 in Jawzjan, the Taliban executed a man accused of supporting the government. He was supposedly a member of an uprising group two years earlier ⁽¹⁷¹⁾.

⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ Al Jazeera, Deadly car bomb hits Afghanistan's Lashkar Gah, 22 June 2017 ([url](#)); Guardian (The), Afghanistan: Taliban claims responsibility for suicide car bomb attack, 22 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ Zabihulla-M, [Twitter], posted on: 22 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁵⁹⁾ RFE/RL, Suicide Bombing Kills Five At Bank In Kabul, 29 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 67.

⁽¹⁶¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Kapisa police chief survive bomb attack, 17 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶²⁾ Germany: Federal Office for Migration and Asylum, Information Centre Asylum and Migration Briefing Notes (20 March 2017), 20 March 2017, available at: ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶³⁾ Germany: Federal Office for Migration and Asylum, Information Centre Asylum and Migration Briefing Notes (15 May 2017), 15 May 2017, available at: ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁴⁾ Khaama Press, Bid to kidnap Afghan army officer turns deadly for militants in Logar, 29 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar acting crime branch chief killed in Taliban attack, 11 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ New York Times (The), Taliban Slaughter Soldiers in Pattern of Attacks in Kandahar, 26 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Senior police officer killed in Chaman attack, 10 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁸⁾ New York Times (The), Afghan Army Recruitment Dwindles as Taliban Threaten Families, 18 November 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁶⁹⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 11.

⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽¹⁷¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban execute three persons in Jawzjan, 29 March 2016 ([url](#)).

- The killing of an ALP commander and his son by a suspected Taliban on a motorcycle in Faryab in September 2017 ⁽¹⁷²⁾.

As mentioned in the subchapter [1.1.5.4 Checkpoints](#), the insurgents continued to target off-duty and former ANP officers ⁽¹⁷³⁾. At their checkpoints along the roads, Taliban are said to screen the passengers to kidnap or kill the security personnel. For example, in May 2016:

‘the Taliban stopped three civilian buses carrying passengers from Kabul to Takhar and Badakhshan Provinces in Ali Abad district of Kunduz Province. Taliban abducted 185 passengers, including 30 women and children. The abductors identified 28 men as Afghan Security Personnel and released 157 passengers. They executed 12 of the kidnapped passengers and released eight others. The last eight were released a month and a half later, after local elders mediated their release’ ⁽¹⁷⁴⁾.

In a similar incident in Farah in July 2017, sixteen passenger were forced out of the bus they were travelling in, seven were killed on the spot and nine others were abducted. According to the police spokesperson, only one victim was a police officer, the other six civilians ⁽¹⁷⁵⁾.

In one instance in Kunduz Province, Taliban are said to have used biometric technology to identify ANSF personnel at their checkpoint, a claim dismissed by the Afghan Ministry of Interior, but later confirmed by a high ranking police official ⁽¹⁷⁶⁾. However, Dr. Giustozzi assumes the Taliban have no access to government databases of security personnel, ‘otherwise the number of their blacklisted individuals would be much higher. This is not surprising as the government itself is hardly able to tell for sure who is really in its security forces, or works for the government’ ⁽¹⁷⁷⁾. For more information on the targeting at checkpoints, please refer to the subchapter [1.1.5.4 Checkpoints](#).

1.2.1.1 Women in the ANSF

In April 2017, SIGAR reported that there were 4,388 women working in the ANSF, 1.4 % of the total ANSF force ⁽¹⁷⁸⁾. In 2013, almost half of all female police officers (688 of the 1489) were stationed in Kabul province, and very few to none deployed in rural provinces. Only in Balkh and Herat, there were more than 100 policewomen ⁽¹⁷⁹⁾. There are women in key units, such as Criminal Investigation Division and Counter-Narcotics ⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ and even in the elite Crisis Response Unit ⁽¹⁸¹⁾ and some hold leadership positions, with the rank of colonel and general

⁽¹⁷²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab: ALP commander, son killed near home, 4 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 43.

⁽¹⁷⁴⁾ US DoS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2016, 6 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 16.

⁽¹⁷⁵⁾ AFP, Gunmen kidnap Afghan bus passengers, killing at least seven, 12 July 2017, available at: ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁶⁾ Khaama Press, MoI rejects Taliban has gained access to biometric system, 1 June 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Taliban Used Biometric System During Kunduz Kidnapping, 5 June 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 13-14.

⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ SIGAR, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress, 30 April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 18.

⁽¹⁷⁹⁾ OXFAM, Women and the Afghan Police, 10 September 2013 ([url](#)), pp. 13-14.

⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ OXFAM, Women and the Afghan Police, 10 September 2013 ([url](#)), p. 13.

⁽¹⁸¹⁾ LA Times (The), In Afghanistan, an elite female police officer battles cultural taboos as well as the Taliban, 3 May 2017 ([url](#)).

(¹⁸²). In 2014, a Kabul district had the first female district police chief (¹⁸³). However, women in police and in leadership positions are a ‘favorite target’ of insurgents (¹⁸⁴).

Without providing detailed information on perpetrators, recent examples of targeting of female ANSF personnel include:

- Two policewomen were shot on their way to work in Badakhshan province in June 2017 (¹⁸⁵).
- Five female security personnel of Kandahar airport travelling in a van transporting them to their work were shot and killed by men on a motorcycle (¹⁸⁶).
- A widely acclaimed female pilot of the Afghan Airforce ended up requesting asylum in the US, citing numerous death threats to her and her family (¹⁸⁷).

For further information on the societal attitudes towards female media workers please refer to the EASO COI Report - *Afghanistan: Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms* (¹⁸⁸).

1.2.2 Government officials or the accusation of being a government spy

In 2016, UNAMA recorded 481 incidents targeting government officials, including judges, prosecutors and judicial staff but not including ANSF, resulting in 521 casualties (¹⁸⁹). For example, in 2016 in Kandahar City, there was a continued spree of execution style killings of civilians working for or perceived as having connections with, the local authorities (¹⁹⁰).

1.2.2.1 Targeting of government officials

According to author and journalist Abubakar Siddique, the targeting of government officials depends on several aspects, such as where a person worked or works, where a person is from, and what level or position a person has. Persons working for the ministries in the forefront of the fight against the Taliban, such as the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Interior, or the Ministry of Justice, are a priority. According to Siddique: ‘the Taliban have shown remarkable skill at targeting them and killing them’ (¹⁹¹). For example, the Ministry of Defense offices and busses transporting its personnel have regularly been targeted, as have Ministry of Interior personnel, notably inside Kabul, including police cadets (¹⁹²). Although less obvious as a target,

(¹⁸²) OXFAM, Women and the Afghan Police, 10 September 2013 ([url](#)), p. 13.

(¹⁸³) UNDP, Afghanistan’s First Female District Police Chief: Colonel Jamila Bayaz, n.d. ([url](#)); Reuters, Kabul’s new female police chief aware of danger, hopes to inspire others, 16 January 2014 ([url](#)).

(¹⁸⁴) Guardian (The), Afghanistan’s top female police officer dies after shooting, 15 September 2013 ([url](#)).

(¹⁸⁵) Germany: Federal Office for Migration and Asylum, Information Centre Asylum and Migration Briefing Notes (7 July 2017), 7 July 2017, available at ([url](#)).

(¹⁸⁶) New York Times (The), Gunmen in Afghanistan Kill 5 Female Airport Employees, 17 December 2016 ([url](#)).

(¹⁸⁷) France24, Female Afghan pilot requests US asylum over safety fears, 26 December 2016 ([url](#)).

(¹⁸⁸) EASO, Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan. Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms, December 2017 ([url](#)).

(¹⁸⁹) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 73.

(¹⁹⁰) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 64.

(¹⁹¹) Siddique, A., Skype interview, 2 August 2017.

(¹⁹²) New York Times (The), A Day of Bloodshed in Kabul: Attacks at Defense Ministry and Aid Compound, 6 September 2016 ([url](#)); Reuters, Dozens killed, wounded in Afghanistan suicide attacks, 27 February 2016 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 7 killed, 18 hurt in suicide attack on MOD bus (Video), 14 December 2014 ([url](#)); Al Jazeera, Kabul suicide bomb kills Afghan defence staff, 26 January 2014 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 dead in attack on

similar attacks have also been raised against other ministries, such as attacks on busses carrying the personnel of the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum in October 2016 and June 2017 ⁽¹⁹³⁾. According to Antonio Giustozzi, not all Taliban networks attribute the same priority to targeting individuals linked to the government. For example, according to Giustozzi, the network loyal to Mullah Rasool does not target government employees at all ⁽¹⁹⁴⁾.

UNAMA reports that significant targets among government officials are judges, prosecutors and other judicial staff ⁽¹⁹⁵⁾. These individuals are singled out, as they are at the forefront of the fight against the Taliban ⁽¹⁹⁶⁾. According to UNAMA, the most recent campaign of targeting of judicial officials and staff was sparked by the execution of six members of the Taliban in May 2016 ⁽¹⁹⁷⁾. For example, in claiming an attack on the courthouse in Logar in June 2016, the Taliban referred to the execution of these Taliban members ⁽¹⁹⁸⁾. Since that execution, there have been a number of retaliatory attacks on the judiciary across the country ⁽¹⁹⁹⁾. The judiciary is therefore designated as a 'legitimate target' by the Taliban, as explained in this 2016 statement by the group ⁽²⁰⁰⁾:

'The enemy's supposed judicial bodies could possibly once again pay a hefty price for their crimes. Mujahideen shall also not remain idle towards known individuals or unions and their workers advocating implementation of such crimes and all of them shall categorically be classified as legitimate military targets' ⁽²⁰¹⁾.

Recent examples include a judge killed by a magnetic IED attached to his car in Jalalabad, Nangarhar in June 2017 ⁽²⁰²⁾.

Local officials are also the focus of targeting by the Taliban ⁽²⁰³⁾. The following examples were found, although not all were publicly claimed by the Taliban:

- In Farah in February 2017, a district governor was killed ⁽²⁰⁴⁾.
- In March 2017, a suicide bomber targeted the provincial officer responsible for Haj and religious affairs in Nangarhar, killing his brother ⁽²⁰⁵⁾.
- In April 2017, a provincial council member from Kapisa was killed in a bomb attack ⁽²⁰⁶⁾.

Defence Ministry bus, 26 May 2014 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Mostly Civilian Casualties in Ministry of Defence Suicide Attack, 9 March 2013 ([url](#)); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 60.

⁽¹⁹³⁾ Guardian (The), Afghanistan: dozens dead in Kabul bombing targeting government workers, 24 July 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, 20 injured as suicide bomber hits mini bus in Kabul, 5 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁴⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 13.

⁽¹⁹⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 45.

⁽¹⁹⁶⁾ Siddique, A., Skype interview, 2 August 2017.

⁽¹⁹⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 73.

⁽¹⁹⁸⁾ Reuters, Taliban attack kills five at Afghan court, 5 June 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽¹⁹⁹⁾ CNN, Taliban shoot up Afghan court, kill 7 in retaliatory attack, 5 June 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 45.

⁽²⁰¹⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan – Voice of Jihad, New statement from the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan: "Regarding the Intent of Executing Prisoners By the Ghani Administration", 29 April 2016, available at: ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰²⁾ 1 TV News, Afghan judge killed in magnetic bomb blast in Jalalabad, 20 June 2017, ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰³⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 45.

⁽²⁰⁴⁾ 1TV News, Afghan district governor killed in bomb blast, 6 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁵⁾ Germany: Federal Office for Migration and Asylum, Information Centre Asylum and Migration Briefing Notes (20 March 2017), 20 March 2017, available at: ([url](#)).

⁽²⁰⁶⁾ Germany: Federal Office for Migration and Asylum, Information Centre Asylum and Migration Briefing Notes (3 April 2017), 3 April 2017, available at: ([url](#)).

- In May 2017, a district chief and two of his guards were injured in an attack in Logar ⁽²⁰⁷⁾.
- In May 2017, the Kandahar governor's media advisor was shot dead ⁽²⁰⁸⁾.
- In June 2017, the Taliban claimed responsibility for the killing of a district governor in Nimroz ⁽²⁰⁹⁾.
- In July 2017, a public relations official of the High Peace Council was killed in Samangan ⁽²¹⁰⁾.
- In July 2017, a district chief and his son were killed in an explosion in Farah ⁽²¹¹⁾.

Personnel from ministries less directly involved in the fight against the Taliban, such as education departments, health departments or rural development, are much less a target 'by default', in the view of Borhan Osman ⁽²¹²⁾. However, reports on the targeting of such profiles were found. For example, in July 2017, the Taliban abducted an administrator of the agriculture office in Jawzjan when he was travelling to the provincial capital for treatment ⁽²¹³⁾. Osman and Siddique explained the circumstances causing a government worker to become a target, although from a ministry not directly involved in the fight against the Taliban. This could be the case when the individual speaks out against the Taliban, or if a personal enmity is involved ⁽²¹⁴⁾. (See [1.2.4 Educational personnel](#) and [1.2.7. Humanitarian workers](#))

During the brief Taliban takeover of the city of Kunduz in 2015, the Taliban specifically visited the houses of government officials (including judges and prosecutors) and asked for them by name. UNAMA received numerous reports of abductions and parallel justice executions of people suspected of working for the government or Afghan security forces. Although the majority of key government workers left the city before it was overrun, the Taliban reportedly also tried to identify the government workers among people fleeing the city at checkpoints ⁽²¹⁵⁾. According to a Kunduz provincial government official interviewed by UNAMA:

'They were using different methods for identification of Government people. For instance if someone said that he is a shopkeeper, then the Taliban was asking him about the price of a specific type of cooking oil or some other things in market. If he couldn't give the exact answer, then he was taken to unknown place' ⁽²¹⁶⁾.

⁽²⁰⁷⁾ Germany: Federal Office for Migration and Asylum, Information Centre Asylum and Migration Briefing Notes (29 May 2017), 29 May 2017, available at: [\(url\)](#).

⁽²⁰⁸⁾ Germany: Federal Office for Migration and Asylum, Information Centre Asylum and Migration Briefing Notes (8 May 2017), 8 May 2017, available at: [\(url\)](#).

⁽²⁰⁹⁾ 1 TV News, Gunmen shoot dead Afghan district governor in Nimroz, 19 June 2017 [\(url\)](#).

⁽²¹⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Samangan's peace committee public relations official killed, 9 July 2017 [\(url\)](#).

⁽²¹¹⁾ Germany: Federal Office for Migration and Asylum, Information Centre Asylum and Migration Briefing Notes (31 July 2017), 31 July 2017, available at: [\(url\)](#).

⁽²¹²⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017; Borhan Osman is political analyst in the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), focussing his research on insurgent groups.

⁽²¹³⁾ Bakhtar News, تلاش برای نجات یک مسؤول اداره زراعت جوزجان از چنگ طالبان, 12 July 2017 [\(url\)](#).

⁽²¹⁴⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017; Borhan Osman is political analyst in the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), focussing his research on insurgent groups; Siddique, A., Skype interview, 2 August 2017.

⁽²¹⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Special Report on Kunduz Province, December 2015 [\(url\)](#), pp. 13, 18.

⁽²¹⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Special Report on Kunduz Province, December 2015 [\(url\)](#), pp. 13, 18.

1.2.2.2 Accusation of supporting the government or spying

Targeting by the Taliban is not limited to those who are government employees, but also to those who are accused of being a supporter of the government ⁽²¹⁷⁾. In 2013, UNAMA documented 246 attacks against civilians who had no official affiliation to government, NGOs or recognised civilian institutions (i.e. medical, education, elections, development programming). These attacks against civilians resulted in 532 civilian casualties. These incidents involved insurgents deliberately targeting civilians, including farmers, shopkeepers and students, whom they perceived as supportive of the government or national or international security forces ⁽²¹⁸⁾. Sources report on the following examples:

- In August 2017, the Taliban allegedly kidnapped over 30 people from a village in Kandahar, killing several of them, on the accusation of supporting the government ⁽²¹⁹⁾.
- In Herat's Gozara district, the Taliban stopped the car of three employees of road construction company and shot them on the spot ⁽²²⁰⁾.
- In Ghazni, the Taliban shut down the bazaar and threatened each shopkeeper to close his shop, because local police used to purchase goods in their shops ⁽²²¹⁾.

Through their parallel judicial system, the Taliban also punished those they accused of being a spy, and passing on information on the Taliban to the government ⁽²²²⁾. According to Giustozzi, spying for the government is considered a crime *per se*, without the possibility to repent ⁽²²³⁾. Examples include:

- In March 2016, a custodian was shot and killed in front of the mosque where he worked. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the incident, alleging that the victim was working with the government intelligence services ⁽²²⁴⁾.
- In August 2016 in Kapisa, the Taliban accused a 20-year-old student of spying, kidnapped him, and killed him a week later ⁽²²⁵⁾.
- In December 2016, Taliban publicly hanged a university student in Maidan Wardak province, after finding him guilty of killing two Taliban commanders. The Taliban claimed to have carried out an 'investigation', and 'arrested' and questioned the student before killing him ⁽²²⁶⁾.
- In January 2017, a man was beaten to death by the Taliban, after a trial in a so-called 'kangaroo court', because he reported the placement of an IED in front of his house ⁽²²⁷⁾.

⁽²¹⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 42.

⁽²¹⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2013, February 2014 ([url](#)), p. 25.

⁽²¹⁹⁾ AFP, Afghan police search for villagers after mass kidnapping, 23 July 2017 via: ([url](#)).

⁽²²⁰⁾ Etilaatroz, طالبان سه کارمند یک شرکت راه سازی را تیرباران کردند, 11 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²²¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban shut bazaar, threaten shopkeepers, 24 December 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽²²²⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 11; USDoS, Afghanistan 2016 Human Rights Report, 3 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 12.

⁽²²³⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 12.

⁽²²⁴⁾ UN Human Rights Council, The situation of human rights in Afghanistan and technical assistance achievements in the field of human rights, 11 January 2017, available at: ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽²²⁵⁾ USDoS, Afghanistan 2016 Human Rights Report, 3 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 12.

⁽²²⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 69.

⁽²²⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban kill man with repeated guns strokes in Faryab, 1 January 2017 ([url](#)).

1.2.3 Working for foreign military troops

One of the main aims of the Taliban is the departure of foreign troops ⁽²²⁸⁾. (See [OTaliban objectives](#)). Those associated with the presence of these foreign troops, such as interpreters or guards, are according to several experts interviewed on this topic, top priorities to be targeted ⁽²²⁹⁾. The Taliban statement announcing the commencement of the 2014 ‘Khaibar’ Spring Offensive lists civilian contractors, translators, administrators, logistics personnel, amongst other individuals, as potential targets ⁽²³⁰⁾.

1.2.3.1 Interpreters

Citing a UNHCR source from 2009, Ben Anderson, a journalist who investigated the situation of interpreters for the US military in Afghanistan, estimated that an interpreter in Afghanistan was killed every 36 hours ⁽²³¹⁾. More recently, although according to Giustozzi difficult to verify, the Taliban claimed to have killed 15 interpreters in Kabul and surrounding suburbs in 2015 and 23 more in the first 11 months of 2016 ⁽²³²⁾. Anand Gopal stated, on the other hand, that there have not been many killings of interpreters in cities where the insurgent presence is not firm. Gopal gave the opinion that interpreters will receive threats, but killing is rare because of the reduced ability of insurgents to penetrate and target in cities such as Herat or Mazar-e Sharif ⁽²³³⁾. The Taliban spokesperson, interviewed by the Smithsonian Magazine, stated that the Taliban not usually send warning letters to interpreters, who he called ‘national traitors’ ⁽²³⁴⁾.

1.2.3.2 Other staff

Not only interpreters are being killed, so are those working in other capacities for the foreign military. For example, in June 2017, eight security guards working at the US military airbase in Bagram were killed when Taliban opened fire on their vehicle ⁽²³⁵⁾. In Baghlan, the Taliban have forced local communities to banish certain families who they considered are allies of the international forces ⁽²³⁶⁾. Anand Gopal however held the opinion that there is a difference between the those on the payroll of the foreign forces, such as interpreters and security

⁽²²⁸⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan – Voice of Jihad, Statement of the Islamic Emirate regarding the Inauguration of the Spring Offensive ‘Operation Mansouri’, 28 April 2017 ([url](#)); Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan – Voice of Jihad, Clarification statement regarding Operation Mansouri, 6 May 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Haqqani Network Chief Denies Taliban Role In Kabul, Herat Bombings, 12 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²²⁹⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017. Anand Gopal is a journalist and author with over ten years’ experience in Afghanistan; Siddique, A., Skype interview, 2 August 2017. Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017; Borhan Osman is political analyst in the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), focussing his research on insurgent groups; Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 13.

⁽²³⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2014, July 2014 ([url](#)), p. 29.

⁽²³¹⁾ Anderson, B., The Interpreters, 28 December 2014 ([url](#)), p. 6.

⁽²³²⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 13.

⁽²³³⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽²³⁴⁾ Smithsonian, The Tragic Fate of the Afghan Interpreters the U.S. Left Behind, November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²³⁵⁾ 1 TV News, Taliban gunmen kill eight workers of Bagram airbase, 20 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²³⁶⁾ CIVIC, Saving ourselves: Security Transition and Impact on Civilian Protection in Afghanistan, 21 November 2016 ([url](#)), p. 29.

guards and, on the other hand, individuals doing general maintenance jobs on security bases or delivering goods to the foreign forces. He gave the opinion that:

‘The latter group aren’t as systematically targeted. They are still targeted, and there it depends to the question of control. There are cases I know where the Taliban are in complete control of an area and foreign bases are basically surrounded. People are making deliveries to that base and they aren’t as systematically being targeted as in areas where there is contested control’ ⁽²³⁷⁾.

1.2.3.3 Special Immigrant Visa

Since 2009, the US has run a Special Immigrant Visa program to help some individuals who worked with the US to leave Afghanistan. However, there are caps on the number of participants, and advocacy groups called the procedures are too slow and not in pace with demand ⁽²³⁸⁾. There are two special immigrant classifications: one for individuals who worked as translators or interpreters and one for individuals who were employed by, or on behalf of, the US government or by ISAF in Afghanistan. Between 2008 and 2015, respectively 461 and 6,928 visa have been issued ⁽²³⁹⁾.

In December of 2016, the Afghan SIV program was extended for an additional four years until 31 December 2020, authorising an additional 1,500 available visas. The conditions included:

‘be employed by or on behalf of the United States Government in Afghanistan for a period of at least two years; served as an interpreter or translator for United States military personnel, the State Department, or USAID in Afghanistan, particularly while traveling off-base or away from U.S. Embassies with such personnel; performed sensitive and trusted activities for the United States Government in Afghanistan; provided faithful and valuable service to the United States Government, which is documented in a positive recommendation or evaluation from a senior supervisor; and have experienced or are experiencing an ongoing serious threat as a consequence of the alien’s employment by the United States Government’ ⁽²⁴⁰⁾.

In March 2017, the US Embassy in Kabul reportedly stopped scheduling interviews for Afghan military interpreters, because it had ran out of Special Immigrant Visas (SIV). By then it was estimated that more than 10,000 applicants were waiting on a decision in their file ⁽²⁴¹⁾. In May 2017, the US president allocated 2,500 extra SIVs for Afghans who were employed by or on behalf of the US Government ⁽²⁴²⁾ and in June 2017, the US Senate approved to issue another 4,000 more SIVs for Afghan interpreters or staff ⁽²⁴³⁾.

Waiting for their visa sometimes for years, many of these (former) employees of foreign troops remain in a situation where they fear targeting ⁽²⁴⁴⁾. There have been reports of

⁽²³⁷⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽²³⁸⁾ Foreign Policy, Special Visas for Afghan Interpreters Are Running Out, 10 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²³⁹⁾ US Congressional Research Service, Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Programs, 26 February 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 18-19. For more information on these programs, see these pages on the US Department of State website: <https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/immigrate/afghans-work-for-us.html#quarterly> and <https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/immigrate/iraqi-afghan-translator.html>.

⁽²⁴⁰⁾ Human Rights First, The Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program: Fact Sheet,

⁽²⁴¹⁾ Foreign Policy, Special Visas for Afghan Interpreters Are Running Out, 10 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁴²⁾ US Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Special Immigrant Visas for Afghans - Who Were Employed by/on Behalf of the U.S. Government, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽²⁴³⁾ Reuters, Afghans who helped U.S. forces may get more visas under defense bill, 29 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁴⁴⁾ Foreign Policy, Special Visas for Afghan Interpreters Are Running Out, 10 March 2017 ([url](#)); Anderson, B., The Interpreters, 28 December 2014 ([url](#)), p. 6.

individuals being killed while waiting for an answer to their visa application ⁽²⁴⁵⁾. Some out of necessity go back to translating for foreign troops or contractors in areas where they have been targeted before ⁽²⁴⁶⁾.

In 2013, the UK and Denmark announced similar 'special visa programs' for interpreters and other personnel ⁽²⁴⁷⁾. At least for the UK, concerns were voiced that the more than 1,000 visas foreseen in the program would not cover all the more than 2,000 staff that worked for the UK troops in Afghanistan ⁽²⁴⁸⁾. Other sources stated only around 600 would qualify ⁽²⁴⁹⁾. As in the US, the UK special visa program was, according to some, marred by slow and overly bureaucratic procedures and blamed for being too restrictive ⁽²⁵⁰⁾. According to an assessment made by the volunteer-run website called Refugees.dk, which provides information about asylum in Denmark, Denmark also runs a similar visa program, but after two years only eight Afghan interpreters of the 151 who applied had received a visa ⁽²⁵¹⁾.

1.2.4 Education sector personnel

1.2.4.1 Education in Afghanistan

According to a May 2016 research paper on the practices of the Taliban in relation to education in Afghanistan by scholars Barnett Rubin, who is the director of the Afghanistan Pakistan Regional Program at New York's University's Centre on International Cooperation and previously was Senior Adviser to the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan in the US Department of State, and Clancy Rudeforth, conflict mediation adviser for the private diplomacy organisation Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, a difference should be made between two major systems of education in Afghanistan. There is the government-supported education in schools known as *maktabs*. In addition, there is religious education in schools known as *madrassas*. Madrassas can be state-run or private ⁽²⁵²⁾. According to Neamat Nojumi, a third group of educational institutions has emerged in post-Taliban Afghanistan, which are private institutions. They count over a hundred over the whole country, according to him ⁽²⁵³⁾. In all three systems, schools have a curriculum of Islamic religious education combined with science, language, mathematics and other subjects. Only the proportion of

⁽²⁴⁵⁾ Business Insider, An Afghan interpreter who worked with the US military was just murdered by the Taliban while waiting for an American visa, 2 June 2015 ([url](#)); Smithsonian, The Tragic Fate of the Afghan Interpreters the U.S. Left Behind, November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁴⁶⁾ Smithsonian, The Tragic Fate of the Afghan Interpreters the U.S. Left Behind, November 2016 ([url](#)); Refugees Deeply, Waiting for a U.S. Visa in the Taliban Heartland, 16 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁴⁷⁾ PRI, UK, Denmark to give Afghan interpreters visas, 22 May 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁴⁸⁾ BBC News, Clarification demanded over Afghan interpreters UK visas, 22 May 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁴⁹⁾ Guardian (The), Afghan interpreters' resettlement scheme 'does not go far enough', 22 May 2013 ([url](#)); PRI, UK, Denmark to give Afghan interpreters visas, 22 May 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁵⁰⁾ Guardian (The), Afghan interpreters 'risk being failed by bureaucracy', 22 May 2013 ([url](#)); Guardian (The), Afghan interpreters' resettlement scheme 'does not go far enough', 22 May 2013 ([url](#)); BBC News, Clarification demanded over Afghan interpreters UK visas, 22 May 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁵¹⁾ Refugees.dk, Documentation: The Afghan Interpreters, 9 June 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁵²⁾ Rubin, B., and Rudeforth, C., Enhancing access to Education: Challenges and Opportunities in Afghanistan, May 2016 ([url](#)), p. 4; Ministry of Education, Islamic Education – Afghanistan, 15 September 2006, available at: ([url](#)); .

⁽²⁵³⁾ Nojumi, N., e-mail, 22 September 2017. Neamat Nojumi made this comment during the review of this report.

religious education differs ⁽²⁵⁴⁾. *Dar ul hifaz* are schools specialised in teaching memorisation of the *Quran* by heart, not to be confused with the madrassas ⁽²⁵⁵⁾.

1.2.4.2 Targeting of education institutions after 2001

During their reign in the 1990s, the Taliban ‘closed girls’ schools and restricted other forms of non-religious education’ ⁽²⁵⁶⁾. When they re-emerged as an insurgency in 2004-5, they showed hostility toward schools run by the Ministry of Education, the *maktabs*, which they regarded, as ‘agents of foreign influence’, according to scholars Rubin and Rudeforth ⁽²⁵⁷⁾. The violence against schools peaked in 2006, with dozens of students and teachers killed and hundreds of schools burned or forcibly shut down ⁽²⁵⁸⁾.

However, communities showed little support for violence and the Taliban faced a hostile response from villagers who wanted their children to be allowed to go to school ⁽²⁵⁹⁾. The Taliban allowed schools to re-open if certain demands were met: adopt the Taliban curriculum, based on the 1980s mujahedin curriculum and textbooks, and hire teachers of religious subjects linked to the Taliban, usually in addition to teachers paid by the ministry of Education ⁽²⁶⁰⁾.

Since 2009, schools and teachers were removed from the list of targets by the Taliban, which led to an actual decrease in attacks on schools and personnel ⁽²⁶¹⁾. In 2012, ‘UNAMA concluded that the circumstances for recent or continuous closures are varied, and do not point to a unified strategy of closing schools’ ⁽²⁶²⁾. Still schools continued to be targeted regularly, even after this change in Taliban policy ⁽²⁶³⁾. Some examples include:

- Three teachers were killed and another abducted by the Taliban in Ghor province in March 2014 ⁽²⁶⁴⁾
- A teacher was killed in his home in Uruzgan province in November 2015 ⁽²⁶⁵⁾

UNAMA documented 44 incidents of ‘threat and intimidation directed against education-related personnel and facilities (including teachers, school watchmen and staff from the

⁽²⁵⁴⁾ Borchgrevink, K., *Beyond Borders: Diversity and Transnational Links in Afghan Religious Education*, September 2010, ([url](#)), p. 19.

⁽²⁵⁵⁾ Borchgrevink, K., *Beyond Borders: Diversity and Transnational Links in Afghan Religious Education*, September 2010, ([url](#)), p. 16.

⁽²⁵⁶⁾ Rubin, B., and Rudeforth, C., *Enhancing access to Education: Challenges and Opportunities in Afghanistan*, May 2016 ([url](#)), p. 6.

⁽²⁵⁷⁾ Rubin, B., and Rudeforth, C., *Enhancing access to Education: Challenges and Opportunities in Afghanistan*, May 2016 ([url](#)), p. 6.

⁽²⁵⁸⁾ New York Times (The), *High School Teacher is Beheaded in Afghanistan*, 5 January 2006 ([url](#)); New York Times (The), *Education in Afghanistan: A harrowing choice*, 9 July 2007 ([url](#)); Giustozzi, A., and Franco, C., *The Battle for Schools: The Taleban and State Education*, 13 December 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁵⁹⁾ Giustozzi, A., and Franco, C., *The Battle for Schools: The Taleban and State Education*, 13 December 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁶⁰⁾ Giustozzi, A., and Franco, C., *The Battle for Schools: The Taleban and State Education*, 13 December 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁶¹⁾ Giustozzi, A., and Franco, C., *The Battle for Schools: The Taleban and State Education*, 13 December 2011 ([url](#)); Rubin, B., and Rudeforth, C., *Enhancing access to Education: Challenges and Opportunities in Afghanistan*, May 2016 ([url](#)), p. 6.

⁽²⁶²⁾ UNAMA, *Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2012*, July 2012 ([url](#)), p. 33.

⁽²⁶³⁾ Khaama Press, *100 teachers and education officials killed in Afghanistan: MOE*, 10 August 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁶⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, *Taliban kill three teachers in Ghor*, 9 March 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁶⁵⁾ Khaama Press, *Unidentified armed men kill a teacher and his son in Urozgan’s Khas Urozgan District*, 29 November 2015 ([url](#)).

Department of Education)’ in 2016, representing a 41 per cent reduction in the number of instances compared to 2015 ⁽²⁶⁶⁾. In 2016, UNAMA and UNICEF stated:

‘In Afghanistan, education personnel, including students, continued to face direct attacks and threats from Anti-Government Elements due to their association with education provided by the Government. For example, UNAMA documented multiple instances of teachers employed by the Government of Afghanistan being killed, beaten, abducted or threatened by Anti-Government Elements after being accused of pro-Government alignment’ ⁽²⁶⁷⁾.

In 2012, UNAMA reported on Taliban directives distributed in several provinces to provincial Education Departments offering a detailed critique of specific content in school textbooks:

‘Their recommended edits included assertions that music classes should be removed, the right to women’s education is not absolute (girls should be educated during childhood and not after that), there is difference between regular war and holy war (Jihad), the right to life should differentiate between suicide and martyrdom, and religions are not equal’ ⁽²⁶⁸⁾.

1.2.4.3 Position of the Taliban towards education as of 2017

The Taliban regularly issue statements claiming to be in support of education ⁽²⁶⁹⁾ and proclaiming an absolute ban on attacks on education. For example, a Taliban statement from August 2016 said (translated by Borhan Osman):

‘According to the principles of the Islamic Emirate, no mujahed has the permission to destroy a bridge or burn a school. . . . Our countrymen have to be aware that the Islamic Emirate mujahedin never intentionally harm any school or public property. The Emirate’s leadership has repeatedly brought the protection of these institutions to the attention of mujahedin’ ⁽²⁷⁰⁾.

Attacks against schools and educational personnel are ‘no longer systematic, but still happen’, according to Rubin and Rudeforth ⁽²⁷¹⁾. Some examples include:

- A staff member of the provincial school authority was killed in a bomb attack in May 2017 in Ghazni ⁽²⁷²⁾
- In July 2017, deputy director of Islamic education in Kapisa was killed by a family member, a member of the Taliban ⁽²⁷³⁾.

According to a 2016 study by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), an independent research think tank based in Kabul, the current objective of the insurgents is not the school closures, as was the case in their violent campaign of 2006-2008, but to gain control

⁽²⁶⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 22.

⁽²⁶⁷⁾ UNAMA & UNICEF, Education and healthcare at risk, April 2016 ([url](#)), p. 10.

⁽²⁶⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2012, July 2012 ([url](#)), p. 33.

⁽²⁶⁹⁾ Rubin, B., and Rudeforth, C., Enhancing access to Education: Challenges and Opportunities in Afghanistan, May 2016 ([url](#)), p. 11.

⁽²⁷⁰⁾ Osman, B., The Attack on the American University in Kabul (2): Who did it and why?, 5 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁷¹⁾ Rubin, B., and Rudeforth, C., Enhancing access to Education: Challenges and Opportunities in Afghanistan, May 2016 ([url](#)), p. 6.

⁽²⁷²⁾ Germany: Federal Office for Migration and Asylum, Information Centre Asylum and Migration Briefing Notes (29 May 2017), 29 May 2017, available at: ([url](#)).

⁽²⁷³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban gun down Kapisa education official, 1 July 2017 ([url](#)); Khaama Press, Kapisa education official shot dead by own brother affiliated with Taliban, 1 July 2017 ([url](#)).

over them. This control is asserted through local deals with local government officials. Such negotiated settlements include arrangements over curriculum with the Taliban being able to inspect the schools regularly ⁽²⁷⁴⁾. However, in Paktika province, for example, dozens of schools remain closed because of insecurity. Locals, interviewed by Pajhwok Afghan News, blame the closure of these schools on individuals within the Taliban, rather than on the Taliban movement ⁽²⁷⁵⁾.

According to Giustozzi, '[e]ducational staff are allowed to operate if their department of education or school signs an agreement with the Taliban, change curriculum and textbooks, recruit teachers recommended by the Taliban for the religious subjects and allow the Taliban to supervise the school' ⁽²⁷⁶⁾. According to Neamat Nojumi, however,

'This Taliban/government partnership has been a localized practice only in the south, particularly in contested areas in Helmand. Even in Helmand, it is not the case for the whole of the province, particularly in the city of Lashkargah. The Taliban's attitude toward the government funded educational facilities and efforts has been hostile in many other contested areas of the country. In principle, the Taliban view the current educational system as the extension of the 'morally corrupt' Afghan government that promotes infidels' influence. The reason Taliban began to tolerate schools [...] was mainly because of the popularity of education across Afghanistan. Otherwise, they reject the Afghan government's educational system entirely' ⁽²⁷⁷⁾. (See [1.1.4.1 The aim of the Taliban targeting campaign](#))

In a June 2017 BBC report from Helmand, it is documented how the Taliban runs schools, still funded by the government. They continue to use government textbooks and only made minor changes to the curriculum. Government inspectors even still have access to the schools ⁽²⁷⁸⁾. Abubakar Siddique stated that teachers in rural areas often hail from the local communities, and therefore are often tolerated even in communities under Taliban control, if they do not speak out against the Taliban ⁽²⁷⁹⁾. Borhan Osman stated similarly that in an effort to come across as a viable alternative to the Afghan government caring for local communities, the mere fact that one is a teacher or employee of the Ministry of Education will not alone cause targeting unless this person is outspoken against the Taliban or considered as a spy, passing information to the provincial government, intelligence agencies or certain political parties ⁽²⁸⁰⁾. Neamat Nojumi added that, while this 'might be accurate for Helmand and parts of the southern districts. It would be difficult to establish this as the reality on the ground for the rest of Afghanistan. Taliban tolerating local teachers is not because of their respect to the formal educational system, but because they cannot easily eliminate the local teachers in a particular place. Often times this level of tolerance has a localized social and political reasoning' ⁽²⁸¹⁾.

According to a 2016 study by AREU, there are wide regional differences in these negotiated arrangements, depending on who is running the insurgency, who is the provincial elite or powerbroker, who is running the provincial line ministries and what is their strength and relationship towards each other and towards the political centre in Kabul ⁽²⁸²⁾. And even then,

⁽²⁷⁴⁾ AREU, The Political Economy Of Education and Health Service Delivery In Afghanistan, January 2016 ([url](#)), p. 30-31.

⁽²⁷⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, First school bell rings for Paktika children in 4 years, 23 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁷⁶⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 12.

⁽²⁷⁷⁾ Nojumi, N., e-mail, 22 September 2017. Neamat Nojumi made this comment during the review of this report.

⁽²⁷⁸⁾ BBC News, Taliban territory: Life in Afghanistan under the militants [video], 7 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁷⁹⁾ Siddique, A., Skype interview, 2 August 2017.

⁽²⁸⁰⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽²⁸¹⁾ Nojumi, N., e-mail, 22 September 2017. Neamat Nojumi made this comment during the review of this report.

⁽²⁸²⁾ AREU, The Political Economy Of Education and Health Service Delivery In Afghanistan, January 2016 ([url](#)), p. 25, 29.

local negotiated deals with the Taliban do not for guarantee protection for teachers, partly because of the presence of mobile insurgent groups that do not feel bound by any settlement ⁽²⁸³⁾. Anand Gopal similarly explained that targeting tends to be much higher and unpredictable in contested areas, in situations where loyalties are unclear to the armed actors trying to assert control over populations ⁽²⁸⁴⁾. Neamat Nojumi stresses that ‘these negotiated settlements are totally informal and extremely local. They are very fragile and can end with a senior level removal on either sides’ ⁽²⁸⁵⁾.

Borhan Osman suggests that there is a shift in targeting policy going on. Although universities are in general tolerated, certain institutions such as the American University in Afghanistan (AUAF) have been legitimate targets because of their links to the United States ⁽²⁸⁶⁾. The US funds 70 % of the university’s costs ⁽²⁸⁷⁾. The AUAF was targeted twice in August 2016 when two of its foreign professors have been kidnapped by the Taliban and later that month 13 people, including 7 students and a professor, were killed in a complex attack ⁽²⁸⁸⁾. In January 2017, the Ministry of Higher Education called for replacing all foreign university teachers with Afghans, partly because of security reasons ⁽²⁸⁹⁾.

Other instances of intimidation include pressuring teachers not to collect their salaries in the bank. The Taliban justified these moves in their fight against corruption and ‘ghost teachers’ ⁽²⁹⁰⁾. In other instances, the Taliban have set a condition on the re-opening of schools that the money from the Ministry of Education goes to the Taliban, the Taliban could assign teachers and head masters and could set the curriculum ⁽²⁹¹⁾.

1.2.4.4 Women in education

Analysts Osman and Gopal stated that based on an extensive 2016 research paper based on interviews with top Taliban leaders, that ‘there does not appear to be clear direction from the leadership on how field commanders should deal with issues such as girls’ schools, [and] the public role of women’ ⁽²⁹²⁾. UNAMA and UNICEF however stated that ‘throughout 2015, Anti-Government Elements deliberately restricted access of women and girls to education, including closure of girls’ schools, prohibition of education beyond 4th or 6th grade and complete bans on education for women and girls’ ⁽²⁹³⁾.

Media reports about the closure of girls schools continue to be reported, for example:

- In 2015 in Logar, 12 girls schools were closed after receiving Taliban threats that they would burn the schools and kill the staff and students ⁽²⁹⁴⁾.

⁽²⁸³⁾ AREU, The Political Economy Of Education and Health Service Delivery In Afghanistan, January 2016 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽²⁸⁴⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽²⁸⁵⁾ Nojumi, N., e-mail, 22 September 2017. Neamat Nojumi made this comment during the review of this report.

⁽²⁸⁶⁾ AAN, The Attack on the American University in Kabul (1): What happened and who the victims were, 4 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁸⁷⁾ Washington Post, Kabul’s American University just reopened after terrorist attack. Now it’s facing new threats, 15 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁸⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, American University asks Taliban to free its professors, 14 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁸⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Private varsities asked not to hire foreign teachers, 12 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁹⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban ask teachers to compile results in their presence, 19 May 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban warn Ghazni teachers against receiving salaries via banks, 5 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁹¹⁾ Rubin, B., and Rudeforth, C., Enhancing access to Education: Challenges and Opportunities in Afghanistan, May 2016 ([url](#)), p. 12.

⁽²⁹²⁾ Osman, B. and Gopal, A., Taliban Views on a Future State, July 2016 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽²⁹³⁾ UNAMA & UNICEF, Education and healthcare at risk, April 2016 ([url](#)), p. 6.

⁽²⁹⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 12 girls’ schools in Logar closed after Taliban’s threats, 27 June 2015 ([url](#)).

- In the first half of 2015, six girls' schools were reportedly targeted in Eastern provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar ⁽²⁹⁵⁾.
- In the Shindand district in Herat province, a number of girls schools remain shut in 2017 because of persistent Taliban threats ⁽²⁹⁶⁾.
- Only after 'indefatigable efforts of local elders', the only three girl schools in Alasay district of Kapisa could reopen in 2017 ⁽²⁹⁷⁾.

Violent incidents targeting female teachers are also reported, including:

- Taliban abducted two female teachers in Ghor in November 2016 ⁽²⁹⁸⁾.
- IWPR reported in December 2016, that female teachers have repeatedly been kidnapped by insurgents in Ghor ⁽²⁹⁹⁾.

1.2.5 Religious scholars

UNAMA stated that 'civilian casualties from attacks deliberately targeting religious persons and places of worship' steeply rose in 2016 ⁽³⁰⁰⁾. According to UNAMA, the killings target 'mullahs who had expressed pro-Government views or condemned civilian casualties caused by Anti-Government Elements' ⁽³⁰¹⁾. According to an article in the New York Times, 'their words carry weight across many parts of society, and they are assiduously courted for their support — and frequently killed for their criticism' ⁽³⁰²⁾. According to Neamat Nojumi, 'most of these clerics are killed mainly because they are either supporting the government or just simply rejecting the Taliban school of thought and ideology on the basis of moderate form of Islam practiced in Afghanistan for centuries, [for instance], Sufism' ⁽³⁰³⁾. The New York Times reports that hundreds of religious scholars have been killed since 2001, with an uptick of the targeting in the last two years ⁽³⁰⁴⁾. According to Anand Gopal, this occurs primarily in areas where the Taliban do not exert total control ⁽³⁰⁵⁾.

The reason for this targeting campaign is that the Taliban fear criticism from *ulema* more than from other actors in society. Only they are capable of delegitimising the Taliban's religious ideology ⁽³⁰⁶⁾. *Ulema* have frequently spoken out against certain insurgent tactics on religious grounds ⁽³⁰⁷⁾. Neamat Nojumi added that both the Taliban and the Afghan government have their own *ulema* ⁽³⁰⁸⁾.

Examples of targeting of religious scholars, not all publicly claimed by the Taliban, include:

⁽²⁹⁵⁾ Khaama Press, Unidentified gunmen blown up girls' school in Nangarhar, 13 July 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁹⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 42 schools remain closed in Herat districts, 29 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁹⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 closed Kapisa girls schools reopened, 3 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁹⁸⁾ Khaama Press, Taliban militants abduct 2 female teachers in Ghor province, 24 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽²⁹⁹⁾ IWPR, Afghanistan: Ghor's Education System Near Collapse, 5 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁰⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 35.

⁽³⁰¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015, February 2016 ([url](#)), p. 47.

⁽³⁰²⁾ New York Times (The), Taliban Target: Scholars of Islam, 28 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁰³⁾ Nojumi, N., e-mail, 22 September 2017. Neamat Nojumi made this comment during the review of this report.

⁽³⁰⁴⁾ New York Times (The), Taliban Target: Scholars of Islam, 28 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁰⁵⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽³⁰⁶⁾ New York Times (The), Taliban Target: Scholars of Islam, 28 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁰⁷⁾ Tolo News, Ulema Council Denounces Jamal Assassination as 'Un-Islamic', 18 October 2013 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Religious scholars declare ongoing conflict against Islam, 14 August 2015 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Jihad Decree in Afghanistan Inadmissible: Ulema Council, 14 March 2017 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Insurgent Attacks Will Not Divide Afghans: Ulema Council, 18 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁰⁸⁾ Nojumi, N., e-mail, 22 September 2017. Neamat Nojumi made this comment during the review of this report.

- In November 2013, gunmen on a motorbike killed the deputy head of the Kandahar Ulema Council ⁽³⁰⁹⁾.
- In August 2015, a member of the greater Ulema Council was killed in a Taliban attack on the road between Tirin Kot, Uruzgan, and Kandahar ⁽³¹⁰⁾.
- In May 2016, gunmen on a motorcycle killed an imam in Kandahar city ⁽³¹¹⁾.
- In May 2017, the deputy head of Islamic Science at the Academy of Science and doctorandus at the University of Nangarhar was shot from a motorcycle and killed in Kabul ⁽³¹²⁾.
- Also in May 2017, the chair of the province's Islamic Scholars Council was killed in Logar ⁽³¹³⁾.
- In May 2017, explosives, placed in his classroom, killed the head of the Ulema Council for Parwan ⁽³¹⁴⁾.
- In June 2017, a remote-controlled IED targeted a weekly gathering of provincial Ulema council members in Herat city ⁽³¹⁵⁾.
- In August 2017, the deputy head of the Ghazni provincial Ulema council was killed ⁽³¹⁶⁾.
- In September 2017, the head of Kapisa Ulema Council was shot and killed near his home ⁽³¹⁷⁾.

UNAMA also reports that religious leaders can be killed 'for delivering a funeral ceremony to a deceased Afghan national security force member, despite warnings not to do so' ⁽³¹⁸⁾.

1.2.7 Humanitarian workers

1.2.7.1 Health-care workers

Violence against health care institutions is, according to a 2016 AREU study on education and health services delivery, 'much rarer' than violence against educational institutions ⁽³¹⁹⁾. In 2016, however, UNAMA recorded 119 incidents affecting health-care facilities or health-care workers, resulting in 23 casualties ⁽³²⁰⁾ - as compared to 94 incidents affecting education, of which 44 directly targeting education personnel and institutions ⁽³²¹⁾. Incidents mainly include threats, intimidation, harassment and abduction of health-care personnel, including ambulance drivers. Threats and intimidation ranged from ordering the closure of a clinic or

⁽³⁰⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ulema council deputy chief gunned down, 11 November 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽³¹⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Ulama Council member killed in Taliban attack, 29 Augustus 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽³¹¹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Prayer leader gunned down in Kandahar City, 31 May 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽³¹²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Senior academic shot dead by motorcyclists in Kabul, 12 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³¹³⁾ Germany: Federal Office for Migration and Asylum, Information Centre Asylum and Migration Briefing Notes (29 May 2017), 29 May 2017, available at: ([url](#)).

⁽³¹⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Parwan Ulema Council chief killed in bombing, 9 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³¹⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 46.

⁽³¹⁶⁾ Bakhtar News, President Ghani Slams Attack On Ghazni Deputy Ulema Council, 28 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³¹⁷⁾ RFE/RL, Gunmen Kill Chief Of Religious Council In Northeastern Afghanistan, 9 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³¹⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2016, July 2016 ([url](#)), p. 16;

UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2015, August 2015 ([url](#)), p. 56.

⁽³¹⁹⁾ AREU, The Political Economy Of Education and Health Service Delivery In Afghanistan, January 2016 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽³²⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 27.

⁽³²¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 22.

vaccination program to ordering medical staff to pay taxes ⁽³²²⁾. In the first half of 2017, UNAMA recorded seven incidents in which eighteen healthcare workers were abducted ⁽³²³⁾.

Often, the reason for the threats against hospitals and clinics include the fact that the facilities treated wounded or injured adversaries (be it pro-government or anti-government fighters) ⁽³²⁴⁾. (For government treatment of these individuals, see [2.4 Treatment of health care and other humanitarian workers](#)). Anand Gopal however questioned if in these rare instances where healthcare workers are targeted, the reason is to be looked for purely in the insurgency, suggesting often rivalries or disputes are at the origin of these targeting incidents ⁽³²⁵⁾.

Here too, local negotiated arrangements with the insurgents create a space for health workers. Like educational institutions, clinics (both government clinics or ngo-operated) need a bargain to be able to function ⁽³²⁶⁾. According to Giustozzi, health staff ‘are allowed to operate if they accept treating injured Taliban cadre’ ⁽³²⁷⁾. UNOCHA reports that health care workers have been forced to treat a soldier or a fighter at gunpoint ⁽³²⁸⁾. In one incident in Baghlan in May 2017 for example, a healthcare worker was killed after he failed to operate on an injured insurgent because of lack of capacity or facilities ⁽³²⁹⁾. In Baghlan, the Taliban ordered a medical facility to relocate to an area under their control so that medics could treat their fighters ⁽³³⁰⁾. However, according to a doctor working in a hospital in Musa Qala, Helmand, and quoted in a BBC report on life under the Taliban from June 2017, the system of hospitals run by the government in areas under Taliban control encounters many problems: doctors do not receive their salaries and medical supplies are lacking. Sometimes, the Taliban steals medicines for themselves ⁽³³¹⁾. In Uruzgan, almost all clinics, including the central hospital in the provincial capital, were closed in September 2017 after receiving threats from the Taliban who control most of the province. The reasons cited for these threats were that ‘the Taliban were demanding that the government select only health officials recommended by their insurgent movement, and that they select the locations of any new clinics. Other officials said the Taliban also wanted the government to send surgeons and medical supplies to district clinics to care for wounded insurgents’ ⁽³³²⁾. The Taliban denied having made threats against these health institutions and claimed they had closed these health centres because of corruption and because the government deprived health centres in Taliban controlled areas of funding and medicines ⁽³³³⁾.

As is the case with teachers, Abubakar Siddique stated that doctors in rural areas often are tolerated, even in communities under Taliban control, if they do not speak out against the Taliban ⁽³³⁴⁾. This was corroborated by Borhan Osman, who commented that: ‘as long as there

⁽³²²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 27.

⁽³²³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 17.

⁽³²⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 28, 30.

⁽³²⁵⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽³²⁶⁾ AREU, The Political Economy Of Education and Health Service Delivery In Afghanistan, January 2016 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽³²⁷⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 12.

⁽³²⁸⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan, Issue 65, 30 June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 8.

⁽³²⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p.17.

⁽³³⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p.17.

⁽³³¹⁾ BBC News, Taliban territory: Life in Afghanistan under the militants [video], 7 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³³²⁾ New York Times (The), Afghan Province, Squeezed by Taliban, Loses Access to Medical Care, 23 September 2017 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Taliban Threats Force Health Facilities In Southern Afghan Province To Close, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³³³⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan – Voice of Jihad, Remarks by spokesman of Islamic Emirate regarding the closure of health centers in Uruzgan, 24 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³³⁴⁾ Siddique, A., Skype interview, 2 August 2017.

is nothing that makes you stand out as a potential enemy of the Taliban, the mere fact that a person is a health worker, will not make this person a target for the Taliban’ ⁽³³⁵⁾.

Here too, the situation can differ from area to area, depending to the degree of control versus contestation ⁽³³⁶⁾. According to Humanitarian Outcomes, an independent research consultancy ⁽³³⁷⁾ that produces the Aid Worker Security Report for 2017 ⁽³³⁸⁾, in contested areas, Taliban attacks on aid workers are used ‘to destabilise the situation and seize assets while delegitimising the current order and making a show of strength to the local population’. In areas firmly under Taliban control, insurgents ‘have strong incentives to make deals with humanitarian actors to provide services to the population (and aid groups can be a revenue source as well, through imposed ‘taxes’ and other concessions)’ ⁽³³⁹⁾. According to UNOCHA, in 2016 and 2017, medical facilities were the target of 240 attacks, averaging 13 incidents per month. The highest number of incidents affecting health facilities or aid workers happened in Badghis (16), Uruzgan (13), Nangarhar (11), and Helmand (3) ⁽³⁴⁰⁾. In Nangarhar, a largely contested province ⁽³⁴¹⁾, UNOCHA cited doctors who reported incidents of targeting, such as threats and killings by insurgents against their colleagues; they stated that are very worried to travel to work or to their home villages. Several cases of targeting doctors’ family members in kidnapping-for-ransom were also reported ⁽³⁴²⁾. The Taliban are also said to use kidnapping as a form of ‘informal registration’ of aid workers in territories they control ⁽³⁴³⁾. UNOCHA also interviewed a doctor in Mazar-e Sharif, who, by contrast with those in Nangarhar, indicated that they had not experienced threats as a result of the conflict at their facility which serves 4,000 people on the outskirts of the city ⁽³⁴⁴⁾.

1.2.7.2 NGO workers

The International NGO Safety Office (INSO), a NGO that provides security analysis to other NGOs in conflict areas, states on its website

‘Whilst incidents of NGOs being the direct targets of hostility remain rare, there have been several prominent cases in which NGOs were targeted as a result of their activities being perceived as either non-neutral or in violation of Afghanistan’s cultural or religious customs. With local operating environments becoming increasingly complex and the array of armed actors both broader and more fragmented, this presents a key risk to NGOs’ ⁽³⁴⁵⁾.

From January to August 2017, INSO recorded 94 incidents affecting NGOs, of which 25 were robberies and 16 cases of intimidation, resulting in 9 fatalities and 10 injuries ⁽³⁴⁶⁾.

⁽³³⁵⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽³³⁶⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽³³⁷⁾ Humanitarian Outcomes, About, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽³³⁸⁾ Based on the Aid Worker Security Database of public on reporting security incidents against humanitarian workers. Humanitarian Outcomes, Aid Worker Security Database, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽³³⁹⁾ Humanitarian Outcomes, Aid Worker Security Report 2017, 31 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 10.

⁽³⁴⁰⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan, Issue 65, 30 June 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 6-7.

⁽³⁴¹⁾ LWJ, LWJ Map Assessment: Taliban controls or contests 45% of Afghan districts, 26 September 2017 ([url](#)); Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, 27 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁴²⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan Issue 66, 31 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽³⁴³⁾ Humanitarian Outcomes, Aid Worker Security Report 2017, 31 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 7.

⁽³⁴⁴⁾ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Afghanistan Issue 66, 31 July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽³⁴⁵⁾ INSO, Afghanistan Key Risks and Mitigation Management, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽³⁴⁶⁾ INSO, Afghanistan NGO incident rate, n.d. ([url](#)).

In 2015, nowhere in the world have there been more victims of attacks on aid workers than in Afghanistan: 101, compared to 42 in second South Sudan ⁽³⁴⁷⁾. In Afghanistan, aid workers are primarily the victim of kidnappings ⁽³⁴⁸⁾.

With respect to the ‘fatality rate’ which INSO calculates on the basis of the total number of all NGO workers killed in the country from national and international NGO staff and the Red Cross, INSO clarifies that ‘Where there is no clear upwards trend in NGO deaths, we assess that *systematic targeting of NGOs does not exist* and that deaths rather occur as a result of exposure to ambient insecurity albeit with occasional targeted events’ [emphasis in the original] ⁽³⁴⁹⁾. In his statement on the occasion of *Eid-ul Adha* published on the Taliban’s website, Taliban leader Haibattullah welcomed NGOs to come to areas under Taliban control and called upon his fighters to provide cooperation and security for NGOs ⁽³⁵⁰⁾. Still, according to Humanitarian Outcomes, an NGO that monitors violence against aid workers, the Taliban have been responsible for 39 % of all attacks from non-state armed groups around the world between 2011 and 2016. No other group was attributed more attacks than the Afghan Taliban ⁽³⁵¹⁾.

However, during the brief takeover of the city of Kunduz in 2015, the former Taliban leader Mullah Mansour, in a statement published on the Taliban’s website, likewise called for NGO-workers to continue their work normally and report problems and complaints to the Taliban ‘Commission for Control and Administration of NGOs and Companies’ ⁽³⁵²⁾. Yet, ‘UNAMA received consistent reports of NGO staff being singled out by the Taliban in house searches, seemingly on the basis of their perceived association with ‘foreigners’. UNAMA further clarified: ‘even where individual Taliban commanders wished to ensure the protection of NGO personnel and property, they struggled to achieve this given the number of different groups engaged in fighting and the lack of a centralized command and control structure in Kunduz’ ⁽³⁵³⁾.

Especially younger and lower-ranked members of insurgents groups, interviewed by Humanitarian Outcomes, frequently accused aid workers of ‘offending and transgressing Islamic dictates’, especially if they were involved in the promotion of women rights ⁽³⁵⁴⁾.

1.2.7.3 Other categories of humanitarian workers

Eighteen of the 95 incidents targeting health-care workers recorded by UNAMA in 2016 targeted **polio vaccination** programs ⁽³⁵⁵⁾. UNICEF, quoted by UNAMA, recorded 20 conflict-related incidents involving polio-eradication workers, but that directly targeted the polio eradication program. Threats and intimidation led to bans, that were mostly ended through

⁽³⁴⁷⁾ Humanitarian Outcomes, Aid Worker Security Report – 2016 – Figures at a glance, n.d., available at: ([url](#)).

⁽³⁴⁸⁾ Humanitarian Outcomes, Aid Worker Security Report – 2016 – Figures at a glance, n.d., available at: ([url](#)); Humanitarian Outcomes, Aid Worker Security Report 2017, 31 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽³⁴⁹⁾ INSO, NGO Fatality Rate Jan to July 2017, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽³⁵⁰⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan – Voice of Jihad, Message of Felicitation of the Esteemed Amir-ul-Momineen, Shiekh-ul-Hadith Hibatullah Akhundzada, (May Allah protect him), on the Occasion of Eid-ul-Adha, 30 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁵¹⁾ Humanitarian Outcomes, Aid Worker Security Report 2017, 31 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 7.

⁽³⁵²⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, cited in: UNAMA, Afghanistan Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Special Report on Kunduz Province, December 2015 ([url](#)), p. 26.

⁽³⁵³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Special Report on Kunduz Province, December 2015 ([url](#)), pp. 16-17.

⁽³⁵⁴⁾ Humanitarian Outcomes, Aid Worker Security Report 2017, 31 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 14.

⁽³⁵⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 28.

mediation of local and respected elders ⁽³⁵⁶⁾. In May 2017, one polio worker was shot and wounded in Khost ⁽³⁵⁷⁾. In Kunduz, where the Taliban blocked polio-vaccinations for 15 months, the main reason for the blockade was a demand from the Taliban for the construction of a trauma clinic to treat civilians and wounded fighters, but also suspicion among villagers that polio teams could be infiltrated by spies was cited ⁽³⁵⁸⁾.

Another specific category of humanitarian workers are the **de-miners**. In 2016, UNAMA recorded 19 casualties and the abduction of 110 civilians in incidents involving humanitarian de-miners. In the first half of 2017, according to UNAMA, in incidents targeting humanitarian de-miners four civilians were abducted, but no civilian casualties occurred ⁽³⁵⁹⁾. Since 2010, 90 de-miners have been killed, 120 wounded and 720 kidnapped, reported AP in June 2017 ⁽³⁶⁰⁾. Most commonly, de-miners are attacked because they clear up mines either laid by the Taliban, or because the Taliban benefits from a minefield not being usable by other forces ⁽³⁶¹⁾. UNAMA also observed that insurgents frequently stole or destroyed vehicles and de-mining equipment ⁽³⁶²⁾.

1.2.8 Tribal elders

The Taliban has punished and killed local elders perceived as pro-government ⁽³⁶³⁾. According to Anand Gopal, these are mostly tribal elders who sit in district shuras or District Development Assemblies (DDA) and are primarily in areas where the Taliban does not exert total control over the area ⁽³⁶⁴⁾. UNAMA recorded in 2016, 69 attacks targeting tribal elders, resulting in 185 casualties ⁽³⁶⁵⁾. In the first six months of 2017, 29 attacks occurred, compared to 19 the first six months of 2016 ⁽³⁶⁶⁾. Although the Taliban have not publically claimed all these incidents, examples include:

- In January 2016, a suicide bomber targeted the home a prominent elder in the city of Jalalabad, Nangarhar, where at that point several elders had gathered ⁽³⁶⁷⁾.
- In March 2017, Taliban held captive four tribal elders for over 40 days in Logar ⁽³⁶⁸⁾.
- In May 2016, Taliban shot and killed a prominent and influential elder in Farah ⁽³⁶⁹⁾.
- An elder known for resolving tribal disputes was shot and killed in a mosque in Khost in June 2017 ⁽³⁷⁰⁾.
- Explosives attached to his car killed a tribal elder from Nangarhar in July 2017 ⁽³⁷¹⁾.

⁽³⁵⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 31.

⁽³⁵⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 17.

⁽³⁵⁸⁾ Guardian (The), Polio in Afghanistan: 'Americans bomb our children daily, why would they care?', 10 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁵⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 73; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 21.

⁽³⁶⁰⁾ AP, Afghan de-miners cling to hard but much-needed jobs, 20 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁶¹⁾ UNAMA, Deminers in the firing line, 18 January 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁶²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2016, July 2016 ([url](#)), p. 30.

⁽³⁶³⁾ CIVIC, Saving ourselves: Security Transition and Impact on Civilian Protection in Afghanistan, 21 November 2016 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽³⁶⁴⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽³⁶⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 73.

⁽³⁶⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 42.

⁽³⁶⁷⁾ BBC News, Afghan suicide bomber targets Jalalabad elders, killing 13, 17 January 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁶⁸⁾ Germany: Federal Office for Migration and Asylum, Information Centre Asylum and Migration Briefing Notes (13 March 2017), 13 March 2017, available at: ([url](#)).

⁽³⁶⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2016, July 2016 ([url](#)), p. 60.

⁽³⁷⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Khost tribal elder gunned down in mosque, 26 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁷¹⁾ Khaama Press, Tribal elder among 5 killed or wounded in Nangarhar explosion, 8 July 2017 ([url](#)).

1.2.9 Enemies of the Taliban

Giustozzi defines ‘enemies of the Taliban’ as ‘leaders and key members of parties and groups hostile to the Taliban, such as high level individuals killed in 2011: leader of the Jamiaat-e Islami party and president of the High Peace Council, Burhannudin Rabbani; Uruzgan governor and strongman Jan Mohammad; or, police commander for Northern Afghanistan, General Daud; Kandahar strongman and president Karzai’s brother, Ahmad Wali Karzai ⁽³⁷²⁾. For individuals such as these targets, Dr. Giustozzi states that he sees no possibility for someone of such a rank to repent and that the Taliban sees no need to provide a warning to those high profile individuals before being targeted ⁽³⁷³⁾.

Enemies of the Taliban may also include members of other armed groups active in the country, such as the Hezb-e Islami, of which the armed wing under Gulbuddin Hekmatyar signed a peace agreement with the government of Afghanistan ⁽³⁷⁴⁾. Out of fear of retaliation by the Taliban, Hezb-e Islami fighters have refused to lay down their arms ⁽³⁷⁵⁾. Although active Taliban member have been and still are living among Hezb-e Islami members in Pakistan ⁽³⁷⁶⁾, killings of members of Hezb-e Islami have taken place. Hezb-e Islami members have suggested that these (attempted) assassinations have happened ‘as a result of “collusion” between local officials and the Taliban’ ⁽³⁷⁷⁾. Examples of targeting by unknown perpetrators include the killing of a Hezb-e Islami commander gunned down in a mosque in Logar in June 2017 ⁽³⁷⁸⁾; in Baghlan in July 2017 ⁽³⁷⁹⁾ and an attack on a senior Hezb-e Islami member who narrowly escaped a targeted assassination attempt in Kabul in September 2017 ⁽³⁸⁰⁾.

The Taliban can individually target members of other armed groups too. In Nangarhar in August 2017, Khaama Press reported that the Taliban sentenced two ISKP members to death and executed them on charges of killing civilians and killing Taliban ⁽³⁸¹⁾.

1.2.10 Journalists, media workers and human rights defenders

UNAMA states that journalists and civil society representatives ‘who express opinions and monitor and report on human rights violations and abuses’ encounter an ‘environment of threat and intimidation’ attributable to both insurgents and state actors ⁽³⁸²⁾.

In general, the media forms an important part of the Taliban’s propaganda. Journalists are used to quickly disseminate their message. Their spokespersons call reporters with their latest news, systematically send e-mails or text messages and answer the phone when called up by

⁽³⁷²⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 11; BBC News, Afghanistan: Suicide blast kills top police commander, 29 May 2011 ([url](#)); Guardian (The), Ahmed Wali Karzai, the corrupt and lawless face of modern Afghanistan, 12 July 2011 ([url](#)); BBC News, Afghanistan: Senior aide to President Karzai killed, 17 July 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁷³⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 12, 15.

⁽³⁷⁴⁾ AAN, Hekmatyar’s Return to Kabul: Background reading by AAN, 4 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁷⁵⁾ RFE/RL, Hekmatyar’s Fighters Refuse To Lay Down Arms In Afghanistan, 11 May 2017 ([url](#)); Ruttig, T., A Matter of Registration: Factional tensions in Hezb-e Islami, 25 November 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁷⁶⁾ Muzhary F., Moving Out of Shamshatu: Hezb-e Islami’s refugee followers between hope of return and doubts about the peace deal, 14 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁷⁷⁾ Ruttig, T., A Matter of Registration: Factional tensions in Hezb-e Islami, 25 November 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁷⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Former HIA commander gunned down in Logar mosque attack, 22 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁷⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Former HIA commander gunned down in Baghlan, 2 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁸⁰⁾ Khaama Press, Key Hezb-e-Islami member escapes assassination attempt in Kabul city, 6 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁸¹⁾ Khaama Press, Taliban execute two important ISIS leaders in Nangarhar province, 29 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁸²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 32.

journalists ⁽³⁸³⁾. At the same time, Human Rights Watch (HRW) claimed ‘the Taliban and other insurgent groups have threatened journalists to compel them to cover their version of news events and to refrain from reporting government statements’ ⁽³⁸⁴⁾.

During the brief takeover of the city of Kunduz in 2015, the Taliban visited the homes of several journalists to obtain information about their whereabouts. Journalists that fled the city were particularly concerned about their contacts and sources, whose details were kept at home or in their offices, which were looted by the Taliban ⁽³⁸⁵⁾.

In the aftermath of the Kunduz takeover, the Taliban issued strong threats against two TV channels, Tolo TV and 1TV, on the basis of their alleged false reporting of rape by Taliban fighters ⁽³⁸⁶⁾. The threats materialised when a suicide bomber targeted a van transporting personnel of a production company affiliated to Tolo TV was in January 2016, killing seven. The Taliban claimed the attack and linked it to the station’s reporting on Kunduz in 2015 ⁽³⁸⁷⁾. This event was, according to the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC), a nonprofit organization that supports press freedom in Afghanistan and promotes safety and rights of journalists, the deadliest attack on media workers in the conflict so far, causing ‘extensive terror within journalists and media community across the country’ ⁽³⁸⁸⁾. According to Borhan Osman, Tolo TV and 1TV had been specifically lifted from the list of protected media by the Taliban military commission, under pressure from Taliban foot soldiers and ‘Pakistan-based young fanatics’ ⁽³⁸⁹⁾.

The AJSC saw a shift in 2016 in the Taliban’s policy towards the media. Initially, the Taliban sought friendly relations with the media, in the hopes of a better coverage of their activities and improvement of their public image. Since 2016, the Taliban employ a different strategy, forcing favorable coverage and preventing government-friendly coverage ⁽³⁹⁰⁾. This change in approach brought with it more violence against media workers:

In 2016, the Taliban’s level of threat and violence against journalists and media not only reached its maximum, but it also became much more intense and deadlier [...]. Parallel to their violence, the Taliban also increased and intensified their efforts to control the publication and broadcast contents of media ⁽³⁹¹⁾.

According to AJSC, in the first six months of 2017, there were 73 cases of violence against journalists, including killing, beating, inflicting injury and humiliation, intimidation and detention of journalists. Representing a 35 % increase in comparison to the first six months of 2016, this number is the highest number ever recorded by AJSC. AJSC claimed the increase in threats and violence against journalists was especially significant in the east of the country. From January to June 2017, 10 journalists and media workers have been killed. While most of

⁽³⁸³⁾ RFE/RL, Gandhara Blog, Taliban Propaganda Meets The Digital Age, 10 July 2017 ([url](#)); HRW, “Stop Reporting or We’ll Kill Your Family” Threats to Media Freedom in Afghanistan, January 2015 ([url](#)), p. 35; Huffington Post (The), A Profile of the Taliban’s Propaganda Tactics, 1 February 2010 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁸⁴⁾ HRW, “Stop Reporting or We’ll Kill Your Family” Threats to Media Freedom in Afghanistan, January 2015 ([url](#)), p. 35.

⁽³⁸⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Special Report on Kunduz Province, December 2015 ([url](#)), p. 17.

⁽³⁸⁶⁾ Reuters, Afghan TV stations face Taliban threat after Kunduz, 18 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁸⁷⁾ BBC News, Kabul blast: Suicide bomber kills seven TV staff, 20 January 2017 ([url](#)); Al Jazeera, Taliban suicide attack in Kabul kills TV station staff, 21 January 2017 ([url](#)); New York Times, Taliban Suicide Bomber Strikes Packed Bus in Kabul, 20 January 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁸⁸⁾ AJSC, Six Months Report July-December 2016 Exclusive Report: Analysis of violence against Journalists 2012-2016, 9 January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 9.

⁽³⁸⁹⁾ Osman, B., The Attack on the American University in Kabul (2): Who did it and why?, 5 September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁹⁰⁾ AJSC, Six Months Report July-December 2016 Exclusive Report: Analysis of violence against Journalists 2012-2016, 9 January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 8.

⁽³⁹¹⁾ AJSC, Six Months Report July-December 2016 Exclusive Report: Analysis of violence against Journalists 2012-2016, 9 January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 8.

the violence is committed by government (-affiliated) actors, all the killings were committed by either Taliban or ISKP ⁽³⁹²⁾. (For role of government actors in this violence, see [2.3 Government targeting of journalists, media workers and human rights defenders](#); for ISKP's targeting of media workers, see [1.5.1 Islamic State Khorasan Province](#)).

In June 2017, the Federation of Afghanistan's Media Organisations and Journalists told a press conference that eight journalists had been killed and 20 wounded in one month's time ⁽³⁹³⁾. Examples of journalists that were killed, reportedly by the Taliban, include:

- The killing of an editor in chief of a local radio station in Logar, reportedly after receiving many threats by the Taliban ⁽³⁹⁴⁾. The threats came for broadcasting of female voices, entertainment and political programs as well as advertisements by the National Security Forces ⁽³⁹⁵⁾. The radio station was earlier the subject of a violent raid by NATO forces, on the suspicion of 'reporting of potential enemy activity' ⁽³⁹⁶⁾.
- A killing and a stabbing of journalists in the streets of Kalat, Zabul, in October and November 2016, both after receiving several threats by the Taliban ⁽³⁹⁷⁾.
- In February 2016, two Afghan Adib radio workers in Pol-e Khomri in Baghlan province were attacked, leaving one in a coma. Taliban forces reportedly were behind the attack, although no group claimed responsibility ⁽³⁹⁸⁾.

According to UNAMA, in 2016, the Taliban issued at least eleven statements threatening the media, accusing several major news providers, 'of publishing "enemy propaganda", "intelligence", "biased reports from the mouth of the enemy", and "defaming the Mujahideen"' ⁽³⁹⁹⁾. Cases of intimidation of the media and journalists by the Taliban in 2016 occurred, according to the AJSC, mainly in areas where the Taliban have most presence and influence. In these areas:

'they demanded that media avoid broadcasting or publishing certain matters, which involved broadcasting or publication of commercial announcements by the security forces, peace messages, female voice, music and other types of entertainment programming. The most recent instances of such attempts by the Taliban to censure local media have been witnessed in the provinces of Wardak, Ghazni, Logar, Paktia and Paktika. In addition, Taliban have attempted to force journalists and media, through intimidation, to cover news concerning their activities. Such attempts mainly happen in insecure provinces where Taliban have large presence' ⁽⁴⁰⁰⁾.

In certain areas of the country, the Taliban distributes guidelines on broadcasting and publication, which they expect to be followed strictly. For example, in December 2016, such guidelines were handed out to media outlets in Logar ⁽⁴⁰¹⁾.

⁽³⁹²⁾ AJSC, Six – Month Report (Jan – June 2017) Afghanistan, A Dangerous Country for Journalists and Media, 24 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁹³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 8 journalists killed, 20 injured in a month: group, 14 Juni 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁹⁴⁾ Tolo News, Gunmen 'Execute' Radio Journalist in Logar, 18 December 2016 ([url](#)); NAI, The president must personally reckon the murder case journalists, 16 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁹⁵⁾ AJSC, Six Months Report July-December 2016 Exclusive Report: Analysis of violence against Journalists 2012-2016, 9 January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 9.

⁽³⁹⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, US, Afghan forces ransack radio office in Logar, 1 March 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁹⁷⁾ AFJC, Unidentified gunmen shot dead local journalist in Southern Zabul province, 17 October 2016 ([url](#)); AFJC, Journalist critically wounded after brutally stabbed in Kalat city, 12 November 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽³⁹⁸⁾ US DoS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2016, 6 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 23.

⁽³⁹⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 32.

⁽⁴⁰⁰⁾ AJSC, Six Months Report July-December 2016 Exclusive Report: Analysis of violence against Journalists 2012-2016, 9 January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 6.

⁽⁴⁰¹⁾ AJSC, Six Months Report July-December 2016 Exclusive Report: Analysis of violence against Journalists 2012-2016, 9 January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 9.

According to the US Department of State:

An independent organization focused on the safety of journalists continued to operate a safe house for journalists facing threats. It reported law enforcement officials generally cooperated in assisting journalists who faced credible threats, although limited investigative capacity meant many cases remained unresolved. The Afghan Independent Bar Association established a media law committee to provide legal support, expertise, and services to media organizations ⁽⁴⁰²⁾.

Afghan political analysts and commentators have also reportedly been targeted for speaking out on issues such as the fragmentation and weaknesses of the Taliban or foreign interference in the insurgency ⁽⁴⁰³⁾.

The 2016 EU+ 'Local Strategy on Human Rights Defenders in Afghanistan,' a document agreed upon by EU countries and Canada, Norway, Switzerland and the US, and based on a 2014 workshop with Afghan human rights defenders, states that the work of these individuals in particular is 'often dangerous, all over Afghanistan' ⁽⁴⁰⁴⁾, because human rights are 'often seen as an alien, Western or a non-Islamic concept'. Threats and violence do not only come from the Taliban or other armed opposition groups, but also from government entities, warlords and organised crime. In addition to violations and abuses of the 'right to life' and other 'inhuman and degrading treatment', human rights defenders often also face more subtle and diffuse forms of violence, such as 'denial of medical care, education for the children, loss of housing, land or citizenship, or other types of social disqualification' ⁽⁴⁰⁵⁾. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) has a complaints mechanism, but they face considerable constraints in movement, as they receive threats themselves and have limited government protection. Police, prosecutors and courts 'fail to take threats against human rights defenders seriously,' with few investigations and even fewer prosecutions and convictions for those threatening or attacking human rights defenders ⁽⁴⁰⁶⁾.

In the first months of 2017, UNAMA recorded four cases of intimidation and killing of civil society actors in Baghlan, Nangarhar and Kabul province ⁽⁴⁰⁷⁾. Without providing details of the perpetrators, further examples found include:

- A civil society activist killed in Jalalabad in July 2017 ⁽⁴⁰⁸⁾.
- A civil society activist and correspondent for international media was shot near his home in Baghlan province in May 2017 ⁽⁴⁰⁹⁾.
- The killing of a civil society activist in Tagab, Kapisa in February 2016 ⁽⁴¹⁰⁾

1.2.10.1 Female journalists

In 2017, there were an estimated 500 female journalists in Afghanistan, however, more and more of them are reportedly quitting their jobs and or fleeing their country, according to

⁽⁴⁰²⁾ US DoS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2016, 6 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 22.

⁽⁴⁰³⁾ Guardian (The), Shot for speaking out: Taliban target prominent critics in Afghanistan, 30 December 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁰⁴⁾ EEAS, EU+ Local Strategy for Human Rights Defenders in Afghanistan 2014 – Revised 2016, n.d. ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽⁴⁰⁵⁾ EEAS, EU+ Local Strategy for Human Rights Defenders in Afghanistan 2014 – Revised 2016, n.d. ([url](#)), pp. 3-4.

⁽⁴⁰⁶⁾ EEAS, EU+ Local Strategy for Human Rights Defenders in Afghanistan 2014 – Revised 2016, n.d. ([url](#)), pp. 3-4.

⁽⁴⁰⁷⁾ UN Secretary-General (UNSG), The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 15 June 2017 2017, available at: ([url](#)), p. 8.

⁽⁴⁰⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Civil society activist gunned down in Nangarhar capital, 10 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁰⁹⁾ NAI, An experienced journalist assassination in Baghlan, 7 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴¹⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 33.

RFE/RL⁽⁴¹¹⁾. According to US Department of State, the proportion of women working as media workers dropped from 30 % in 2015 to 20 % in 2016⁽⁴¹²⁾. Besides the threats and dangers that face journalists in general⁽⁴¹³⁾, female journalists face multiple difficulties, linked to their gender. According to US Department of State, ‘if not subjected to sexual harassment and abuse at work, female journalists often faced pressure by their families to leave the media profession or at least not to show their faces on television’⁽⁴¹⁴⁾. For further information on the societal attitudes towards female media workers please refer to the EASO COI Report - *Afghanistan: Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms*⁽⁴¹⁵⁾.

1.2.10.2 Women human rights defenders

According to UNAMA, female activists in areas affected by armed conflict are ‘disproportionally affected’ because of extremist ideologies of AGEs⁽⁴¹⁶⁾. According to the EU+ Local Strategy on Human Rights Defenders,

‘in the current conservative and insecure environment, women human rights defenders are in a particularly difficult situation: they are not only targeted for the work they do, but also for who they are and for challenging social and religious patriarchal norms, which may result in stigmatization, isolation and various forms of threats and violence’⁽⁴¹⁷⁾.

During their takeover of the city of Kunduz, for example, the Taliban obtained a list of names and addresses of female human rights defenders and the organisations they worked for. They performed a search operation throughout the city that lasted for several days. The level of detail in that pre-prepared list of names led some women human rights defenders interviewed by UNAMA to fear a possible infiltration of insurgents into those government institutions which maintain detailed information on civil society organisations⁽⁴¹⁸⁾.

According to the EU+ Local Strategy for Human Rights Defenders in Afghanistan, Women human right defenders who attempt to report violations are stigmatised or even blamed for causing the violations themselves⁽⁴¹⁹⁾.

⁽⁴¹¹⁾ RFE/RL, Gandhara Blog, Violence, Threats Forcing Afghan Women To Abandon Journalism, 14 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴¹²⁾ US DoS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2016, 6 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 22.

⁽⁴¹³⁾ AJSC, The Reporting Heroes – A Study on the Condition of Afghan Female Journalists, 14 April 2016 ([url](#)), p. 11.

⁽⁴¹⁴⁾ US DoS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2016, 6 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 22.

⁽⁴¹⁵⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan. Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms, December 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴¹⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 32.

⁽⁴¹⁷⁾ EEAS, EU+ Local Strategy for Human Rights Defenders in Afghanistan 2014 – Revised 2016, n.d. ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽⁴¹⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Special Report on Kunduz Province, December 2015 ([url](#)), p. 16.

⁽⁴¹⁹⁾ EEAS, EU+ Local Strategy for Human Rights Defenders in Afghanistan 2014 – Revised 2016, n.d. ([url](#)), pp. 3-4.

1.2.11 Hazara and Shia minorities

1.2.11.1 Background

In Afghanistan, an estimated 10 to 15 % of the population are Shia Muslim ⁽⁴²⁰⁾. The majority of these Shia are ethnic Hazara ⁽⁴²¹⁾. Hazara Shia are primarily Twelvers. Twelver Shia in Afghanistan also include the Farsiwan community in the west of Afghanistan and smaller communities of Bayat, Qizilbash and some Sayyeds ⁽⁴²²⁾. Some Hazara identify as Sayyed, but not all Sayyed are Hazara ⁽⁴²³⁾.

Other than Twelver Shia, there is also an Ismaili community of Shia, primarily in the provinces of Badakhshan and Baghlan and in Kabul. Some Ismaili are of the Tajik ethnicity, others are Hazara and some Sayyeds also identify as Ismaili ⁽⁴²⁴⁾. There is also a small minority of Sunni Hazara ⁽⁴²⁵⁾.

Shia Hazara have faced long-term discrimination from the Sunni majority population ⁽⁴²⁶⁾. During the Taliban rule in the nineties, several massacres were perpetrated on the Hazara by either the Taliban in Mazar-e Sharif in 1998 ⁽⁴²⁷⁾ and Yakawlang, Bamiyan in 2001 ⁽⁴²⁸⁾; or by other Sunni groups, for instance, by Sayyaf's Ittihad-i Islami forces in the Afshar neighbourhood in Kabul in 1993 ⁽⁴²⁹⁾.

Since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, Hazara have improved their position in society ⁽⁴³⁰⁾. Article 4 of the Afghan Constitution of 2004 includes the Hazara as one of the peoples that comprise the nation of Afghanistan. The Constitution establishes Islam as the official religion, and applies Hanafi jurisprudence where there is no specific constitutional provision; for Shia jurisprudence to prevail in personal matters for Shia ⁽⁴³¹⁾. Benefitting from migration and rapid developments in education and work opportunities in Afghanistan, Hazara have advanced their position strongly after 2001 ⁽⁴³²⁾. However, two professors interviewed by the Research Directorate of the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) stated that other

⁽⁴²⁰⁾ USCIRF, Annual Report 2017 - Tier 2 countries - Afghanistan, 26 April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽⁴²¹⁾ Al Jazeera, Afghanistan: Who are the Hazaras?, 27 June ([url](#)).

⁽⁴²²⁾ Winterbotham, E., Legacies of Conflict: Healing Complexes and Moving Forwards in Kabul Province, October 2010 ([url](#)), p. 8; Gang, R., Community-Based Dispute Resolution Processes in Kabul City, March 2011 ([url](#)), p. 13; Winterbotham, E., Legacies of Conflict: Healing Complexes and Moving Forwards in Ghzani Province, October 2011 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽⁴²³⁾ Lifos, Temarapport: Hazarer i Afghanistan, 28 August 2015 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽⁴²⁴⁾ Minority Rights Group International, Afghanistan – Hazara, n.d. ([url](#)); US Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, Afghanistan: Information on activities of Ismailis loyal to Sayed Kayan, 7 July 2004, available at: ([url](#)); Lifos, Temarapport: Afghanistans ismailiter – en shiaminorit, 30 June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 4; USDoS, 2016 Report on International Religious Freedom - Afghanistan, 15 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽⁴²⁵⁾ Ruttig, T., Ghorband – A Valley Once Friendly, 19 July 2011 ([url](#)); Minority Rights Group International, Afghanistan – Hazara, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽⁴²⁶⁾ Minority Rights Group International, Afghanistan – Hazara, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽⁴²⁷⁾ Afghanistan Justice Project, Casting Shadows: War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity: 1978-2001, 2005 available at: ([url](#)), pp. 120-122.

⁽⁴²⁸⁾ Afghanistan Justice Project, Casting Shadows: War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity: 1978-2001, 2005 available at: ([url](#)), pp. 131-154.

⁽⁴²⁹⁾ Afghanistan Justice Project, Casting Shadows: War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity: 1978-2001, 2005 available at: ([url](#)), pp. 82-87.

⁽⁴³⁰⁾ Semple, M., The rise of the Hazaras and the challenge of pluralism in Afghanistan 1978-2011, n.d. ([url](#)); Minority Rights Group International, Afghanistan – Hazara, n.d. ([url](#)); New York Times (The), Hazaras Hustle to Head of Class in Afghanistan, 3 January 2010 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴³¹⁾ Afghanistan, The Constitution of Afghanistan, art.2, art 4, 26 January 2004 available at: ([url](#)).

⁽⁴³²⁾ Lifos, Temarapport: Hazarer i Afghanistan, 28 August 2015 ([url](#)), p. 10.

groups in society may look at this fast paced social and economic progress with suspicion, jealousy and resentment ⁽⁴³³⁾.

1.2.11.2 Situation as of September 2017

In 2016, UNAMA raised concerns about ‘an emerging patterns of deliberate sectarian attacks against the Shia Muslim minority’ ⁽⁴³⁴⁾. This pattern continued in the first half of 2017 ⁽⁴³⁵⁾.

According to Borhan Osman ⁽⁴³⁶⁾, incidents where Hazara or other Shia have been targeted can according to Borhan Osman be categorised in two main types:

- Attacks on places where Shia gather in the cities, such as mosques in the cities of Kabul or Herat ⁽⁴³⁷⁾, during religious commemorations in the cities of Kabul or Mazar-e Sharif ⁽⁴³⁸⁾ or during a political demonstration in Kabul ⁽⁴³⁹⁾;
- Instances where Hazara were singled out from buses. Such incidents occurred in more rural areas in the provinces like Baghlan, Sar-e Pul, Ghor, Balkh, Wardak, Ghazni and Zabul ⁽⁴⁴⁰⁾. Similar in nature are cases where Hazara villages have been attacked in Sar-e Pul or Baghlan ⁽⁴⁴¹⁾.

Analyst Borhan Osman gave the opinion that the main risk for Hazara or Shia of being targeted, merely for their ethnicity or sectarian lines, is in the attacks on gatherings, religious commemorations or demonstrations in the cities. This pattern of attacks point to new dynamics emerging in the conflict in Afghanistan for which, according to Osman, it is too early to draw any conclusions from ⁽⁴⁴²⁾. However, Anad Gopal said that this pattern is increasing ⁽⁴⁴³⁾.

On the other hand, the targeting and abduction of Hazara along the roads seems to decrease between 2015 and 2016, according to UNAMA data. UNAMA documented 16 incidents in 2016 of abduction of in total 85 were Hazara civilians. Most were released unharmed, but five were killed. In 2015, insurgents abducted 224 Hazara civilians in 26 incidents ⁽⁴⁴⁴⁾.

Both Siddique and Osman gave the view that most of the time when incidents occurred in which Hazara road passengers were singled out and killed or abducted, other reasons led to this targeting. These reasons can be non-political community disputes or the fact that these

⁽⁴³³⁾ IRB, Afghanistan: Situation of Hazara people living in Kabul City, including treatment by society, security situation, and access to employment; security situation for Hazara traveling to areas surrounding Kabul City to access employment (2014-April 2016), 20 April 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴³⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 34.

⁽⁴³⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 46.

⁽⁴³⁶⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽⁴³⁷⁾ UNAMA, UNAMA condemns killing of civilians in Herat mosque attack, 2 August 2017 ([url](#)); Reuters, Four killed in attack on mosque in Kabul, 15 June 2017 ([url](#)); UNAMA, UNAMA condemns killing of civilians in Kabul mosque attack, 26 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴³⁸⁾ BBC News, Kabul shrine attack kills Shia Muslims during Ashura, 11 October 2016 ([url](#)); New York Times (The), Rare Attacks on Shiites Kill Scores in Afghanistan, 6 December 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴³⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan: Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict - Special Report Attack on a Peaceful Demonstration in Kabul, 23 July 2016, October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁴⁰⁾ New York Times (The), Gunmen Attack Hazara Miners in Afghanistan, Killing at Least 9, 6 January 2017 ([url](#)); AIHRC, Attacks against Hazaras in Afghanistan, n.d. ([url](#)), pp. 4-5; USDoS, 2016 Report on International Religious Freedom - Afghanistan, 15 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 13.

⁽⁴⁴¹⁾ RFE/RL, Gandhara Blog, Hundreds Of Hostages Freed After Rare Joint IS-Taliban Attack In Afghanistan, 9 August 2017 ([url](#)); Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, 15 August 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁴²⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽⁴⁴³⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽⁴⁴⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 68.

Hazara were targets for other reasons, for example, being ANSF members. In those cases, according to Borhan Osman, they would have been singled out regardless of their ethnicity⁽⁴⁴⁵⁾. With the possible exception of the February 2015 Zabul mass abduction, analyst Qayoom Suroush, former researcher with Afghanistan Analyst Network (AAN) and Human Rights Watch, currently researcher at the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), came to the same conclusion earlier, in an AAN report examining incidents targeting Hazara⁽⁴⁴⁶⁾. While Hazara may seem more at risk while travelling on the roads, sources of the Canadian IRB and the Norwegian Landinfo related this enhanced risk to elements such as the fact that Hazara travel more frequently and are therefore overrepresented on the roads, and that they also often have found jobs in the NGO-sector or as high ranking officials in the government⁽⁴⁴⁷⁾.

Also according to the 2016 UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Report to the Human Rights Council, discriminatory intent based upon ethnicity or religion was not documented among the motives for the many instances of targeting the Hazara⁽⁴⁴⁸⁾. With regards to the targeting of the mostly Hazara village in Sar-e Pul in August 2017, AAN co-director notes that the motive seemed to be the fact that the village was harbouring a local uprising force against the Taliban⁽⁴⁴⁹⁾. UNAMA did not receive 'information supporting the claims that the attack on the village had a sectarian or ethnic motivation'⁽⁴⁵⁰⁾. In the attack on a Hazara village in Baghlan in May 2016, the Obaid Ali described the motive as being the Hazara support for a military operation against the Taliban, in breach of an agreement between the Taliban and the Hazara community⁽⁴⁵¹⁾.

Analysts Osman and Qayoum gave the opinion that the reporting on these incidents is often 'full of mistakes with assumptions relayed as facts'⁽⁴⁵²⁾, and risks being 'misleading', partly because of a very vocal Hazara activism⁽⁴⁵³⁾. Anand Gopal was of the view that because most Hazara live in non-contested areas (except for certain areas in Ghazni), they are currently 'probably the least targeted community in Afghanistan in those areas,' compared to the Pashtun in heavily contested areas⁽⁴⁵⁴⁾. UNHCR noted however that 'the Shia community is disproportionately represented among civilian casualties in Kabul and Herat'⁽⁴⁵⁵⁾.

At the same time discrimination against Hazara persists⁽⁴⁵⁶⁾, although according to the US Department of State Sunni versus Shia discrimination is on the decline and confined to 'some localities'⁽⁴⁵⁷⁾.

⁽⁴⁴⁵⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽⁴⁴⁶⁾ Suroush, Q., Hazaras in the Crosshairs? A scrutiny of recent incidents, 24 April 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁴⁷⁾ IRB, Afghanistan: Situation of Hazara people living in Kabul City, including treatment by society, security situation, and access to employment; security situation for Hazara traveling to areas surrounding Kabul City to access employment (2014-April 2016), 20 April 2016 ([url](#)); Landinfo, Report Hazaras and Afghan insurgent groups, 3 October 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 18-19.

⁽⁴⁴⁸⁾ UN Human Rights Council, Rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, 16 December 2016 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽⁴⁴⁹⁾ Ali, O., The Assault in Sayad: Did Taleban and Daesh really collaborate?, 9 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁵⁰⁾ UNAMA, Special Report. Attacks in Mirza Olang, Sari Pul Province: 3 - 5 August 2017, August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽⁴⁵¹⁾ Ali, O., Taleban in the North: Gaining ground along the Ring Road in Baghlan, 15 August 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁵²⁾ Suroush, Q., Hazaras in the Crosshairs? A scrutiny of recent incidents, 24 April 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁵³⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽⁴⁵⁴⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽⁴⁵⁵⁾ UNHCR, e-mail, 25 September 2017. UNHCR made this comment during the review of this report.

⁽⁴⁵⁶⁾ Minority Rights Group International, Afghanistan – Hazara, n.d. ([url](#)); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2017 – Afghanistan, n.d. ([url](#));

⁽⁴⁵⁷⁾ US DoS, 2016 Report on International Religious Freedom - Afghanistan, 15 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 16.

1.2.11.3 Main perpetrators

According to UNAMA, the main perpetrators of these attacks deliberately targeting the Shia Muslim communities are the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) ⁽⁴⁵⁸⁾. Borhan Osman, Abubakar Siddique and Anand Gopal all corroborated this during interviews for this report ⁽⁴⁵⁹⁾. The ISKP itself claimed most of the attacks targeting Hazara ⁽⁴⁶⁰⁾. However, the territorial reach of ISKP, or affiliated groups, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), is limited ⁽⁴⁶¹⁾. ISKP is based in essentially a few districts in southern Nangarhar ⁽⁴⁶²⁾ and has some operational presence in Kabul and Herat ⁽⁴⁶³⁾ that enables them to execute high profile attacks ⁽⁴⁶⁴⁾. (See [1.5.1 Islamic State Khorasan Province](#))

There are several reasons that ISKP targets Hazara. According to Abubakar Siddique, an important reason for ISKP to target Hazara is their perceived closeness to Iran ⁽⁴⁶⁵⁾. In 2016, a commander of the group told Reuters that Hazara were targeted for their support to Iran in its fight against Islamic State in Syria ⁽⁴⁶⁶⁾. However, there is also an ideological component: members of the Islamic State group also believe it is morally right to kill Shia ⁽⁴⁶⁷⁾. Shia are considered apostates and therefore a 'legitimate' target ⁽⁴⁶⁸⁾. For example, in April 2017, ISKP claimed to have killed a Shia teacher in Jalalabad ⁽⁴⁶⁹⁾ and in July 2017, ISKP claimed to have killed a Shia man in Khost, on charges of 'sorcery' ⁽⁴⁷⁰⁾. Although UNAMA did not label the attack on Hazara village in Sar-e Pul in August 2017 as 'sectarian', 'UNAMA received multiple, credible reports from women and men that Anti-Government Elements (especially those self-identifying as *Daesh*) made anti-Shia statements (calling them 'half-Muslims' and 'infidels') during the attack ⁽⁴⁷¹⁾. One of the commanders attacking Mirza Olang had previously shown some interest in ISKP even though he fought under the Taliban banner during the attack ⁽⁴⁷²⁾. For more information, see the chapter on IS Conceptualisation of Apostasy in EASO COI Report - *Afghanistan: Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms* ⁽⁴⁷³⁾.

According to AAN,

'the ISKP attacks on Shia targets echo the approach of 'Daesh Central', and that of violent sectarian groups in Pakistan, some of which now associated with Daesh. In

⁽⁴⁵⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 34; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 46.

⁽⁴⁵⁹⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017; Siddique, A., Skype interview, 2 August 2017; Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽⁴⁶⁰⁾ @Terror_Monitor [Twitter], posted on: 2 August 2017 ([url](#)); @Terror_Monitor [Twitter], posted on: 16 June 2017 ([url](#)); @Terror_Monitor [Twitter], posted on: 14 May 2017 ([url](#)); @Terror_Monitor [Twitter], posted on: 21 November 2016 ([url](#)); @Terror_Monitor [Twitter], posted on: 10 October 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁶¹⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽⁴⁶²⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017; Osman, B., The Battle for Mamand: ISKP under strain, but not yet defeated, 23 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁶³⁾ UNAMA, e-mail, 4 October 2017. UNAMA made this comment during the review of this report.

⁽⁴⁶⁴⁾ Osman, B., With an Active Cell in Kabul, ISKP Tries to Bring Sectarianism to the Afghan War, 19 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁶⁵⁾ Siddique, A., Skype interview, 2 August 2017.

⁽⁴⁶⁶⁾ Reuters, ISIS commander says Afghanistan's Hazaras targeted over support for Syria, 26 July 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁶⁷⁾ Siddique, A., Skype interview, 2 August 2017.

⁽⁴⁶⁸⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017; AAN and Ruttig, T., Bracing for Attacks on Ashura: Extra security measures for Shia mourners, 30 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁶⁹⁾ @Terror_Monitor [Twitter], posted on: 25 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁷⁰⁾ @Terror_Monitor [Twitter], posted on: 2 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁷¹⁾ UNAMA, Special Report. Attacks in Mirza Olang, Sari Pul Province: 3 - 5 August 2017, August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 6.

⁽⁴⁷²⁾ Ali, O., The Assault in Sayad: Did Taleban and Daesh really collaborate?, 9 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁷³⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan. Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms, October 2017 ([url](#)).

those countries, they have been part of a widespread, violent, sectarian, Sunni-versus-Shia conflict [...] and it appeared that ISKP, as well as being consumed by sectarian hatred, also sought to provoke the same tit-for-tat violence in Afghanistan. This has not succeeded so far. Indeed, attacks have been followed by calls on all sides for national unity and Muslim brotherhood’ ⁽⁴⁷⁴⁾.

1.2.11.4 Taliban and the Hazara

According to analysts Osman and Gopal, the Taliban follow a strict national agenda. This includes the idea that all segments of society should be represented in their ranks. This means that other ethnic groups than their Pashtun core should be integrated in their movement ⁽⁴⁷⁵⁾. Taliban do not seek to spark a sectarian war, according to the Christian Science Monitor, ‘not least because they see the Hazaras and other [Shias] as part of a nation they want to fully control’ ⁽⁴⁷⁶⁾. In his 2017 Eid message, the Taliban leader Mawlawi Haibatullah condemned ‘all subversive activities among the brother ethnicities under the name of ethnicity, language, geography, religion and faction’ and, while claiming to be the only defender of national interest, blamed sectarian violence on ‘foreign instigators’ ⁽⁴⁷⁷⁾. Targeting Hazara is, according to Anand Gopal, a ‘red line’ for the Taliban ⁽⁴⁷⁸⁾.

Although the Taliban retains a deep-seated mistrust of former adversaries from the nineties in particular ⁽⁴⁷⁹⁾, in recent years, some Hazara communities and the Taliban assisted each other in the fight against the Islamic State ⁽⁴⁸⁰⁾. There has been an instance where the Taliban claimed to have received a pledge of allegiance by a Hazara commander from Bamiyan ⁽⁴⁸¹⁾ and from Baghlan ⁽⁴⁸²⁾ and reports of Hazara recruits in Ghazni ⁽⁴⁸³⁾ and a Hazara commander fighting alongside the Taliban in Kunduz ⁽⁴⁸⁴⁾. The Taliban claim to have support from ‘the majority of the Shia populations in Bamiyan, Daikundi and Hazarajat’ ⁽⁴⁸⁵⁾. According to Giustozzi, there are several hundred Hazara fighters in the Taliban ranks, as well as Shia. These are mainly local militias from the southern fringes of Hazarajat, joining the Taliban for local infighting. Only the Haqqani network explicitly bans Shia from its ranks ⁽⁴⁸⁶⁾.

Although the Taliban publicly condemned the killing of at least nine Hazara coal miners in Baghlan in January 2017 ⁽⁴⁸⁷⁾, local sources of the AIHRC stated it was actually the local Taliban

⁽⁴⁷⁴⁾ AAN and Ruttig, T., Bracing for Attacks on Ashura: Extra security measures for Shia mourners, 30 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁷⁵⁾ Osman, B. and Gopal, A., Taliban Views on a Future State, July 2016 ([url](#)), p. 11.

⁽⁴⁷⁶⁾ Christian Science Monitor (The), ISIS attacks Shiites, but Afghans resist push to make conflict religious, 5 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁷⁷⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan – Voice of Jihad, Message of Felicitation of the Esteemed Amir-ul-Momineen, Shiekh-ul-Hadith Hibatullah Akhundzada, (May Allah protect him), on the Occasion of Eid-ul-fitr, 23 June 2017 ([url](#)); Pajhwok Afghan News, Fueling sectarian strife enemy plot: Haibatullah, 23 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁷⁸⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽⁴⁷⁹⁾ Osman, B. and Gopal, A., Taliban Views on a Future State, July 2016 ([url](#)), p. 11.

⁽⁴⁸⁰⁾ Reuters, Fearing Islamic State, some Afghan Shi'ites seek help from old enemies, 22 March 2015 ([url](#)); RFE/RL, Afghan Taliban Detail Fight Against Uzbek IS Militants, 30 November 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁸¹⁾ @Terror_Monitor [Twitter], posted on: 1 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁸²⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan – Recruitment by armed groups, source: IEA, September 2016 ([url](#)), p. 19.

⁽⁴⁸³⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report: Afghanistan – Recruitment by armed groups, source: Borhan Osman, September 2016 ([url](#)), p. 19.

⁽⁴⁸⁴⁾ New York Times (The), A Taliban Prize, Won in a Few Hours After Years of Strategy, 30 September 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁸⁵⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan – Voice of Jihad, Sectarian Killings; A Dangerous Enemy Conspiracy, 15 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁸⁶⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s organization and structure, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 13.

⁽⁴⁸⁷⁾ New York Times (The), Gunmen Attack Hazara Miners in Afghanistan, Killing at Least 9, 6 January 2017 ([url](#)).

who had committed these murders ⁽⁴⁸⁸⁾. Several other kidnapping incidents of Hazara on the roads in Sar-e Pul, Wardak, Ghazni and Ghor in 2016 have been attributed to the Taliban ⁽⁴⁸⁹⁾.

1.2.11.5 Situation of other Shia minorities, including Ismaili

Apart from a partly failed suicide attack on an Ismaili cultural centre in Kabul in 2014 ⁽⁴⁹⁰⁾, experts interviewed for this report had no other information about attacks on other Shia (Twelver or Ismaili) communities ⁽⁴⁹¹⁾. Sweden's country of origin information service, Lifos, concluded a June 2017 report on Afghan Ismaili and Shia minorities by stating that: 'the Ismailis are no longer a target for the Taliban movement because of their religious faith. They are, however, a target for the Islamic State in Afghanistan, which has shown itself capable of carrying out several high profile attacks against Shias in the capital, but so far their efforts to inject sectarian or ethnic violence among the peoples of Afghanistan have failed' ⁽⁴⁹²⁾.

For example, in 2017 there were three attacks against Shia targets in Herat City: in January, an IED detonated in front of a Shia mosque, killing one person and injuring five more; in May an IED exploded outside a bakery in a heavily Shia neighbourhood of Herat killing seven persons and injuring 17 more ⁽⁴⁹³⁾; and in August 2017, a suicide bomber entered a Shia mosque in Herat, killing 29 and wounding 60 ⁽⁴⁹⁴⁾. In this last attack, according to Borhan Osman, the majority of attendees were Hazara, but not exclusively ⁽⁴⁹⁵⁾.

1.2.12 Recruitment

For the discussion on recruitment by armed forces and insurgents, please consult the EASO Country of Origin Information Report *Afghanistan – Recruitment by armed groups*, dated September 2016 ⁽⁴⁹⁶⁾ and Landinfo's Report *Afghanistan: Recruitment to Taliban*, dated 29 June 2017 ⁽⁴⁹⁷⁾.

⁽⁴⁸⁸⁾ AIHRC, Attacks against Hazaras in Afghanistan, n.d. ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽⁴⁸⁹⁾ US DoS, 2016 Report on International Religious Freedom - Afghanistan, 15 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 13.

⁽⁴⁹⁰⁾ Khaama Press, Kabul suicide bomber fails to target World's largest holy Quran archive, 20 February 2017 ([url](#)); AP, Suicide blast kills 1, wounds 4 in Kabul, 20 February 2014, via: ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁹¹⁾ Siddique, A., Skype interview, 2 August 2017; Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017; Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽⁴⁹²⁾ Lifos, Temarapport: Afghanistans ismailiter – en shiaminoritet, 30 June 2017 ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽⁴⁹³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 46.

⁽⁴⁹⁴⁾ Guardian (The), Dozens killed in bombing of mosque in Afghan city of Herat, 1 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁹⁵⁾ Osman, B., e-mail, 16 August 2017.

⁽⁴⁹⁶⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Recruitment by armed groups, September 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁴⁹⁷⁾ Landinfo, Report Afghanistan: Recruitment to Taliban, 29 June 2017 ([url](#)).

1.3 Situation of family members

1.3.1 Family members of ANSF personnel

According to a report by the Centre for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) ⁽⁴⁹⁸⁾ the Taliban collect information on local elders and local population in order to establish which family has a member with the ANSF. They then pressure that family to convince the ANSF member to give up his position ⁽⁴⁹⁹⁾.

Sources interviewed by the Canadian IRB explained that family members could be put under pressure to give information on the whereabouts of the wanted person. Family members can also be punished in absence of the wanted person, or family members are threatened in order to pressure the wanted person to give oneself up. This is said to be ‘a fairly successful tactic’ ⁽⁵⁰⁰⁾. Insurgents can also threaten family members to force people to resign from their public positions ⁽⁵⁰¹⁾. Abubakar Siddique called this practice ‘very common, especially in rural areas’ ⁽⁵⁰²⁾. Giustozzi says that ‘wherever the Taliban are present’ they have been pressuring family members to force ANSF-members to resign. And although not always using (the threat of) violence, sometimes family members have been executed ⁽⁵⁰³⁾. In one particular case, the Taliban killed eight brothers of an ALP commander in Baghlan in 2015 ⁽⁵⁰⁴⁾. In another case in Kunduz province, quoted by a New York Times article, the family of an ANA soldier was forced to relocate as their son refused to leave the army after receiving threats. After they left, their houses were either destroyed or turned into a Taliban base ⁽⁵⁰⁵⁾.

Examples of insurgent targeting of family members include:

- In Jawzjan, a 70-year old man was sentenced to death by a Taliban court and killed because he was supposedly related to the commander of an ‘uprising’ ⁽⁵⁰⁶⁾;
- In Sar-e Pul, an ALP commander’s five children were abducted and his house burnt down by insurgents ⁽⁵⁰⁷⁾.

There are also reports that family members of ANSF personnel who attend the funerals of their deceased family member are targeted. Examples of such incidents include:

- A 2016 incident when the Taliban warned that all those who participated in the funeral of a local pro-government militia commander would not be allowed back into the village in Faryab ⁽⁵⁰⁸⁾.

⁽⁴⁹⁸⁾ A research and advocacy organization that conducts field research and provides policy recommendations on reducing civilian harm in armed conflict.

⁽⁴⁹⁹⁾ CIVIC, Saving ourselves: Security Transition and Impact on Civilian Protection in Afghanistan, 21 November 2016 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽⁵⁰⁰⁾ IRB, Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue individuals after they relocate to another region; their capacity to track individuals over the long term; Taliban capacity to carry out targeted killings (2012-January 2016), 15 February 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁰¹⁾ CIVIC, Saving ourselves: Security Transition and Impact on Civilian Protection in Afghanistan, 21 November 2016 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽⁵⁰²⁾ Siddique, A., Skype interview, 2 August 2017.

⁽⁵⁰³⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 13.

⁽⁵⁰⁴⁾ CIVIC, Saving ourselves: Security Transition and Impact on Civilian Protection in Afghanistan, 21 November 2016 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽⁵⁰⁵⁾ New York Times (The), Afghan Army Recruitment Dwindles as Taliban Threaten Families, 18 November 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁰⁶⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban court orders elderly man executed in Jawzjan, 19 October 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁰⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 59.

⁽⁵⁰⁸⁾ New York Times (The), An Afghan Father-Son Tale Takes a Fatal Turn, but Does Not End, 8 September 2016 ([url](#)).

- In January 2015, a suicide bomber targeted a funeral for a deceased ALP commander in Laghman, killing 12 attendees and injuring 34 others, including three children ⁽⁵⁰⁹⁾.
- In December 2014, the funeral of a security official in Kapisa was attacked by a suicide bomber, killing nine attendees and injuring dozens ⁽⁵¹⁰⁾

1.3.2 Family members

During their takeover of Kunduz city, the Taliban performed a targeted search of the city looking for female human rights defenders, among others. Taliban members went to their homes and if the wanted person was not home, they threatened and physically assaulted their family members, according to UNAMA ⁽⁵¹¹⁾.

The Taliban also recruits family members of fallen combatants, in order to replace deceased fighters. According to Taliban sources of scholar Giustozzi, this is a 'common practice' ⁽⁵¹²⁾. Borhan Osman, as quoted in the EASO COI Report Recruitment by Armed Groups, in contrast, gave the opinion that he believed that 'the Taliban would show its respect to the family and even support them financially for the deceased family member' ⁽⁵¹³⁾. Further and corroborating information could not be found.

According to Faizullah Jalal, a professor of political science at Kabul University, quoted by the New York Times, it is not uncommon for two family members to be at opposite sides of the conflict, and eventually end up trying to kill each other ⁽⁵¹⁴⁾. Neamat Nojumi stated that 'within an Afghan social construct, two brothers fighting to kill one another on the opposite sides of politics is rare. However, this scenario is more vivid within an extended family in the form of a sub clan – or among step-cousins' ⁽⁵¹⁵⁾.

1.4 Escaping targeting

1.4.1 Repentance and redemption

According to Giustozzi, the Taliban offer certain targeted individuals, such as government officials, members of the ANSF, perceived collaborators of the government or the foreign military forces, contractors for the government or foreign countries and interpreters, the opportunity to 'repent' and 'redeem' ⁽⁵¹⁶⁾. In a public statement by the Taliban, quoted by UNAMA, the 'Taliban "invited" the "workers of invaders and Kabul administration" to take advantage of an amnesty to "protect themselves and their families from shame and harm in this world [...] to safeguard their li[v]es and wealth"' ⁽⁵¹⁷⁾. According to Giustozzi, this

⁽⁵⁰⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 16 dead, 39 injured in Laghman funeral bombing, 29 January 2015 ([url](#)); UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2015, August 2015 ([url](#)), p. 49.

⁽⁵¹⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 9 dead, 22 injured in suicide attack at funeral, 1 December 2014 ([url](#))

⁽⁵¹¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Special Report on Kunduz Province, December 2015 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽⁵¹²⁾ Giustozzi, A., The Military Cohesion of the Taliban, 14 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵¹³⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan – Recruitment by armed groups, September 2016 ([url](#)), p. 22.

⁽⁵¹⁴⁾ New York Times (The), 'I Will Kill Him': Afghan Commander Targets Son, a Taliban Fighter, 15 May 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵¹⁵⁾ Nojumi, N., e-mail, 22 September 2017. Neamat Nojumi made this comment during the review of this report.

⁽⁵¹⁶⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 12.

⁽⁵¹⁷⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 78.

opportunity to repent is a key aspect of the targeting campaign ⁽⁵¹⁸⁾. Anand Gopal and Borhan Osman corroborated that if quitting one's job is what the threats are demanding, doing so is generally enough to avoid further targeting ⁽⁵¹⁹⁾. For example, the Taliban reportedly 'often' release captured ANSF personnel through mediation of community leaders, on the condition of stopping to work with the government ⁽⁵²⁰⁾.

Besides quitting service, members of the ANSF will have the chance to, according to Giustozzi, join the Taliban before they will be targeted ⁽⁵²¹⁾. Analyst Borhan Osman called the logic behind the string of Taliban attacks on ANSF in spring 2017 the use of 'carrot and stick' ⁽⁵²²⁾. (See [1.2.1 Members of the Afghan security forces and pro-government militias](#)) Claiming to have killed '200 Police Special Unit hirelings' in Gardez in June 2017, the Taliban sent warnings to other police officers, as quoted here in a statement from the Taliban's website: 'They only have two choices: either repent, leave your duties or turn your weapons on the foreign invaders and infidel forces' ⁽⁵²³⁾. According to media sources, the Taliban recruits members of the ANSF to target (former) colleagues ⁽⁵²⁴⁾. For example, in Faryab province, eight members of the ALP were poisoned and then shot by a colleague, who was claimed to have links with the Taliban ⁽⁵²⁵⁾.

On the other hand, former ANSF members are also victims of targeted killings ⁽⁵²⁶⁾. An ALP commander, who offered to surrender in return for the freedom of his eight kidnapped brothers, was not able to save their lives. Although he offered to quit and eventually did quit his position, his eight brothers were killed ⁽⁵²⁷⁾. In another example, a man who had left a local uprising two years earlier was convicted in a Taliban court and executed on the accusation of supporting the government ⁽⁵²⁸⁾.

1.4.2 Relocating

Individuals and their families that receive threats from the Taliban because of past or current connections to the government or any other entity targeted by the Taliban often relocate to the cities for their safety ⁽⁵²⁹⁾. Sources report on instances where certain individuals have chosen to relocate in anticipation to certain events; for example, a teacher in the girls' school of Uruzgan Tirin Kot relocated to Kabul, in anticipation of a possible Taliban takeover of the

⁽⁵¹⁸⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 12.

⁽⁵¹⁹⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017; Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽⁵²⁰⁾ CIVIC, Saving ourselves: Security Transition and Impact on Civilian Protection in Afghanistan, 21 November 2016 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽⁵²¹⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 12-13.

⁽⁵²²⁾ Borhan, Osman [Twitter], posted on: 22 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵²³⁾ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan – Voice of Jihad, Gardez martyr attack leaves nearly 200 gunmen dead, 18 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵²⁴⁾ RFE/RL, Six Afghan Policemen Killed In Insider Attack, 28 May 2017 ([url](#)); AP, Q&A: Taliban infiltrate Afghan army to target foreign troops, 18 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵²⁵⁾ Bakhtar News Agency, Eight Policemen After Poisoning Martyred by Their Comrade, 3 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵²⁶⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 64.

⁽⁵²⁷⁾ CIVIC, Saving ourselves: Security Transition and Impact on Civilian Protection in Afghanistan, 21 November 2016 ([url](#)), p. 15.

⁽⁵²⁸⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Taliban execute three persons in Jawzjan, 29 March 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵²⁹⁾ CIVIC, Saving ourselves: Security Transition and Impact on Civilian Protection in Afghanistan, 21 November 2016 ([url](#)), p. 15; New York Times (The), Afghan Army Recruitment Dwindles as Taliban Threaten Families, 18 November 2017 ([url](#)).

city in September 2016 ⁽⁵³⁰⁾. In anticipation of the takeover of Kunduz City in 2015, most government employees fled to neighbouring provinces and to Kabul ⁽⁵³¹⁾.

According to Giustozzi, 'mainly, [ANSF] members and their families have gradually been forced to relocate to safer areas under government control, although some Taliban targeting occurs here too' ⁽⁵³²⁾. An analyst of the Afghanistan Analysts Network stated in a 2016 interview with the Canadian IRB that even after relocation, wanted individuals that are located by the Taliban can be killed, depending on the political climate of the day and depending on the individual's profile ⁽⁵³³⁾. See [1.4.3 Capacity to track and target in the cities](#).

According to two sources of the Canadian IRB, an assistant professor at the Institute of National Security and Counterterrorism at Syracuse University and the Director of the Program for Culture and Conflict at the Naval Postgraduate School in California, the Taliban have the capacity to track individuals after relocation, using their formal networks of local commanders and shadow governors, and their informal networks of mullahs ⁽⁵³⁴⁾. Factors influencing the efficiency of these communication flows can be the relation between the local commander in the province of origin and the central leadership, the relation of the local commanders in the province of origin and the province of relocation, the level of Taliban activity in the area of relocation, including checkpoints ⁽⁵³⁵⁾. According to Giustozzi, even after relocating, wanted individuals are still 'at risk of being caught while travelling on the road at a Taliban check point' ⁽⁵³⁶⁾.

According to oral sources interviewed by IRB, the Afghan communities are very close-knit by nature, and Afghans know when a newcomer arrives in their community or passes through. A number of things impact a person's ability to conceal their background, such as 'tribal/local connections to elders and family, regional accent differences, last names which may refer to origin, religious affiliation and prayer rituals, and higher education profiles which may identify the individual as belonging to a higher social class' ⁽⁵³⁷⁾. According to an article by RFE/RL about the Taliban in the digital age, these familial and community networks are extended over social media, and through their knowledge of these close knit communities, the Taliban can follow a person online and harass them to quit their job over social media ⁽⁵³⁸⁾.

When relocating to another area under Taliban control, if somebody new arrives and the background is unclear, this can already raise suspicion and trigger investigations by the Taliban in their information network ⁽⁵³⁹⁾. People are generally aware of what is happening in their

⁽⁵³⁰⁾ New York Times (The), Voices From a Worsening Afghan War, 7 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵³¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Human Rights and Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Special Report on Kunduz Province, December 2015 ([url](#)), p. 18.

⁽⁵³²⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 13.

⁽⁵³³⁾ IRB, Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue individuals after they relocate to another region; their capacity to track individuals over the long term; Taliban capacity to carry out targeted killings (2012-January 2016), 15 February 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵³⁴⁾ IRB, Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue individuals after they relocate to another region; their capacity to track individuals over the long term; Taliban capacity to carry out targeted killings (2012-January 2016), 15 February 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵³⁵⁾ IRB, Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue individuals after they relocate to another region; their capacity to track individuals over the long term; Taliban capacity to carry out targeted killings (2012-January 2016), 15 February 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵³⁶⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 13.

⁽⁵³⁷⁾ IRB, Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue individuals after they relocate to another region; their capacity to track individuals over the long term; Taliban capacity to carry out targeted killings (2012-January 2016), 15 February 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵³⁸⁾ RFE/RL, Gandhara Blog, Taliban Propaganda Meets The Digital Age, 10 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵³⁹⁾ IRB, Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue individuals after they relocate to another region; their capacity to track individuals over the long term; Taliban capacity to carry out targeted killings (2012-January 2016), 15 February 2016 ([url](#)).

district and information can cover long distances through tribal networks, explained a source interviewed by the IRB ⁽⁵⁴⁰⁾.

Not only does the Taliban survey any newcomer to the village or town they control, according to Giustozzi, they will also scrutinise those who travel to areas under government control, under the suspicion of spying for the government. ‘Those travelling in or out of a Taliban area should be able to provide a convincing justification for their travels, better if backed up by some evidence of trading deals, medical needs etc. In the event of the Taliban looking for culprits of spying in the government’s favour, anybody suspected of having gone to the authorities would be at great risk’ ⁽⁵⁴¹⁾.

1.4.3 Capacity to track and target individuals within large cities

Several oral sources interviewed in January 2016 by the Canadian IRB stated that the Taliban have a network of informants and conduct intelligence gathering in the cities, although it is more difficult to track people in urban areas ⁽⁵⁴²⁾. Targeted attacks in urban centre do occur. Some recent examples of targeting in Kabul include gunmen on motorcycles and remote controlled IEDs:

- In June 2016, a member of parliament was killed when an IED placed in an electricity box in front of his house was detonated the moment he arrived home ⁽⁵⁴³⁾.
- In December 2016, the Taliban attacked the Kabul house of a member of parliament from Helmand. Three gunmen killed several family members of the MP, and wounded several more, including the MP himself ⁽⁵⁴⁴⁾.
- In December 2016, gunmen on motorcycles attacked the home of former Taliban official Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, killing his guard ⁽⁵⁴⁵⁾.
- In December 2016, a bomb placed under a bridge in the Dashti Barchi area of Kabul targeted the vehicle of an MP from Bamiyan, injuring the MP and his son, amongst others ⁽⁵⁴⁶⁾.

In Kabul, there are at least 1,500 spies and informers of the Taliban, according to Giustozzi’s 2017 report for LandInfo, which was based primarily on interviews with Taliban sources. According to these sources, different networks within the Taliban have different surveillance assignments: the Haqqani network gathers information for special operations (large-scale attacks on high profiles), while the Peshawar Shura tracks wanted individuals. The Peshawar Shura is said to have around 500 spies and informers in Kabul. While the high profile attacks seem to take place largely in the city centre, the targeted killings, including the ones with magnetic IEDs, take place away from the city centre ⁽⁵⁴⁷⁾. Since 2016, the Taliban have started a campaign of targeted killings of government officials and ANSF members in Kandahar city

⁽⁵⁴⁰⁾ IRB, Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue individuals after they relocate to another region; their capacity to track individuals over the long term; Taliban capacity to carry out targeted killings (2012-January 2016), 15 February 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁴¹⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 17.

⁽⁵⁴²⁾ IRB, Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue individuals after they relocate to another region; their capacity to track individuals over the long term; Taliban capacity to carry out targeted killings (2012-January 2016), 15 February 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁴³⁾ Bakhtar News, MP Sher Wali Wardak Killed In Kabul Explosion, 7 June 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁴⁴⁾ Tolo News, MP’s House Under Attack In Kabul, Five Feared Dead, 22 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁴⁵⁾ Khaama Press, 1 killed in attack on ex-Taliban leader Mullah Salam Zaeef’s home in Kabul, 24 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁴⁶⁾ RFE/RL, Afghan Lawmaker Injured In Kabul Bomb Attack, 28 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁴⁷⁾ Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban’s Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 10.

(⁵⁴⁸). In the wake of several frontal assaults on cities in the period 2015-2016, the Taliban are now seeking to infiltrate the cities in a more low profile manner, but on a larger scale than they have ever done before, according to Giustozzi (⁵⁴⁹).

Targeted killings by the Taliban reportedly occur in major cities, for example, the Taliban killed their main opponent in Uruzgan province, police chief and tribesman of former president Karzai Matiullah Khan, in a targeted suicide bombing in Kabul in 2015 (⁵⁵⁰). According to Abubakar Siddique, the list of people for whom the Taliban will invest resources and planning to track and target into the major cities is limited to a few dozen and up to a hundred persons, maximum (⁵⁵¹). For lower profile individuals, Abubakar Siddique gave the opinion that the Taliban 'probably will not target them or their family members after relocating to the cities' (⁵⁵²). Both Abubakar Siddique and Anand Gopal highlighted that there are exceptions where the targeting actually entails personal enmities, rivalries or disputes (⁵⁵³). See the chapter on disputes in EASO COI Report - Afghanistan: Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms for more information on this topic.

According to a professor interviewed by the COI unit of the Canadian IRB (⁵⁵⁴), Taliban tracking capacities after relocation are particularly successful when targeting 'well known and well positioned opponents' (⁵⁵⁵). According to Giustozzi, there is a degree of cost-effectiveness involved: a profile of low importance to the Taliban, but residing in an area easy to access for the Taliban, may be targeted sooner than a high profile residing in an area heavily patrolled by the authorities (⁵⁵⁶). See further information on the urban-rural divide under 1.1.5 [Taliban targeting of civilians](#).

1.5 Insurgent groups other than the Taliban

The Taliban, including looser affiliated groups such as the Haqqani network, are the main insurgent group in Afghanistan. Besides the Taliban, a wide range of smaller groups operate such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic Jihad Union, Lashkar-e Tayyiba, Jaysh Muhammed, the Islamic State Khorasan Province (⁵⁵⁷), Fedai Mahaz (⁵⁵⁸), and the Mullah Dadullah Front (⁵⁵⁹), that is said to have rejoined the Taliban (⁵⁶⁰).

(⁵⁴⁸) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 64; New York Times (The), Taliban Slaughter Soldiers in Pattern of Attacks in Kandahar, 26 July 2017 ([url](#)).

(⁵⁴⁹) Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 19-20.

(⁵⁵⁰) New York Times (The), Powerful Afghan Police Chief Killed in Kabul, 19 March 2015 ([url](#)).

(⁵⁵¹) Siddique, A., Skype interview, 2 August 2017.

(⁵⁵²) Siddique, A., Skype interview, 2 August 2017.

(⁵⁵³) Siddique, A., Skype interview, 2 August 2017; Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

(⁵⁵⁴) A professor, who is the Director of the Program for Culture and Conflict at the Naval Postgraduate School in California, and who, for three decades, has been conducting and publishing research on Afghanistan and South Asia.

(⁵⁵⁵) IRB, Afghanistan: Whether the Taliban has the capacity to pursue individuals after they relocate to another region; their capacity to track individuals over the long term; Taliban capacity to carry out targeted killings (2012-January 2016), 15 February 2016 ([url](#)).

(⁵⁵⁶) Giustozzi, A., Afghanistan: Taliban's Intelligence and intimidation campaign, 23 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 16.

(⁵⁵⁷) UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 6.

(⁵⁵⁸) Osman, B. and Clark, K., The Murder of Swedish Journalist Nils Horner: an assessment of the Fedai Mahaz claim, 19 March 2014 ([url](#)).

(⁵⁵⁹) Ruttig, T., The Mulla Dadullah Front: A search for clues, 22 May 2012 ([url](#)).

(⁵⁶⁰) Roggio, B., Powerful jihadist faction reconciles with the Taliban, 15 Augustus 2016 ([url](#)).

Discussing all of these groups is beyond the scope of this report. This report limits itself to briefly discussing the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) and The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).

1.5.1 Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP)

For the targeting of Hazara and Shia minorities by ISKP, please read [1.2.11 Hazara and Shia minorities](#).

According to Anand Gopal, while the Taliban is said to ‘limit the targeting of certain individuals’, such as teachers, healthcare workers or journalists, the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) does not to make such distinctions ⁽⁵⁶¹⁾. According to Neamat Nojumi, ISKP members and commanders are mainly former Taliban who try to reintroduce ‘unlimited and radical targeting’ as was customary in the first years after the Taliban re-emergence post-2001, and before the Taliban introduced restrictions on targeting. These ISKP commanders do so in order to gain support across the rank and file of militant networks ⁽⁵⁶²⁾.

According to Borhan Osman, merely working for the Afghan government is enough to be perceived as ‘non-Muslim’ by the ISKP, and therefore become eligible for targeting ⁽⁵⁶³⁾. For example, UNAMA observed a steep increase in targeting of educational personnel in Nangarhar in 2015, directly linking this to the emergence of ISKP in that province ⁽⁵⁶⁴⁾. In March 2017, ISKP attacked an ANA military hospital in Kabul, killing indiscriminately 49 people and wounding 88 others, including medical personnel. The other victims were patients, including soldiers *hors de combat*, staff and family members ⁽⁵⁶⁵⁾. In an example from September 2017, associates of ISKP beheaded two civilians on charges of spying for the government in Kunar ⁽⁵⁶⁶⁾.

Family members have also been targeted. For example, in September 2017, Khaama Press (KP) reported that ISKP executed two brothers and their uncle. The brothers were ANA soldiers travelling off duty, visiting their family on the occasion of Eid-ul-Adha ⁽⁵⁶⁷⁾.

According to CIVIC, ISKP does not seek support from community elders to gain legitimacy. To the contrary, community elders have been systematically targeted. According to CIVIC, ISKP also targets clerics, teachers and civilians accused of perceived affiliation with either the government or the Taliban. Targeting individuals serves to intimidate entire communities ⁽⁵⁶⁸⁾. For example, in October 2016, a group formerly affiliated with Taliban but identifying themselves as *Daesh* (as ISKP is often referred to in Afghanistan), abducted 35 civilians in Ghor province, and shot and killed 26 of them in retaliation of the killing of their leader ⁽⁵⁶⁹⁾. However, according to Borhan Osman’s analysis, ISKP was not involved, but the attack was instead carried out by a criminal gang with ‘historical links to the Taliban’ ⁽⁵⁷⁰⁾.

⁽⁵⁶¹⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017; Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽⁵⁶²⁾ Nojumi, N., e-mail, 22 September 2017. Neamat Nojumi made this comment during the review of this report.

⁽⁵⁶³⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽⁵⁶⁴⁾ UNAMA & UNICEF, Education and healthcare at risk, April 2016 ([url](#)), p. 9.

⁽⁵⁶⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 18-19.

⁽⁵⁶⁶⁾ Khaama Press, ISIS behead two Afghan civilians on espionage charges in Kunar, 15 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁶⁷⁾ Khaama Press, ISIS execute two brothers serving with Afghan army in Nangarhar province, 5 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁶⁸⁾ CIVIC, Saving ourselves: Security Transition and Impact on Civilian Protection in Afghanistan, 21 November 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 11-13, 29.

⁽⁵⁶⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 66.

⁽⁵⁷⁰⁾ Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, 23 November 2016 ([url](#)).

Some examples of ISKP targeting in Nangarhar and some other provinces include:

- In August 2015, ISKP executed ten elders by placing them on explosives ⁽⁵⁷¹⁾.
- In August 2015, ISKP forced the closure of 25 schools in Deh Bala district, threatening teachers with 'severe punishment', death threats, extortion of their salaries if they failed to comply with their orders or reported to authorities ⁽⁵⁷²⁾.
- In October 2016, a suicide bomber targeted a gathering of elders from Pachiragam district. The elders gathered in Jalalabad to solve internal disputes and seek an alliance against ISKP ⁽⁵⁷³⁾.
- A dozen *madrassa* teachers were kidnapped by ISKP militants in Nangarhar province in January 2017 ⁽⁵⁷⁴⁾ and released through mediation of local elders after two months in captivity ⁽⁵⁷⁵⁾.
- In February 2017, unknown gunmen killed six Red Cross aid workers in Jawzjan province and abducted two more ⁽⁵⁷⁶⁾. These two were released in September 2017 ⁽⁵⁷⁷⁾. The likely culprit, according to analyst Kate Clark, was a local affiliate of ISKP ⁽⁵⁷⁸⁾.
- In March 2017, ISKP affiliates in Sar-e Pul allegedly killed and beheaded three influential Hazara elders ⁽⁵⁷⁹⁾.
- In July 2017, ISKP in Jawzjan allegedly beheaded ten Taliban fighters in Darzab district ⁽⁵⁸⁰⁾.
- In July 2017, ISKP released a video in which they beheaded five persons on charges of espionage and being government soldiers ⁽⁵⁸¹⁾.
- In July 2017, ISKP fighters shot and killed a tribal elder in Jawzjan Province ⁽⁵⁸²⁾.
- In Jawzjan in 2017, ISKP members closed schools and forced teachers to transfer their government pay to the group ⁽⁵⁸³⁾.
- In August 2017, ISKP claimed the attack on the home of MP Zahir Qadir, the leader of a local pro-government militia engaged in fighting Taliban and ISK in Nangarhar ⁽⁵⁸⁴⁾.
- In November 2017, Afghan officials claimed that ISKP in Nangarhar had beheaded 15 of its own fighters, due to infighting in the group ⁽⁵⁸⁵⁾.

Because of ISKP presence and activities targeting the local population, entire communities have relocated to Jalalabad and surrounding districts ⁽⁵⁸⁶⁾.

⁽⁵⁷¹⁾ International Business Times, Isis in Afghanistan: Video shows brutal new execution by bombing method, 10 August 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁷²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2015, February 2016 ([url](#)), p. 19.

⁽⁵⁷³⁾ Reuters, Afghan elders killed in suicide attack on meeting, 31 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁷⁴⁾ Khaama Press, ISIS militants kidnap 13 seminary teachers in East of Afghanistan, 17 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁷⁵⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, A dozen seminary teachers released from Daesh captivity, 4 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁷⁶⁾ Guardian (The), Six Red Cross workers in Afghanistan killed in ambush, 8 February 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁷⁷⁾ RFE/RL, Red Cross Staff Members Released In Northern Afghanistan, 5 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁷⁸⁾ Clark, K., Working in a 'Grey Zone': ICRC forced to scale back its work in Afghanistan, 10 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁷⁹⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 3 Hazara elders allegedly beheaded in Sar-i-Pul, 16 March 2017 ([url](#)); AP, Afghan officials: Islamic State kills 3 Shiite elders, 16 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁸⁰⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Daesh militants behead 10 Taliban rivals in Jawzjan, 2 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁸¹⁾ Abdul Mateen Imran, [Twitter], posted on: 25 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁸²⁾ Germany: Federal Office for Migration and Asylum, Information Centre Asylum and Migration Briefing Notes (31 July 2017), 31 July 2017, available at: ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁸³⁾ RFE/RL, IS Threatens Teachers And Students In Restive Afghan District, 5 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁸⁴⁾ RFE/RL, Suicide Attack On Home Of Afghan Lawmaker Kills Two Guards, 30 August 2017 ([url](#)); @Terror_Monitor [Twitter], posted on: 30 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁸⁵⁾ Reuters, Islamic State beheads 15 of its own fighters: Afghan official, 23 November 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁸⁶⁾ CIVIC, Saving ourselves: Security Transition and Impact on Civilian Protection in Afghanistan, 21 November 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 11-13, 29.

ISKP also issues “night letters”, threat letters that are fixed on the doors of mosques and shops, to demand support from the local population and warning of punishment for disobedience ⁽⁵⁸⁷⁾. In Jawzjan, ISKP used night letters to threaten parents to keep their children away from school ⁽⁵⁸⁸⁾.

ISKP in Nangarhar also runs a campaign of pressure against the media. In 2015, the offices in Jalalabad of Voice of America, Pajhwok Afghan News, Radio Killid and Radio Safa were targeted by bombings ⁽⁵⁸⁹⁾. In June 2017, the ISKP issued a statement threatening all journalists in Nangarhar ⁽⁵⁹⁰⁾. According to AJSC, ISKP

‘has also made many attempts to force media to publish or broadcast contents concerning their activities and operations by intimidating and attacking them. The attacks on Radio Killid, Radio Safi and Pajhwok News Agency in Jalalabad in October 2015 by Daesh were carried out primarily because of the resistance of these media agencies to publish or broadcast ‘on order’ news, which are instances of the kind of threats that journalists have to cope with’ ⁽⁵⁹¹⁾.

A complex attack on the national Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) premises in Jalalabad in May 2017, claimed by ISKP, killed six people: four RTA personnel: a driver, a guard, and two technical personnel, as well as two policemen ⁽⁵⁹²⁾. This campaign against media is not limited to Nangarhar: in November 2017, ISKP claimed a complex attack on Kabul-based Shamshad TV ⁽⁵⁹³⁾.

1.5.1.1 Geographic presence

ISKP’s stronghold is based in certain southern districts of Nangarhar ⁽⁵⁹⁴⁾, where they are fighting over control with the Taliban ⁽⁵⁹⁵⁾. Their presence in eastern Afghanistan spreads to neighbouring provinces Kunar ⁽⁵⁹⁶⁾ and, according to government sources, Laghman ⁽⁵⁹⁷⁾.

⁽⁵⁸⁷⁾ Germany: Federal Office for Migration and Asylum, Information Centre Asylum and Migration Briefing Notes (24 April 2017), 24 April 2017, available at: [\(url\)](#).

⁽⁵⁸⁸⁾ RFE/RL, IS Threatens Teachers And Students In Restive Afghan District, 5 September 2017 [\(url\)](#).

⁽⁵⁸⁹⁾ RSF, RSF condemns deadly attack on state radio and TV in Jalalabad, 17 May 2017 [\(url\)](#).

⁽⁵⁹⁰⁾ 1 TV News, IS threatens journalists in Afghanistan with death, 15 June 2017 [\(url\)](#).

⁽⁵⁹¹⁾ AJSC, Six Months Report July-December 2016 Exclusive Report: Analysis of violence against Journalists 2012-2016, 9 January 2017 [\(url\)](#), pp. 6, 9.

⁽⁵⁹²⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, RTA office attack denounced as war crime, 18 May 2017 [\(url\)](#); Reuters, Islamic State claims attack on state TV station in Afghanistan, 17 May 2017 [\(url\)](#).

⁽⁵⁹³⁾ BBC News, Afghan television channel Shamshad TV back on air after attack, 7 November 2017 [\(url\)](#).

⁽⁵⁹⁴⁾ Osman, B., Descent into chaos: Why did Nangarhar turn into an IS hub?, 27 September 2017 [\(url\)](#); Clark, K., and Osman, B., More Militias? Part 2: The proposed Afghan Territorial Army in the fight against ISKP, 23 September 2017 [\(url\)](#); Reuters, Islamic State beheads 15 of its own fighters: Afghan official, 23 November 2017 [\(url\)](#); UN Secretary-General (UNSG), The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 21 September 2017, available at: [\(url\)](#), p. 5.

⁽⁵⁹⁵⁾ RFE/RL, Taliban, IS Face Off In Afghanistan, 30 October 2017 [\(url\)](#).

⁽⁵⁹⁶⁾ UN Secretary-General (UNSG), The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 21 September 2017, available at: [\(url\)](#), p. 5; Reuters, Islamic State fighters in Afghanistan flee to Kunar province, 24 March 2016 [\(url\)](#); Roggio, B., US military kills Islamic State Khorasan province leader in Kunar, 13 August 2017 [\(url\)](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, 2 civilians in Kunar decapitated by Daesh fighters, 15 September 2017 [\(url\)](#).

⁽⁵⁹⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 9 militants killed in Laghman-Nangarhar offensives, 20 September 2017 [\(url\)](#); Khaama Press, Taliban and ISIS clashes spread to Laghman as both sides suffer heavy casualties, 29 November 2017 [\(url\)](#).

Besides their presence in the city of Kabul ⁽⁵⁹⁸⁾, Borhan Osman explained that the assassination of an ANA soldier in the Khalis Family Colony in September 2017 as an indication of ISKP's growing presence in the outskirts of Jalalabad ⁽⁵⁹⁹⁾.

Disgruntled or ex-communicated Taliban commanders in other provinces such as Herat, Ghor, Sar-e Pul and Jawzjan have also pledged allegiance to the ISKP group, although the level of coordination and cooperation between these groups and the ISKP core in Nangarhar remains unclear ⁽⁶⁰⁰⁾.

1.5.1.2 Women in ISKP areas

According to women interviewed by CIVIC, in areas under control of ISKP in Nangarhar, women are completely banned from public life, including working on farms, which has affected a significant number of women who carry out much of the agricultural labour in rural areas. Women have also reportedly been 'beaten or shot for walking unnecessarily in public spaces' ⁽⁶⁰¹⁾.

1.5.2 Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)

Until 2014, IMU fought alongside the Taliban in northern Afghanistan. After the public announcement of Mullah Omar's death, IMU switched allegiance to ISKP. This resulted in clashes between the IMU and Taliban, notably in the Southern province of Zabul in 2015 ⁽⁶⁰²⁾. According to a September 2017 interview with Anand Gopal for this report, a northern group, called Jundullah, separated from the IMU and operates under the umbrella of the Taliban in the North ⁽⁶⁰³⁾. This group previously attempted to establish a base in the name of the Islamic State in northeastern Afghanistan ⁽⁶⁰⁴⁾. Although they can be autonomous in their operations, they are supposed to obey to the Taliban rules, including the prohibition on sectarian violence and limitations on targeting of certain types of individuals in society ⁽⁶⁰⁵⁾. According to both Borhan Osman and Obaid Ali, there are IMU-groups operating in the Northern provinces Kunduz and Takhar, whose activities the Taliban have difficulty controlling. They operate and target according to their agenda ⁽⁶⁰⁶⁾. Analyst Obaid Ali in July 2017 stated that both IMU and Jundallah in the North of Afghanistan 'continued to run autonomous fronts and kept separate command structures' ⁽⁶⁰⁷⁾.

⁽⁵⁹⁸⁾ Osman, B., With an Active Cell in Kabul, ISKP Tries to Bring Sectarianism to the Afghan War, 19 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁵⁹⁹⁾ Borhan, Osman [Twitter], posted on: 6 September 2017 ([url](#))

⁽⁶⁰⁰⁾ Ali, O., Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North (4): A case study from Jawzjan, 18 September 2017 ([url](#)); UN Secretary-General (UNSG), The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 21 September 2017, available at: ([url](#)), p. 5; Ali, O., The Assault in Sayad: Did Taleban and Daesh really collaborate?, 9 August 2017 ([url](#)); Osman, B., Carnage in Ghor: Was Islamic State the perpetrator or was it falsely accused?, 23 November 2016 ([url](#)); Ali, O., Qari Hekmat's Island: A Daesh enclave in Jawzjan?, 11 November 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁰¹⁾ CIVIC, Saving ourselves: Security Transition and Impact on Civilian Protection in Afghanistan, 21 November 2016 ([url](#)), p. 13.

⁽⁶⁰²⁾ Osman, B., Toward Fragmentation? Mapping the post-Omar Taleban, 24 November 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁰³⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽⁶⁰⁴⁾ Ali, O., The 2016 Insurgency in the North: Raising the Daesh flag (although not for long), 15 July 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁰⁵⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017.

⁽⁶⁰⁶⁾ Osman, B., Skype interview, 8 August 2017; Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North: The Takhar case study, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁰⁷⁾ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taleban of the North: The Takhar case study, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)).

According to Anand Gopal, other than Jundullah, the rest of IMU is very small and fragmented making discernable targeting patterns difficult to establish ⁽⁶⁰⁸⁾. Obaid Ali stated that Uzbek fighters from both IMU and Jundullah largely ignore local culture. For example, they ignore local elders' mediation in conflicts and the consultation of tribal elders on important issues, only accepting the views of religious scholars in solving disputes ⁽⁶⁰⁹⁾.

⁽⁶⁰⁸⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽⁶⁰⁹⁾ Ali, O., The Non-Pashtun Taliban of the North: The Takhar case study, 29 July 2017 ([url](#)).

2. Targeting by the government

This chapter examines the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan as a potential actor of persecution or serious harm. Much of the issues with the government of Afghanistan are covered by the EASO Country of Origin Information Report *Afghanistan. Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City*. In the chapter on 'State Protection' of this report, issues with the integrity of the ANA, ANP and the formal justice system are set out, in addition to highlighting mechanisms to report misconduct and the situation of returnees and women ⁽⁶¹⁰⁾.

This chapter will focus on the issues not covered by this previous EASO report or, when available, an update of the relevant information. This chapter primarily looks into the conduct of state actors, including Afghan Local Police and other pro-government militias, towards those suspected of being an anti-government element, and towards journalists and humanitarian workers.

For the situation and treatment of women and couples for charges of moral crimes, see the chapter on Gender targeting in the EASO Country of Origin Information Report *Afghanistan : Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms* ⁽⁶¹¹⁾.

2.1 Death penalty, summary executions, drone and air strikes

For a discussion of the application of the death sentence in Afghanistan, please refer to the section on Death penalty enforcement by the government in the EASO Country of Origin Information Report *Afghanistan: Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms* ⁽⁶¹²⁾.

Besides death penalty, there have been cases of deliberate and summary executions by the ANSF. In 2016, UNAMA documented an increase in civilians killed by regular ANSF (excluding ALP or other pro-government armed groups). In 37 incidents in 2016, UNAMA recorded 35 deaths and eight wounded. According to UNAMA '[m]ost incidents consisted of scenarios in which Afghan national security forces shot and killed or injured civilians believing them to be Anti Government Elements, but UNAMA also documented incidents of extrajudicial killings and killings by Afghan national security forces abusing their positions of power' ⁽⁶¹³⁾. For example the killing of five people during a night raid by the NDS in Nangarhar in June 2017. Local residents claimed the victims were civilians ⁽⁶¹⁴⁾.

International military forces have also been targeting suspected insurgents. According to an investigation by Der Spiegel, NATO forces held a hit list of targeted killings in Afghanistan. The article states that 'the list, which included up to 750 people at times, proves for the first time that NATO didn't just target the Taliban leadership, but also eliminated mid- and lower-level members of the group on a large scale. Some Afghans were only on the list because, as drug

⁽⁶¹⁰⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report. Afghanistan. Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City, August 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 71-114.

⁽⁶¹¹⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan. Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms, October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶¹²⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan. Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms, October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶¹³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 90-91.

⁽⁶¹⁴⁾ 1 TV News, Intelligence forces kill five in night raid in Nangarhar, 19 June 2017 ([url](#)).

dealers, they were allegedly supporting the insurgents' ⁽⁶¹⁵⁾. According to AAN analyst Kate Clark, targets of drone strikes are often chosen based on intelligence. When that intelligence is wrong, these strikes end up killing civilians. Targets can be attacked 'based solely on their 'patterns of life' which indicate to US targeters that they are combatants (these are called 'signature strikes')' ⁽⁶¹⁶⁾. These so-called 'signature strikes' base targeting on 'suspicious behavioural patterns rather than direct evidence of combatant activity' ⁽⁶¹⁷⁾. According to human rights groups quoted by the Guardian, these criteria 'can be as vague as killing "military-aged males" in regions where terrorists operate' ⁽⁶¹⁸⁾. In a 2011 example from Daikundi, a convoy of civilian vehicles was targeted by drone strikes solely based on a series of misinterpretations of their behaviour, killing at least 15 unarmed civilians ⁽⁶¹⁹⁾. According to Kate Clark, there are no reliable numbers of civilians being killed in drone strikes in Afghanistan ⁽⁶²⁰⁾. On airstrikes in general, UNAMA documented a 'sharp increase' in civilian casualties in 2016: the number of casualties doubled to 590 in 2016, of which 40 % attributed to the international military forces ⁽⁶²¹⁾. In the first six months of 2017, the number of civilian casualties from airstrikes rose a further 43 % ⁽⁶²²⁾. The number of weapons released during international air force sorties steadily rose during spring/summer 2017 to a five-year high in August 2017 ⁽⁶²³⁾. UNAMA attributed this increase to aerial operations targeting ISKP in Nangarhar ⁽⁶²⁴⁾.

2.2 Torture and illegal detention

2.2.1 Arbitrary arrest and illegal detention

Although the law prohibits arbitrary arrest or detention ⁽⁶²⁵⁾, there are several sources suggesting both are widespread in Afghanistan ⁽⁶²⁶⁾. There are several accounts of illegal detention centers, some of which were run by the international military forces in the past ⁽⁶²⁷⁾ or by members of the ANSF, in 2016 ⁽⁶²⁸⁾. For example, the Kandahar police is 'widely suspected' of operating a secret detention centre according to UNAMA and HRW ⁽⁶²⁹⁾; there

⁽⁶¹⁵⁾ Spiegel (Der), A Dubious History of Targeted Killings in Afghanistan, 28 December 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶¹⁶⁾ Clark, K., Drone Warfare 2: Targeted Killings – a future model for Afghanistan?, 1 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶¹⁷⁾ Davis, L. E., et al., Clarifying the Rules for Targeted Killing: An Analytical Framework for Policies Involving Long-Range Armed Drones, 2016 ([url](#)), p. 5.

⁽⁶¹⁸⁾ Guardian (The), US to continue 'signature strikes' on people suspected of terrorist links, 1 July 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶¹⁹⁾ Los Angeles Times (The), Anatomy of an Afghan war tragedy, 10 April 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶²⁰⁾ Clark, K., Drone Warfare 2: Targeted Killings – a future model for Afghanistan?, 1 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶²¹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 83.

⁽⁶²²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 52.

⁽⁶²³⁾ US Air Forces Central Command – Combined Air Operations Center, Combined Forces Air Component Commander - 2012-2017 Airpower Statistics, 31 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶²⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 52.

⁽⁶²⁵⁾ Afghanistan, Criminal Procedure Code, art. 7, 5 May 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶²⁶⁾ US DoS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2016, 6 March 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 6-7;

⁽⁶²⁷⁾ Clark, K., 'Secret NATO Jails' that Aren't Secret: Ambush and drama over detainees, 6 May 2014 ([url](#)); International Criminal Court, Office of the Prosecutor, Report on Preliminary Examination Activities 2016, 14 November 2016 ([url](#)), p. 44; UN OHCHR, Committee against Torture considers report of Afghanistan, 26 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶²⁸⁾ US DoS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2016, 6 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽⁶²⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 57 (footnote 204); HRW, "Today We Shall All Die" Afghanistan's Strongmen and the Legacy of Impunity, 3 March 2015 ([url](#)), pp. 66-67.

have reportedly been several illegal detention centers in and around Ghazni City ⁽⁶³⁰⁾; the police in Helmand is suspected of keeping illegal prisoners in poor conditions ⁽⁶³¹⁾. Further sources report that in Faryab and other locations, pro-government militias are suspected of having private jails ⁽⁶³²⁾. This also reportedly occurs in Takhar ⁽⁶³³⁾.

Strongmen or political power brokers linked to the government can also act on their own, outside the security apparatus, to target their opponents. First Vice-President, Abdul Rashid Dostum, has been accused of illegal detention and abuse of a political opponent in his home province of Jawzjan ⁽⁶³⁴⁾.

The US Department of State stated in March 2017 that 'there were no reports the government held political prisoners or detainees' ⁽⁶³⁵⁾.

2.2.2 Treatment of detainees

The Criminal Procedure Code strictly prohibits the use of confessions made through 'misconduct, narcotics, duress, torture, hypnosis, threat, intimidation, or promising a benefit' ⁽⁶³⁶⁾. According to the Afghan Police Law, the police can detain a person for up to 72 hours in pre-trial detention ⁽⁶³⁷⁾. The arrested individual must be informed of the reasons for the arrest, interrogated within 24 hours, and then turned over to the *saranwal*, or prosecutor ⁽⁶³⁸⁾.

Although torture is prohibited in the constitution of Afghanistan ⁽⁶³⁹⁾, in a report on the treatment of conflict-related detainees from April 2017, UNAMA and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for the Human Rights (OHCHR) stated that 39 % of all Afghan prisoners interviewed gave credible accounts of having experienced torture or other forms of ill-treatment. Of the interviewed, 85 were children detained on security related charges, of which 45 % had been subjected to torture or ill treatment ⁽⁶⁴⁰⁾. In most cases, the authorities used torture and ill-treatment to extract a confession. While the majority of documented cases related to incidents allegedly carried out in NDS facilities, UNAMA also noted a significant increase in the use of torture and ill-treatment on detainees by the ANP, noting that credible accounts of torture and ill-treatment by those who had been detained by police are at the highest level since it began monitoring in 2010 ⁽⁶⁴¹⁾.

The locations where particularly high levels of torture and other forms of ill-treatment have been documented are:

⁽⁶³⁰⁾ HRW, "Today We Shall All Die" Afghanistan's Strongmen and the Legacy of Impunity, 3 March 2015 ([url](#)), p. 68.

⁽⁶³¹⁾ Anderson, B., This Is What Winning Looks Like [video], 27 May 2013 ([url](#)), 5:00.

⁽⁶³²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 95.

⁽⁶³³⁾ Guardian (The), Afghanistan funds abusive militias as US military 'ignores' situation, officials say, 26 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶³⁴⁾ UN Secretary-General (UNSG), The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, 3 March 2017, available at: ([url](#)), p. 1; New York Times (The), Afghanistan Vice President Accused of Torturing Political Rival, 13 December 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶³⁵⁾ US DoS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2016, 6 March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 13.

⁽⁶³⁶⁾ Afghanistan, Criminal Procedure Code, art. 22, 5 May 2014 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶³⁷⁾ Afghanistan, Police Law, Art. 25, 22 September 2005 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶³⁸⁾ Touchpoint, 3.2: The Process of a Criminal Justice Case in Afghanistan, February 2014, available at: ([url](#)), p. 4.

⁽⁶³⁹⁾ UNOHCHR, Committee against Torture considers report of Afghanistan, 26 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁴⁰⁾ UNAMA, Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees: Implementation of Afghanistan's National Plan on the Elimination of Torture, April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 7.

⁽⁶⁴¹⁾ UN Human Rights Council, The situation of human rights in Afghanistan and technical assistance achievements in the field of human rights, 11 January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 9.

- The NDS Counter-Terrorism Directorate located in the Shashdarak area of Kabul. Supposedly, it was previously the Fifth Directorate and was subsequently renumbered 90, 124 and most recently, NDS 241.
- NDS and ANP stations in Kandahar ⁽⁶⁴²⁾.

In 2013, UNAMA found that ‘[o]ne third of all credible and reliable cases of torture and ill-treatment involving ANP originated in facilities in Kandahar province’ ⁽⁶⁴³⁾. In 2017, UNAMA stated that ‘91 per cent of detainees [in Kandahar ANP custody] interviewed gave credible and reliable accounts of being subjected to the most brutal forms of torture and ill treatment’ ⁽⁶⁴⁴⁾.

UNAMA in 2017 also documented a significant increase in the abuse of detainees by ANP in Nangarhar and further in 20 other provinces, of which Farah and Herat were ‘of particular concern’ to UNAMA ⁽⁶⁴⁵⁾.

There is, according to UNAMA, also ‘some evidence’ that torture or other forms of ill-treatment occurs in ANA custody, including in the Afghan National Detention Facility in Bagram, Parwan ⁽⁶⁴⁶⁾.

In a criminal investigation procedure that heavily relies on confessions ‘judges frequently base convictions solely on these statements, even in the absence of any corroborating evidence’, according to HRW ⁽⁶⁴⁷⁾. In the majority of cases documented by UNAMA, torture and ill-treatment were used in order to extract a confession. Torture stopped once the suspect signed or thumb-printed a confession ⁽⁶⁴⁸⁾. A government official told the AAN that there is ‘an institutional belief in its effectiveness, a belief that, without torture, the state cannot get convictions and that ‘terrorists’ will be released and be able to attack again’ ⁽⁶⁴⁹⁾.

According to Anand Gopal, government targeting of civilians happens, ‘even more so than with insurgent targeting’, based on family ties, kinship and tribal association. For example, Gopal has the opinion that the Pashtun tribe of the Ishaqzai (from whom the former Taliban leader Mansour hailed), is ‘probably the most targeted community in Afghanistan’ by government elements ⁽⁶⁵⁰⁾. Victims of torture by ANSF in Kandahar tend to be disproportionately poorer elements of the Ishaqzai, Alizai, and Nurzai tribes. Rarely will the ANP in Kandahar target Popalzai or Barakzai, according to Anand Gopal ⁽⁶⁵¹⁾.

⁽⁶⁴²⁾ Clark, K., Afghanistan’s Record on Torture to Come under UN Scrutiny, 21 April 2017 ([url](#)); Washington Post (The), Viral video appears to show Afghan police dragging man behind truck, 9 March 2016 ([url](#)); HRW, HRW Submission to the Committee against Torture: Afghanistan, March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2; UNAMA, Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees: Implementation of Afghanistan’s National Plan on the Elimination of Torture, April 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 8-10.

⁽⁶⁴³⁾ UNAMA, Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees in Afghan Custody. One Year On, January 2013 ([url](#)), p. 11.

⁽⁶⁴⁴⁾ UNAMA, Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees: Implementation of Afghanistan’s National Plan on the Elimination of Torture, April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 9.

⁽⁶⁴⁵⁾ UNAMA, Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees: Implementation of Afghanistan’s National Plan on the Elimination of Torture, April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 9.

⁽⁶⁴⁶⁾ UNAMA, Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees: Implementation of Afghanistan’s National Plan on the Elimination of Torture, April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 10.

⁽⁶⁴⁷⁾ HRW, HRW Submission to the Committee against Torture: Afghanistan, March 2017 ([url](#)), p. 2.

⁽⁶⁴⁸⁾ UNAMA, Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees: Implementation of Afghanistan’s National Plan on the Elimination of Torture, April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 6.

⁽⁶⁴⁹⁾ Clark, K., Afghanistan’s Record on Torture to Come under UN Scrutiny, 21 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁵⁰⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽⁶⁵¹⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

In 2017, by contrast, the ANP-commander for Kandahar, Abdul Razeq – a government official who is implicated in serious human rights abuses in Kandahar ⁽⁶⁵²⁾ – called for the creation of a ‘safe zone’ for returning Taliban members and their families, to return to from their hide-outs in Pakistan ⁽⁶⁵³⁾. According to RFE/RL, there have since been several returnees, including according to sources on the side of the Taliban and the Afghan government quoted by RFE/RL, leaders and senior Taliban officials ⁽⁶⁵⁴⁾.

2.3 Government targeting of journalists, media workers and human rights defenders

Afghanistan ranks 120th of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders 2017 World Press Freedom Index ⁽⁶⁵⁵⁾. The UN Committee against Torture mentioned in 2017, ‘numerous reports alleging that human rights defenders, as well as journalists, are subjected to threats, intimidation, harassment, surveillance, arbitrary detentions, forced disappearances and killings’ and issued concerns over the lack of any state protection against it in Afghanistan ⁽⁶⁵⁶⁾.

Human Rights Watch reports that in 2016, 12 journalists were killed in the first 9 months of the year, making it the ‘bloodiest’ year on record since 2001 for journalists ⁽⁶⁵⁷⁾. Although the Taliban are responsible for most of the killings of journalists ⁽⁶⁵⁸⁾, HRW reports that most of the violence against journalists and media workers is by the government or pro-government elements, more so than the Taliban ⁽⁶⁵⁹⁾.

The AJSC reports that on average during the period 2012-2016, the Afghan government has been responsible for over 40 cases of violence against journalists and media workers. Of the 100 beatings of journalists in this period, the Afghan government and security forces are responsible of the majority of them, stressing that the beatings were ‘deliberate and intentional’ ⁽⁶⁶⁰⁾.

Cases of violence include intimidation or silencing journalists by powerful individuals, including in one instance even by President Ghani’s security detail ⁽⁶⁶¹⁾. According to Reporters Without Borders, police and judicial authorities are susceptible to being influenced by local officials. In one example, the police harassed a local journalist from Zabul for reporting on claims of possible collaboration between the Taliban and an official of the Transport Ministry ⁽⁶⁶²⁾. Harassment of journalists and media workers by local officials, their bodyguards, police

⁽⁶⁵²⁾ HRW, “Today We Shall All Die” Afghanistan’s Strongmen and the Legacy of Impunity, 3 March 2015 ([url](#)), pp. 72-73; UN CAT, Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Afghanistan, 12 June 2017, available at: ([url](#)), p. 4; Atlantic (The), Our Man in Kandahar, November 2011 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁵³⁾ AFP, Afghans push for Taliban ‘safe zone’ to outflank Pakistan, 10 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁵⁴⁾ RFE/RL, Gandhara Blog, Peace Prompts Taliban Figures To Return To Afghanistan, 29 August 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁵⁵⁾ Reporters Without Borders, 2017 World Press Freedom Index, n.d. ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁵⁶⁾ UN CAT, Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Afghanistan, 12 June 2017, available at: ([url](#)), p. 10.

⁽⁶⁵⁷⁾ HRW, World Report 2017 - Afghanistan, 12 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁵⁸⁾ AJSC, Six Months Report July-December 2016 Exclusive Report: Analysis of violence against Journalists 2012-2016, 9 January 2017 ([url](#)), p. 3.

⁽⁶⁵⁹⁾ HRW, World Report 2017 - Afghanistan, 12 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁶⁰⁾ AJSC, Six Months Report July-December 2016 Exclusive Report: Analysis of violence against Journalists 2012-2016, 9 January 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 5, 7.

⁽⁶⁶¹⁾ HRW, World Report 2017 - Afghanistan, 12 January 2017 ([url](#)); HRW, Afghanistan: Security Forces Assault Reporters, 1 September 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Ghani’s Treatment of Journalists, Media Sparks Backlash, 10 April 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁶²⁾ Reporters Without Borders, RSF decries wave of violence against Afghan journalists and media, 24 October 2016 ([url](#)).

officers, or the Taliban is reported from provinces and locations including Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar, Herat, Ghazni, Kabul ⁽⁶⁶³⁾, Ghor ⁽⁶⁶⁴⁾, Kunduz ⁽⁶⁶⁵⁾, and Balkh ⁽⁶⁶⁶⁾.

2.4 Treatment of healthcare workers, humanitarian workers and teachers

Health workers or other humanitarian workers who, because of their job, operate in insurgent areas or have contact with insurgents, are also reportedly 'victims of government abuse', according to Anand Gopal ⁽⁶⁶⁷⁾. Humanitarian workers come into contact with insurgents primarily due to the need to negotiate in a very local context to establish the space within which they can operate inside insurgent held areas (see 1.2.7 [Humanitarian workers](#)). Anand Gopal gave the example of an acquaintance of his, who as a humanitarian worker, needed to frequently enter ISKP-held areas in Nangarhar and feared more the NDS checkpoints en route than the insurgents in the area where he was operating. Because he regularly crosses zones of influence, he feared attracting negative attention by government forces. While this person never had any problem in Kabul or Jalalabad, Anand Gopal related this example to the rationale of targeting in contested areas, spaces in between zones of influence where loyalties are both unclear and matter more to both sides in the conflict ⁽⁶⁶⁸⁾. See [1.1.4.1 The aim of the Taliban targeting campaign](#) for further elaboration of this rationale.

Often, the reason for threats to health workers from one party in the conflict is that health facilities treated wounded or injured adversaries from the other party ⁽⁶⁶⁹⁾. For example, in February 2016, two patients of an NGO-run hospital in Wardak were summarily killed, and medical staff were threatened and harassed by government forces on the accusation of treating insurgent fighters ⁽⁶⁷⁰⁾. In October 2015, US airplanes accidentally bombed a hospital run by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Kunduz, killing 42 people including 14 MSF staff. However, the ANA was rumoured to have intentionally provided the wrong coordinates or at least held back from averting the US forces that they were bombing the wrong target. This was reportedly to punish MSF for what they saw as their collusion with the other side or because they believed Taliban were inside the building ⁽⁶⁷¹⁾.

Local power brokers can also put pressure on health workers to shift the health facilities to places in their favour ⁽⁶⁷²⁾.

With schools and educational personnel more often in contact with the Taliban through negotiated arrangements (see [1.2.4 Education sector personnel](#)), school personnel risk becoming associated with the insurgents and becoming a target of government action. For example, in Logar, government sources quoted by Pajhwok Afghan News claimed dozens of schoolteachers worked half a day with the government and fought against the government

⁽⁶⁶³⁾ Reporters Without Borders, RSF decries wave of violence against Afghan journalists and media, 24 October 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁶⁴⁾ NAI, Increasing violation against journalists not sufferable, 15 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁶⁵⁾ NAI, Qunduz provincial governor should introduce his secretary to court, 4 January 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁶⁶⁾ NAI, The violator police against Ariana News journalist to give trial, 22 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁶⁷⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽⁶⁶⁸⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽⁶⁶⁹⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 28, 30.

⁽⁶⁷⁰⁾ UNAMA, UN calls on all parties to respect health facilities, 23 February 2016 ([url](#)); Clark, K., Clinics under fire? Health workers caught up in the Afghan conflict, 15 March 2016 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁷¹⁾ Humanitarian Outcomes, Aid Worker Security Report 2017, 31 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 9; AFP, Analysts slam US account of MSF hospital strike, 30 November 2015, available at: ([url](#)); Clark, K., MSF Investigation: US hospital strike looking more like a war crime, 10 November 2015 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁷²⁾ UNOCHA, Operational Coordination Team – Ghor Province. Meeting Minutes, 24 October 2016 ([url](#)).

for the rest of the day ⁽⁶⁷³⁾. NDS personnel killed five Taliban members, together with a teacher of local girls' school in a raid on a home in Logar province in March 2017. Government sources quoted by Pajhwok claimed the five Taliban were gathering in the teacher's house, who they branded as a friend of the Taliban ⁽⁶⁷⁴⁾. As with humanitarian workers, educational workers also belong to Anand Gopal's third category of targeting civilian populations: in contested areas, in situations where loyalties are unclear to the armed actors trying to assert control over populations, targeting of civilians by armed actors, including (pro-)government actors, tends to increase ⁽⁶⁷⁵⁾. (See [1.1.4 Taliban objectives](#))

2.5 Government attitudes towards Hazara people

According to the AIHRC, the Afghan government, the Afghan population, civil society, human rights organisations and victims' families and security forces all have denounced the mass attacks on Hazara mosques and shrines as attempts to create ethnic and religious tensions, and called upon not further exacerbating these tensions ⁽⁶⁷⁶⁾. Indeed, attacks have been followed by calls on all sides for national unity and Muslim brotherhood. That includes the Taliban (see [1.2.11 Hazara and Shia Minorities](#)). However, many Afghan Shia and Hazaras have complained about the government's failure to protect them, some alleging indifference or collusion ⁽⁶⁷⁷⁾. To counter such feelings and allegations, the Afghan government has deployed additional police around places of worship of the Shia community in the run up of the Ashura commemorations in October 2017. More controversially, the Ministry of Interior has been arming Shia civilians in order to protect their own places of worship and gathering. The Afghan Minister of Interior, himself a Hazara, reportedly considered this a "medium-term policy... for across the country... [and for] one to two years," depending on how security conditions develop' ⁽⁶⁷⁸⁾. The security measures are concentrated in those big cities that have seen large scale attacks on Shia – Kabul, Herat and possibly Mazar-e Sharif – while cities such as Ghazni and Kandahar, with sizeable Shia population, did not receive the same attention ⁽⁶⁷⁹⁾. On 29 September 2017, one of these armed civilians stopped a suicide bomber before he could reach a Shia mosque in Kabul; he still detonated his explosives at some distance from the mosque (and ongoing Ashura commemorations), and the explosion killed six people ⁽⁶⁸⁰⁾.

The Afghan authorities for the most part took a permissive stance toward mass demonstrations by Hazara in Kabul ⁽⁶⁸¹⁾.

According to the UN Human Rights Council the issues of ethnicity and religion are deeply politicised, but systematic discrimination against a particular group was not documented as part of the ongoing conflict ⁽⁶⁸²⁾. According to US Department of State, 'Shia Muslims, although holding some major government positions, said the number of positions did not

⁽⁶⁷³⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Logar schoolteachers fight against forces in Taliban ranks, 8 May 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁷⁴⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, 5 Taliban, teacher killed in Logar home raid, 5 March 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁷⁵⁾ Gopal, A., Skype interview, 1 September 2017.

⁽⁶⁷⁶⁾ AIHRC, Attacks against Hazaras in Afghanistan, n.d. ([url](#)), pp. 1-2.

⁽⁶⁷⁷⁾ AAN and Ruttig, T., Bracing for Attacks on Ashura: Extra security measures for Shia mourners, 30 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁷⁸⁾ AAN and Ruttig, T., Bracing for Attacks on Ashura: Extra security measures for Shia mourners, 30 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁷⁹⁾ AAN and Ruttig, T., Bracing for Attacks on Ashura: Extra security measures for Shia mourners, 30 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁸⁰⁾ Christian Science Monitor (The), ISIS attacks Shiites, but Afghans resist push to make conflict religious, 5 October 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁸¹⁾ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2017 - Afghanistan, 2 June 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁸²⁾ UN Human Rights Council, Rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, 16 December 2016 ([url](#)), p. 4.

reflect their demographics and complained the government neglected security in majority-Shia areas' ⁽⁶⁸³⁾. Reuters reported that a leaked memo coming from a staff member of the president's office, however, seemed to suggest favouritism towards Pashtuns, and discrimination towards Uzbeks, Tajiks and Hazaras in the recruitment of staff for the office ⁽⁶⁸⁴⁾. Another leaked memo however, about recruitment into a newly established anti-riot police force in Kabul, was perceived as biased against Tajiks, in favour of Pashtuns, Hazaras and Uzbeks ⁽⁶⁸⁵⁾.

2.6 Afghan Local Police and pro-government militias

The Afghan Local Police (ALP) are a community-based defense force in Afghanistan that falls under the authority of the Ministry of Interior. In 2017, the ALP counted 29,000 members and had a presence in 199 districts in 31 provinces ⁽⁶⁸⁶⁾. The ALP have been accused of abuse of power and are accused of targeting and killing suspected insurgents, and equally of making threats, intimidation and harassment of civilians, including severe beatings, extortion, theft, threats and sexual abuse ⁽⁶⁸⁷⁾. In 2016 UNAMA attributed 65 civilian casualties to the ALP, in the first half of 2017 already 64 ⁽⁶⁸⁸⁾. In the period 2015-2016, UNAMA recorded instances of ill-treatment by ALP in 12 provinces, namely: Nangarhar, Baghlan, Kunar, Badakhshan, Balkh, Faryab, Kunduz, Laghman, Paktika, Pakiya, Sar-e-Pul and Takhar ⁽⁶⁸⁹⁾. In 2016,

'UNAMA observed increased efforts of the Afghan Local Police Directorate in the area of accountability, which may have contributed in the decrease of civilian casualties attributed to Afghan Local Police. In 2016, the Afghan Local Police Directorate arrested 108 Afghan Local Police personnel and referred them to the Attorney-General's Office for prosecution on the charge of abuse of authority' ⁽⁶⁹⁰⁾.

Besides the ALP, there are an unknown number of militias fighting on the side of the government, or at least, against the insurgents, both Taliban and ISKP ⁽⁶⁹¹⁾. Those groups too have been accused of targeted killings and threatening, intimidating and harassing civilians ⁽⁶⁹²⁾. In 2016, UNAMA attributed 185 civilian casualties to pro-government groups and in the first half of 2017, 42 ⁽⁶⁹³⁾. Because of the links these local militia often have to local or national

⁽⁶⁸³⁾ US DoS, 2016 Report on International Religious Freedom - Afghanistan, 15 August 2017 ([url](#)), p. 1.

⁽⁶⁸⁴⁾ Reuters, Leaked Memo Fuels Accusations of Ethnic Bias in Afghan Government, 21 September 2017 ([url](#)).

⁽⁶⁸⁵⁾ RFE/RL, Leaked Memo Fuels New Allegations Of Ethnic Bias In Afghan Government, 20 November 2017 ([url](#)).

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⁽⁶⁸⁸⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 95; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 59.

⁽⁶⁸⁹⁾ UNAMA, Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees: Implementation of Afghanistan's National Plan on the Elimination of Torture, April 2017 ([url](#)), p. 10.

⁽⁶⁹⁰⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 97.

⁽⁶⁹¹⁾ Diplomat (The), Afghanistan's Militias: The Enemy Within?, 4 January 2017 ([url](#)); HRW, World Report 2017. Events of 2016, n.d. ([url](#)), pp. 66-67; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 60-61.

⁽⁶⁹²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 94.

⁽⁶⁹³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 93; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 60.

powerbrokers, their human rights abuses often occur in an atmosphere of impunity ⁽⁶⁹⁴⁾. UNAMA further observed that it,

‘continued to receive reports of Government authorities’ unwillingness or inability to control the illegal activities of pro-Government armed groups due to their reliance on such groups to fight against Anti-Government Elements and the protection provided to some groups by powerful political figures. The use of irregular government armed groups operating outside a well-defined chain of command increases the risk that such groups exploit a fragile security environment, further compounding the protection risks faced by civilians and the possibility of human rights abuses’ ⁽⁶⁹⁵⁾.

Most instances of abuse of power seem to occur when ALP do not hail from the communities they are assigned to protect, against the initial idea of the ALP as a community defense force. This is especially the case when the divisions between ALP and community run along ethnic lines or (often related) a different background and loyalty in the *jihad* against the Soviet presence in the 1980s ⁽⁶⁹⁶⁾. For example, cases of ALP clashes with locals include:

- in Jalrez, Wardak, where ALP from Bamiyan where assigned to guard the highway, they have been accused of preying on the local villagers ⁽⁶⁹⁷⁾;
- in Kunduz, where militias linked to a local Tajik strongman Mir Alam were accused of predatory behaviour against Pashtun villages, including numerous killings ⁽⁶⁹⁸⁾;
- in Uruzgan, where Hazara militias of neighbouring Ghazni were accused of preying on the Pashtun population ⁽⁶⁹⁹⁾;
- in Zabul, where the ALP, imposed from outside, has been accused of harassing, extorting and killings locals ⁽⁷⁰⁰⁾;
- in Baghlan, where the ALP program intensified Tajik-Pashtun power struggles ⁽⁷⁰¹⁾.

2.3.1 Targeted profiles

ALP and pro-government militias have mainly targeted and killed civilians because they are suspected of being related to or helping the insurgents or even rival pro-government groups ⁽⁷⁰²⁾. UNAMA also documented cases where pro-government militias targeted and killed civilians because they refused to pay taxes to these groups ⁽⁷⁰³⁾.

In 2016, most of the victims of ALP and pro-government militia targeting and deliberately killing of civilians occurred in the northern region, notably Faryab and Kunduz ⁽⁷⁰⁴⁾. While in

⁽⁶⁹⁴⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 94; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), pp. 60-61.

⁽⁶⁹⁵⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 95.

⁽⁶⁹⁶⁾ Baczo, A., Dorronsoro, G., The Militia System in Kunduz, February 2016 ([url](#))

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⁽⁶⁹⁸⁾ Bleuer, C., and Ali, O., Security in Kunduz Worsening Further: The case of Khanabad, 28 October 2014 ([url](#)); HRW, “Today We Shall All Die” Afghanistan’s Strongmen and the Legacy of Impunity, 3 March 2015 ([url](#)), pp. 47-58.

⁽⁶⁹⁹⁾ van Bijlert, M., Security at the Fringes: the case of Shujai in Khas Uruzgan, 6 April 2013 ([url](#)).

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⁽⁷⁰²⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 96; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2016, February 2017 ([url](#)), p. 95; UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 60.

⁽⁷⁰³⁾ UNAMA, Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Midyear Report 2017, July 2017 ([url](#)), p. 60.

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Faryab, these incidents often happen within the context of rival pro-government groups, linked to either Uzbek dominated Junbesh-e Melli and the predominantly Tajik Jamiat-e Islami ⁽⁷⁰⁵⁾. In Kunduz, the primary target for pro-government militias tends to be Pashtun villages accused of harbouring insurgents in the past and present ⁽⁷⁰⁶⁾.

Some pro-government militias are accused of running their own parallel judicial system issuing sentences, including death sentences, for ordinary crimes ⁽⁷⁰⁷⁾.

2.7 Redress

On the possibilities for redress, see EASO Country of Origin Information Report on Afghanistan: Key socio-economic indicators, state protection, and mobility in Kabul City, Mazar-e Sharif, and Herat City, in the chapter 3.6 Anti-Corruption efforts and mechanisms to report misconduct ⁽⁷⁰⁸⁾.

Even with the new anti-torture legislation of 2017, there is no mechanism in the law that allows citizens to sue the government for torture before a civil court. Torture claims are to be investigated by the authorities themselves, but civil society activists claim this only rarely happens ⁽⁷⁰⁹⁾.

⁽⁷⁰⁵⁾ EASO, Country of Origin Information Report Afghanistan Security Situation, November 2016 ([url](#)), pp. 138-139.

⁽⁷⁰⁶⁾ Baczko, A., Dorronsoro, G., The Militia System in Kunduz, February 2016 ([url](#)); Derksen, D., The Politics of Disarmament and Rearmament in Afghanistan, 20 May 2015 ([url](#)); HRW, "Today We Shall All Die" Afghanistan's Strongmen and the Legacy of Impunity, 3 March 2015 ([url](#)); Goodhand, J., Hakimi, A., Counterinsurgency, Local Militias, and Statebuilding in Afghanistan, 18 December 2013 ([url](#)).

⁽⁷⁰⁷⁾ Pajhwok Afghan News, Faryab woman killed over phone contact with stranger, 27 July 2016 ([url](#)); Tolo News, Three Ghor Families Exiled by 'Dadgah-e-Sahrayee', 15 August 2013 ([url](#)).

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Annex II: Terms of Reference

1. Insurgent targeting

Modus Operandi

- What are the developments in the structure of the Taliban?
- What is the targeting strategy of the Taliban?
- What are the objectives of the Taliban targeting campaign?
- Do the Taliban have guidelines or restrictions when targeting civilians?
- How do guidelines translate on the ground?
- Is there a difference in targeting between urban areas and rural areas?
- What is the strength of the Taliban and how does the Taliban recruit?
- Does the Taliban make use of coercion while recruiting?
- Does the Taliban recruit children?
- What are the capacities of the Taliban in terms of information gathering and track and trace individuals after relocating to other areas of Afghanistan / in the cities?
- What are the objectives, capacities and modus operandi of the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)?

Profiles

- What is the situation for the main profiles targeted by the Taliban, including members of the ANSF, government workers, individuals accused of supporting the government, «spying» for the government, individuals associated with the foreign military presence, community leaders: tribal elders and religious leaders in the community, humanitarian workers, journalists and other media workers, human rights defenders, educational staff with specific regard to girls' education.
- What's the situation of women in the public sphere?
- What's the situation of Hazara and other shia minorities, including Ismaili?
- What is the situation for family members of all the individuals discussed in this chapter?

Escaping targeting

- Are there possible ways of avoid targeting?

2. Government or government affiliated actors

- Including ANSF, pro-government militias and international military forces

Government forms of prosecution

- In what cases does the state impose dead penalty?
- Do Afghan state actors use torture and in what circumstances?

Targeting by government affiliated actors

- What individuals are at risk of being targeted by pro-government actors?
- Is there a possibility for redress in case of government targeting?



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