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Country Policy and Information Note
Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation

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Preface

Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in the Introduction section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into 2 parts: (1) an assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note - that is information in the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw - by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies**:**

- a person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- that the general humanitarian situation is so severe that there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk of serious harm because conditions amount to inhuman or degrading treatment as within paragraphs 339C and 339CA(iii) of the Immigration Rules / Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)
- that the security situation is such that there are substantial grounds for believing there is a real risk of serious harm because there exists a serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in a situation of international or internal armed conflict as within paragraphs 339C and 339CA(iv) of the Immigration Rules
- a person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- a person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- a claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- if a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the Common EU [European Union] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information (COI), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2013. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a terms of reference which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate and balanced, which is compared and contrasted where appropriate so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture is provided of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote. Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the bibliography.

Feedback

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the Country Policy and Information Team.

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

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Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the gov.uk website.

Contents

Assessment

Updated: 13 September 2021

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

1.1.1 That the general humanitarian situation in Afghanistan is so severe that there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk of serious harm because conditions amount to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment as within paragraphs 339C and 339CA(iii) of the Immigration Rules/Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

and/or

1.1.2 That the security situation in Afghanistan is such that there are substantial grounds for believing there is a real risk of serious harm because there exists a serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in a situation of international or internal armed conflict, as within paragraphs 339C and 339CA(iv) of the Immigration Rules.

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2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants).

2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis).

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2.2 Exclusion

2.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.

2.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).

2.2.3 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave see the instruction on Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33(2) of the Refugee Convention, Humanitarian Protection and the instruction Restricted Leave.

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2.3 Convention reason(s)

2.3.1 A severe humanitarian situation and/or a state of civil instability and/or where law and order has broken down do not of themselves give rise to a well-founded fear of persecution for a Refugee Convention reason.

2.3.2 In the absence of a link to one of the 5 Refugee Convention grounds necessary to be recognised as a refugee, the question to address is whether the person will face a real risk of serious harm in order to qualify for Humanitarian Protection (HP).

2.3.3 However, before considering whether a person requires protection because of the general humanitarian and/or security situation, decision makers must consider if the person faces a reasonable degree of likelihood of persecution for a Refugee Convention reason. Where the person qualifies for protection under the Refugee Convention, decision makers do not need to consider if there are substantial grounds for believing the person faces a real risk of serious harm and a grant of HP.

2.3.4 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

2.3.5 For guidance on Humanitarian Protection see the Asylum Instruction, Humanitarian Protection.

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2.4 Risk

a. Humanitarian situation

2.4.1 In the country guidance case AK (Article 15(c)) Afghanistan CG [2012] UKUT 00163(IAC) (18 May 2012), heard on 14 and 15 March 2012, having considered evidence up to early 2012, the Upper Tribunal held that there was little evidence of significant numbers of the urban poor and IDP population in Kabul suffering destitution or inability to survive at subsistence levels (paragraph 225). It also noted that, whilst the importance of return and reintegration packages for UK returnees to Kabul should not be exaggerated, they did, nevertheless, place returnees in a better position than that of other IDPs (paragraph 224).

2.4.2 The country guidance case AS (Safety of Kabul) Afghanistan CG [2018] UKUT 118 (IAC) (28 March 2018), heard on 25 and 27 September, 24 October, 20 November and 11 December 2017, considered humanitarian conditions in the context of whether it was reasonable for healthy single men without connections or support in Kabul to relocate there. This case was reconsidered by the Upper Tribunal (UT) in the country guidance case AS (Safety of Kabul) Afghanistan (CG) [2020] UKUT 130 (IAC) (1 May 2020), heard on 19 and 20 November 2019 and 14 January 2020, who held that:

'The Panel in the 2018 UT decision found that much of Kabul's population lives in inadequate informal housing with limited access to basic services such as sanitation and potable water. They noted that healthcare provision, although poor, is better in Kabul than elsewhere.

'The evidence before us indicates that the position is unchanged. As was the case when the Panel made its findings in the 2018 UT decision, most of Kabul's population is poor, lives in inadequate housing with inadequate sanitation, lacks access to potable water, and struggles to earn sufficient income to sustain itself in a society without any safety net.

'However, it is also apparent, most notably from OCHA's 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview of Afghanistan, that, in terms of people in need, the situation in Kabul is significantly better than much of the rest of Afghanistan.

'The position today is comparable to 2017. A departure from the findings of the Panel in the 2018 UT decision cannot be justified' (paras 224 to 227).

2.4.3 When considering assistance available to returnees, the Upper Tribunal concluded 'We see no reason to depart from the finding of the [2018 Upper Tribunal] Panel that a returnee, generally, will be able to access sufficient assistance and funds so as to be in a position to accommodate and feed himself for the first 4 – 6 weeks in Kabul without earning an income' (paragraph 245).

2.4.4 Around half of the population is in need of some sort of humanitarian aid and gaps and delays in assistance following the Taliban takeover on 15 August 2021 is likely to lead to further deterioration humanitarian situation. Almost one third of the population are in crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity and food prices are increasing. Around 80% of the country is facing severe or serious drought, causing water shortages and affecting the ability to

maintain crops and livestock. Essential health services, already under pressure due to conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic, are further stretched due to limited resources and medical supplies. Thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) fled into Kabul during the Taliban's advance across the country, many of whom have limited or no shelter (see Humanitarian situation).

2.4.5 Following the Taliban takeover of Kabul and the subsequent deterioration in the humanitarian and economic situation, as well as the lack of clarity on how the country will be governed in regard to maintaining and delivering public services, decision makers must consider on the facts of the case whether a returnee, by reason of their individual circumstances or vulnerability, faces a real risk of serious harm contrary to paragraphs 339C and 339CA(iii) of the Immigration Rules / Article 3 ECHR as a result of the humanitarian situation.

2.4.6 For further guidance see the Asylum Instruction on Humanitarian Protection.

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b. Security situation

2.4.7 Paragraphs 339C and 339CA(iv) of the Immigration Rules – which set out a real risk of serious harm as a serious and individual threat by reason of indiscriminate violence in a situation of international or internal armed conflict – **only** apply to civilians who must be non-combatants and not those who are party to the conflict. This could include former combatants who have genuinely and permanently renounced armed activity.

2.4.8 In the country guidance case of AK (Article 15(c)) Afghanistan CG [2012] the Upper Tribunal, which considered evidence up to early 2012, held that '…the level of indiscriminate violence in that country taken as a whole is not at such a high level as to mean that, within the meaning of Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive, a civilian, solely by being present in the country, faces a real risk which threatens his life or person' (paragraph 249B(ii)).

2.4.9 The Upper Tribunal (UT) in AK commented that those parts of Kabul city where returnees are most likely to live are 'the poorest areas of the city or its environs' and have been less affected by indiscriminate violence, stating that the 'great majority [of attacks] have concentrated on areas where the government or international organisations have their offices or where their employees frequent' (paragraph 226).

2.4.10 In the country guidance case AS (Safety of Kabul), the UT, which considered evidence up to January 2020, held that 'There is widespread and persistent conflict-related violence in Kabul. However, the proportion of the population affected by indiscriminate violence is small and not at a level where a returnee, even one with no family or other network and who has no experience living in Kabul, would face a serious and individual threat to their life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence' (paragraph 253(ii)).

2.4.11 The Upper Tribunal found 'the level of indiscriminate violence in Kabul is not sufficient to meet the threshold in Article 15(c) QD' (paragraph 255). The Upper Tribunal held that the country guidance in AK, in relation to Article

15(c) of the Qualification Directive, remained unaffected by its decision in AS (Safety of Kabul) (paragraph 253(vi)).

2.4.12 Since the promulgation of AK in May 2012, when the UT considered 2011 United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) figures, the overall number of conflict-related civilian deaths and injuries in Afghanistan documented by UNAMA has increased. According to UNAMA, since 2011, civilian casualties have increased overall – with the highest number of civilian casualties were recorded in 2016, an overall increase of 46% compared to 2011. Since 2016, civilian casualties have decreased although numbers have fluctuated. In 2020, UNAMA recorded 8,820 civilian casualties (3,035 killed and 5,785 injured), a decrease of 15% compared to civilian casualties recorded in 2019 and the lowest number since 2013 (see Violence during the internal conflict in 2020 – Data on civilian casualties).

2.4.13 In 2020, Kabul province saw the highest number of civilian casualties and, according to UNAMA, the leading cause of such casualties were due to targeted killings (although UNAMA does not indicate how many targeted killings occurred in Kabul). UNAMA defined targeted killings as the use of lethal force by Pro-Government Forces or Anti-Government Elements against a specific individual, but also documents civilian casualties arising directly and incidentally from such targeted attacks (see Targeted attacks and abductions).

2.4.14 According to UNAMA, Kabul had 817 civilian casualties (255 killed and 562 injured) in 2020, a decrease of 48% compared to 2019 (see Annex A for a provincial breakdown of casualties – UNAMA provides the total number of civilian casualties by province but does not break this figure down by type of incident). Between 1 January 2020 to 31 July 2021, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) recorded 356 violent incidents in Kabul (data did not differentiate between Kabul City and Kabul district), which caused 867 fatalities (both civilian and non-civilian) (see Situation in Kabul).

2.4.15 Between 1 January and 30 June 2021 UNAMA documented 5,183 civilian casualties (1,659 killed and 3,524 injured), a 47% increase compared to the same period in 2020 (see Violence between January and September 2021 – Data on civilian casualties).

2.4.16 However, following the announcement of the US troop withdrawal in April 2021, the Taliban advanced across the country, taking control of districts, including Kabul on 15 August, with little or no fighting or resistance from Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) (see International troop withdrawal and ANSF resistance during Taliban advance).

2.4.17 It is therefore open to question as to whether there continues to be a 'situation of international or internal armed conflict' in Afghanistan. Should indiscriminate violence be taking place, it is only in some areas of Afghanistan and is to a far lesser extent following the international troop withdrawal and Taliban takeover (see General security situation post-Taliban takeover). Comparable to the Upper Tribunal's findings in AK, it is not at such a high level that it represents, in general, a real risk of harm contrary to paragraphs 339C and 339CA(iv) of the Immigration Rules.

2.4.18 Even where there is not in general a real risk of serious harm by reason of indiscriminate violence in a situation of international or internal armed conflict, decision makers must consider whether there are particular factors relevant to the person's circumstances which might nevertheless place them at risk. The more a person is able to show that they are specifically affected by factors particular to their personal circumstances (the 'sliding scale'), the lower the level of indiscriminate violence required for them to be at a real risk of serious harm. Therefore, a person may still face a real risk of serious harm even where generally there is not such a risk if they are able to show that there are specific reasons over and above simply being a civilian for being affected by the indiscriminate violence.

2.4.19 For guidance on considering serious harm where there is a situation of indiscriminate violence in an international or internal armed conflict, including consideration of enhanced risk factors and the 'sliding scale', see the Asylum Instruction on Humanitarian Protection.

2.4.20 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

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2.5 Protection

2.5.1 Where there is a real risk to a civilian's life or person such that removal would be in breach of Article 15(c) because of their individual circumstances, the state may be willing but is unlikely to be able to provide protection. Since the authorities are now the Taliban, it is an open question whether they may or may not be willing and/or able to provide protection, and will depend on the particular circumstances of the case.

2.5.2 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

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2.6 Internal relocation

2.6.1 In AK, the Upper Tribunal held that internal relocation to Kabul was reasonable, bar some limited categories (lone women and female heads of household). This was confirmed in AS (Safety of Kabul). However, in light of the Taliban's capture of Kabul on 15 August 2021, internal relocation to Kabul is unlikely to be a reasonable option whilst the Taliban remain in control and it would therefore be unduly harsh to expect a person to do so.

2.6.2 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

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2.7 Certification

2.7.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

2.7.2 For further guidance on certification, see Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 (clearly unfounded claims).

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Country information

Section 3 updated: 3 September 2021

3. Conflict background

3.1 Overview of recent conflicts

3.1.1 For a brief recent history of conflict in Afghanistan, from the Soviet invasion to the Taliban (Taleban) insurgency and subsequent US-led military operations, see the BBC News timeline of events (up to September 2019)[1].

3.1.2 For information on the general security situation, including, for example, parties to the conflict, intensity level of the violence, nature of the violence, regional spreading of the violence, targets of the violence, risk of collateral damage, use of arms and tactics, possibility to reach areas – security of transport (roads and airports), and indirect effects of the violence/conflict, see

- the COI sections of previous versions of this CPIN
- European Asylum Support Office (EASO) Reports on the Afghanistan Security situation, dated between January 2016 and September 2021.
- the German Government's Federal Office for Migration and Refugees weekly Briefing Notes
- UNOCHA updates on ReliefWeb, and
- media outlets such as Kabul Now, ToloNews, Pajhwok News, Reuters and Al Jazeera.

3.1.3 On 15 August 2021, the Taliban seized control of Kabul and took over the Presidential Palace, as President Ghani fled the country and the Afghan government collapsed[2] [3]. See also District control.

3.1.4 For more information on the Taliban and its takeover of Kabul, see the Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Fear of the Taliban.

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3.2 Peace talks

3.2.1 For further information on peace talks prior to the Taliban takeover, see the Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Fear of the Taliban.

3.2.2 Although the Taliban appeared to be engaging in peace talks, as noted by the Independent on 19 August 2021, '… the talks appear to have merely provided the Taliban with time and cover to plan the unexpectedly rapid takeover that saw them sweep into Kabul unopposed on [15 August], even before the NATO withdrawal was complete.'[4]

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[1] BBC News, 'Afghanistan profile – Timeline', 9 September 2019
[2] BBC News, 'Afghanistan conflict: Kabul falls to Taliban as president flees', 16 August 2021
[3] AP News, 'Taliban sweep into Afghan capital after government collapses', 16 August 2021
[4] Independent, 'Taliban peace deal: What is the Doha agreement signed by the…', 19 August 2021

3.3 International troop withdrawal

3.3.1 The EASO COI Report on Afghanistan – Security Situation noted in regard to the reduction of foreign troops in the country:

'As part of the bilateral agreement signed between the US and the Taliban on 29 February 2020, the US agreed to reduce their troops from over 12 000 to 8 600 within 135 days (by mid-July 2020); NATO and other coalition forces would also reduce their presence proportionally; with the commitment of a total withdrawal of all US and NATO troops within 14 months (by April 2021), depending on "action on the obligations" by the Taliban. On 18 June 2020, the US stated they had fulfilled their commitment under the Doha Agreement of reducing their troops in Afghanistan to 8 600. As for the timeframe set for the full withdrawal of all US and foreign troops, US General Frank McKenzie, who oversees US forces in the region, said it was an "aspirational" commitment that would hinge on certain actions on the part of the Taliban. In November 2020, the US troops in Afghanistan reduced to an estimated number of 4 000 to 5 000, and in January 2021 their number was decreased to 2 500 or, by other accounts, 3 500.'[5]

3.3.2 The UN Security Council's report of 1 June 2021 noted, 'On 11 April [2021], the Taliban insisted that any breach of the 1 May deadline would automatically lead to a resumption in attacks. The Taliban dismissed any notion of extending the deadline as having no benefit, reiterating that re-establishment of the "Islamic Emirate", and not maintaining a democratic system, was the only option on the table.'[6]

3.3.3 Reporting on the US military withdrawal, the CRS noted in its 11 June 2021 report:

'On April 14, 2021, President Joe Biden announced that the United States would begin a "final withdrawal" on May 1, to be completed by September 11, 2021. In a written response, the Taliban accused the United States of breaching the February 2020 agreement and stated that the U.S. decision to stay beyond May 1 "in principle opens the way for [Taliban forces] to take every necessary countermeasure, hence the American side will be held responsible for all future consequences." A senior Administration official said after the withdrawal announcement, "We have communicated to the Taliban in no uncertain terms that if they do conduct attacks against U.S. or allied forces … we will hit back hard".'[7]

3.3.4 At a joint press conference on 14 April 2021, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that NATO Foreign and Defence Ministers had decided to start the withdrawal of NATO Resolute Support forces by 1 May 2021, adding 'We plan to complete the drawdown of all our troops within a few months.'[8] At the time, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated, 'We'll continue to support the Government of Afghanistan, and provide assistance to the Afghan security forces who have fought and continue to fight valiantly

[5] EASO, 'COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', (pages 36 to 37), June 2021
[6] UN Security Council, 'Twelfth report of the Analytical Support…' (paragraph 11), 1 June 2021
[7] CRS, 'Afghanistan: Background and U.S. Policy: In Brief' (page 2), 11 June 2021
[8] NATO, 'Joint press point', 15 April 2021

at a great cost on behalf of their country, and we'll keep investing in the wellbeing of the Afghan people.'[9]

3.3.5 In its quarterly report to the US Congress, dated April 2021, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) stated in regard to US troop withdrawal, which includes US defence contractors, that:

'The complete withdrawal of U.S. troops and U.S. defense contractors from Afghanistan will test whether the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) can sustain themselves and defend the Afghan government without direct U.S. and Coalition military support. Defense officials expressed concern about these issues throughout the quarter. On February 20, 2021, General Kenneth F. McKenzie, in a meeting with Pakistani officials, warned that an early U.S. pullout could risk the collapse of the Afghan government. On March 13, the commander of U.S. and allied forces in Afghanistan, General Austin Scott Miller, warned that a U.S. withdrawal would leave the Afghan security forces without vital support, especially for its air force, which relies on contractors to maintain its planes and helicopters.'[10]

3.3.6 The ODNI Annual Threat Assessment, dated 9 April 2021, assessed that, 'The Taliban is likely to make gains on the battlefield, and the Afghan Government will struggle to hold the Taliban at bay if the coalition withdraws support.'[11]

3.3.7 On 29 June 2021, US officials told Reuters that the US military could be days away from a complete withdrawal from Afghanistan[12], although around 650 US troops were expected to stay to protect the US embassy and Kabul airport[13] [14]. On 30 June 2021, BBC News reported that German and Italian troops had left the country[15]. UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, confirmed on 8 July 2021 that most British troops had left Afghanistan (the majority having left in 2014), whilst a small military presence would remain in Kabul to protect diplomatic missions[16].

3.3.8 A House of Commons Library Research Briefing, dated 17 August 2021, noted 'On 12 August 2021, prior to the fall of Kabul and the Afghan Government, the security situation on the ground had prompted the United States and the UK to announce the deployment of military personnel to Afghanistan. This was to assist in the safe evacuation of diplomatic staff and other country nationals and to help accelerate schemes to relocate former locally employed Afghan civilians to the US and UK respectively.'[17]

3.3.9 Following a massive airlift of both foreign and Afghan nationals, which ensued the Taliban takeover of Kabul, by 31 August 2021 all NATO troops had left Afghanistan, as noted by Reuters, who added 'Having failed to anticipate the Taliban would prevail so quickly, Washington and its NATO

[9] NATO, 'Joint press point', 15 April 2021
[10] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (page 56), 30 April 2021
[11] ODNI, 'Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community' (page 25), 9 April 2021
[12] Reuters, 'U.S. military days away from completing Afghan withdrawal – sources', 30 June 2021
[13] Reuters, 'U.S. military days away from completing Afghan withdrawal – sources', 30 June 2021
[14] CNN, 'Afghanistan: US days from completing formal withdrawal but up to 1,000…', 30 June 2021
[15] BBC News, 'Afghanistan: US military 'days away' from completing pull-out', 30 june 2021
[16] BBC News, 'Afghanistan: Most British troops have left – PM', 8 July 2021
[17] House of Commons Library, 'Afghanistan: Fall of the Government…' (page 1 to 2), 17 August 2021

allies were forced into a hasty exit, leaving behind thousands of Afghans who helped them and may have qualified for evacuation and others who feel at risk.'[18]

3.3.10 Reuters reported that shortly after midnight on 31 August 2021, 'Celebratory gunfire resounded across the Afghan capital on Tuesday as the Taliban took control of the airport following the withdrawal of the last U.S. troops, marking the end of a 20-year war that left the Islamist group stronger than it was in 2001.'[19]

See also District control.

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Section 4 updated: 3 September 2021

4. Control of territory

4.1 Methodologies and definitions

4.1.1 In regard to the definition of district control, the EASO COI Report Afghanistan, Security Situation, dated June 2021, stated 'As noted by the AAN [Afghanistan Analysts Network] co-Director Kate Clark in May 2017, sources that assess the Taliban's territorial control in Afghanistan tend to disagree over figures and over the definition of the word "control". Moreover, as pointed out by ANN expert Thomas Ruttig, there are different counts of the number of districts.'[20]

4.1.2 In its quarterly report to Congress, dated July 2021, SIGAR concurred that different sources use different figures for the number of districts, ranging from 370 to 421[21].

4.1.3 The Long War Journal (LWJ), a project by the non-profit policy institute, the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD), classified the level of control as follows:

'A "Contested" district may mean that the government is in control of the district center or buildings within the district center, or a base, but little else, while the Taliban controls large areas or all of the areas outside of the district center. Or, the Taliban may control several villages, mines and other resources, runs prisons in the district, or administers areas of the district.

'A "Controlled" district may mean the Taliban is openly administering a district, providing services and security, and also running the local courts. LWJ may assess a district Taliban controlled if the district center frequently exchanges hands and/or the government only controls a few buildings or villages in the district.'[22]

4.1.4 When measuring areas of control, the AAN noted '… many of the districts whose centres have now fallen were already under de facto Taleban control, with ANSF and officials isolated in the district centre.'[23] The report added:

[18] Reuters, 'Last U.S. troops depart Afghanistan after massive airlift ending…', 31 August 2021
[19] Reuters, 'Taliban hail victory with gunfire after last U.S. troops leave Afghanistan', 31 August 2021
[20] EASO, 'COI Report Afghanistan, Security Situation' (page 79), June 2021
[21] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (pages 54 to 55), 30 July 2021
[22] FDD, LWJ, 'Mapping Taliban Contested and Controlled Districts in Afghanistan', no date
[23] AAN, 'Menace, Negotiation, Attack: The Taleban take more District Centres…', 16 July 2021

'As always, there is debate about what "control" means: governing, the ability to travel safely, or deny the other side movement? This report measures only who controls the district centre, a metric chosen for its simplicity and relative ease of determination. This means that a district may be classed as having fallen to the Taleban even if there may still Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) present outside the district centre. In other districts that we have classed as having fallen to the Taleban, because the ANSF and government officials have withdrawn, the Taleban have not yet established defensive positions, nor are they governing.'[24]

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4.2 District control

4.2.1 For maps showing district control, see Long War Journal (LWJ) Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan, presented in the form of time lapse videos showing the Taliban's advance[25], and Gandhara (Radio Free Afghanistan) Interactive Map: Taliban Control In Afghanistan Then And Now.

4.2.2 On 9 July 2021, the Taliban claimed it 'had taken control of 85% of territory in Afghanistan', reported Reuters. Afghan government officials dismissed the claims as 'propaganda.'[26]

4.2.3 The AAN provided in-depth reporting of districts controlled by the Taliban, as at 14 July 2021[27].

4.2.4 The AAN report also noted the capture of important border crossings, allowing the Taliban to tax traders and thus weaken the government, which relies heavily on customs duties, as well as Taliban control of 'sections of the ring road that circles Afghanistan from Mazar-e Sharif in the north to Herat in the west, Kandahar in the south and Kabul in the centre.'[28] BBC News reported that as at 26 July 2021, the Taliban controlled at least 6 border crossings – Islam Qala and Sheikh Abu Nasr Farahi bordering Iran in the west, a crossing on the Afghanistan-Turkmenistan border, 2 crossings to Tajikistan, including Sher Khan, and Spin Boldak bordering Pakistan[29].

4.2.5 UNAMA noted in its midyear report for 2021, dated July 2021, that:

'While control of many district administrative centres changed hands during this period, sometimes based upon arrangements between parties and civilians in the area, there was also a significant amount of fighting that occurred in and around civilian populated areas. Civilians suffered from being near areas that were newly contested, whether by Taliban moving into these areas, or by Afghan national security forces attempting to re-take territory.'[30]

See Violence between January and September 2021.

[24] AAN, 'Menace, Negotiation, Attack: The Taleban take more District Centres…', 16 July 2021
[25] FDD, LWJ, 'Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan', no date
[26] Reuters, 'Taliban say they control 85% of Afghanistan, humanitarian concerns mount', 10 July 2021
[27] AAN, 'Menace, Negotiation, Attack: The Taleban take more District Centres…', 16 July 2021
[28] AAN, 'Menace, Negotiation, Attack: The Taleban take more District Centres…', 16 July 2021
[29] BBC News, 'Mapping the advance of the Taliban in Afghanistan', 5 August 2021
[30] UNAMA, 'Midyear Update: 1 January to 30 June 2021' (page 10), 26 July 2021

4.2.6 On 11 August 2021, Al Jazeera reported that over a period of 5 days the Taliban seized control of 9 provincial capitals including the cities of Sar-e-Pol, Sheberghan, Aybak, Kunduz, Taluqan, Pul-e-Khumri, Farah, Zaranj and Faizabad[31].

4.2.7 On 15 August 2021, the Taliban seized control of Kabul and took over the Presidential Palace, as President Ghani fled the country[32] [33].

4.2.8 On 22 August 2021 the Taliban were reported to be heading towards Panjshir Valley in a bid to gain control from the anti-Taliban National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRF), which claimed it had thousands of fighters[34] [35], '… made up of local militias and remnants of army and special forces units.'[36] NRF leader, Ahmad Massoud, '… has called for a negotiated settlement with the Taliban but has said his forces will resist if their province in the narrow and mountainous valley is attacked,' according to Reuters reporting on 31 August 2021, who also noted 'A significant force of Taliban fighters has been moved to the area but the two sides have so far been engaged in negotiations and have avoided fighting.'[37]

4.2.9 For more information on the situation in Kabul post-Taliban takeover see Situation in Kabul, General security situation post-Taliban takeover and the Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Fear of the Taliban.

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4.3 Maps of Afghanistan

[31] Al Jazeera, 'Timeline: Afghanistan provincial capitals captured by Taliban', 11 August 2021
[32] BBC News, 'Afghanistan conflict: Kabul falls to Taliban as president flees', 16 August 2021
[33] AP News, 'Taliban sweep into Afghan capital after government collapses', 16 August 2021
[34] Al Jazeera, 'Taliban says hundreds of fighters heading to take Panjshir Valley', 22 August 2021
[35] BBC News, 'Anti-Taliban resistance group says it has thousands of fighters', 23 August 2021
[36] Reuters, 'At least seven Taliban reported killed in Panjshir fighting', 31 August 2021
[37] Reuters, 'At least seven Taliban reported killed in Panjshir fighting', 31 August 2021

Afghanistan map showing major cities as well as parts of surrounding countries[38].

4.3.1 For a detailed map of administrative divisions, see the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) map, Afghanistan: Administrative Divisions January 2014.

4.3.2 The World Bank interactive map, Afghanistan: District Dashboard, dated 1 August 2019, allows users to:

'… explore and visualize socio-economic, geographic, and economic indicators in six different types of visualization across 401 districts in Afghanistan, circa 2016. The tool provides users an easy way to access different types of indicators including population, geography, accessibility, and conflict. These visualizations were constructed by combining publicly available and proprietary sources, including geospatial data sources such as OpenStreetMap and NASA; as well as data on conflict from Uppsala University and UNAMA.'[39]

4.3.3 For information and maps on Government versus Taliban control, see District control.

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Section 5 updated: 3 September 2021

5. Violence during internal conflict in 2020

5.1 Data on civilian casualties

5.1.1 The Global Peace Index (GPI), published June 2021, ranks 163 independent states and territories according to their level of peacefulness, produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), an independent, non-partisan, non-profit think tank[40]. The GPI 2021 report noted that following the US government announcement to withdraw all troops by 11 September 2021, the future of the country remained uncertain:

'Afghanistan remains the least peaceful country in the region and the world on the 2021 GPI, a position it has held for the past four years. However, it did record an improvement in peacefulness over the past year. The total number of deaths from internal conflict and terrorism impact have continue to fall, and the homicide rate has also fallen in the past few years. However, Afghanistan still has a higher terrorism impact than any other country in the world.'[41]

See also International troop withdrawal.

5.1.2 For data on civilian casualties, the main source used in this Note is the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). In addition, data from the NATO Resolute Support (RS) Mission and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) were used for comparison

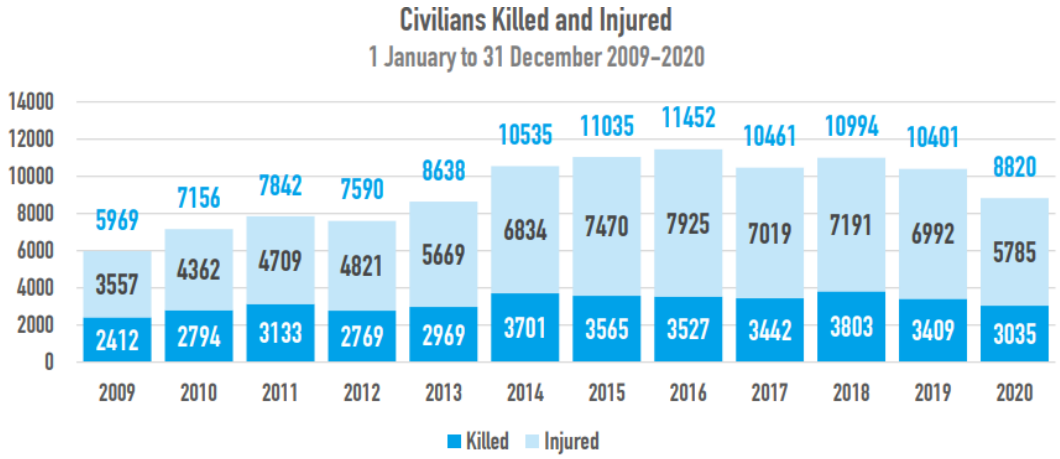
[38] CIA World Factbook, 'Afghanistan - Country Map', 7 July 2021
[39] World Bank, 'Afghanistan: District Dashboard', 1 August 2019
[40] IEP, 'Global Peace Index 2021' (page 2), June 2021
[41] IEP, 'Global Peace Index 2021' (page 19), June 2021

purposes. Figures vary due to different methodologies to collect and assess civilian casualty data.

5.1.3 UNAMA provides updates on civilian casualties in its quarterly, midyear and annual reports – see Reports On The Protection Of Civilians In Armed Conflict.

5.1.4 In its Annual Report 2020, covering 1 January to 31 December 2020, UNAMA documented 8,820 civilian casualties (3,035 killed and 5,785 injured), a decrease of 15% compared to civilian casualties recorded in 2019 and the lowest number since 2013[42]. For a breakdown of civilian casualties by province, see Annex A – Provincial breakdown of civilian casualties in 2020.

5.1.5 UNAMA graph showing total civilian casualties from 1 January to 31 December 2009 to 2020[43].



5.1.6 The NATO Resolute Support (RS) Mission, as reported in SIGAR's quarterly report to Congress, 30 July 2021, recorded a slightly higher number of civilian casualties than UNAMA and cited a total of 9,294 civilian casualties (3,211 killed and 6,083 injured) in 2020, a small increase compared to its 2019 figures – 9,189 (2,530 killed and 6,659 injured)[44]. SIGAR noted that RS and UNAMA used 'different methodologies to collect and assess civilian-casualty data, with RS often reporting fewer civilian casualties than UNAMA.'[45]

5.1.7 The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) recorded fewer civilian casualties overall in 2020 than both UNAMA and RS, noting a total of 8,500 (2,958 killed and 5,542 injured), a 21% decrease compared to 2019 when AIHRC recorded 10,772 civilian casualties (2,817 killed and 7,955 injured)[46].

5.1.8 The 2020 UNAMA report noted:

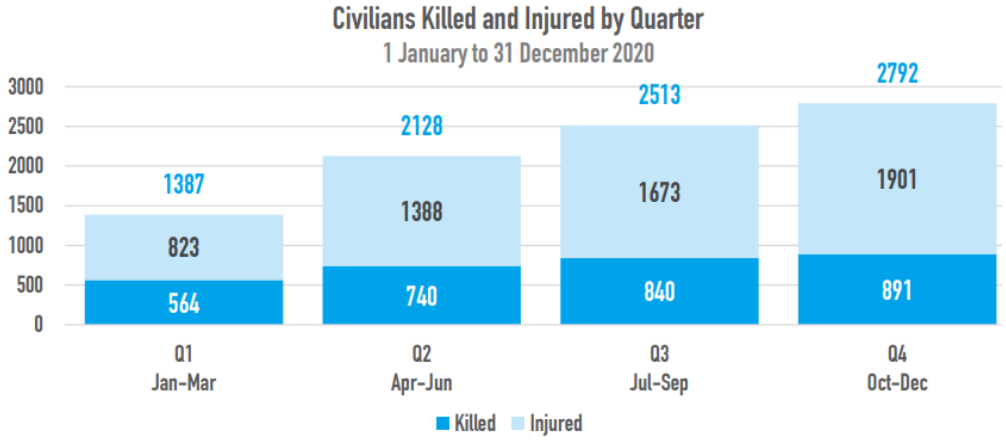
'Although UNAMA welcomes the overall decline in civilian casualties [compared to 2019], the rise in the last quarter of 2020 is of particular

[42] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 11), February 2021
[43] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 12), February 2021
[44] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (page 59), 30 July 2021
[45] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (page 60), 30 April 2021
[46] AIHRC, 'Report Summary: Civilian Casualties in 2020', 28 January 2021

concern, especially as this corresponds with the formal commencement of the Afghanistan Peace Negotiations on 12 September 2020. This was the first time since it began systematic documentation in 2009 that UNAMA documented an increase in the number of civilian casualties recorded in the fourth quarter compared with the prior quarter. In addition, the last three months of 2020 marked a 45 per cent increase in civilian casualties in comparison to the same period in 2019 [1,931 (726 killed and 1,205 injured) [47]], especially from the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and targeted killings.'[48]

See also Nature of attacks in 2020.

5.1.9 UNAMA graph showing civilian casualties per quarter from 1 January to 31 December 2020[49].



5.1.10 Unlike UNAMA, RS figures showed a slight decrease in civilian casualties in the fourth quarter (2,883 civilian casualties) compared to third quarter (3,017 civilian casualties) of 2020, whilst also noting an increase of over 50% in total civilian casualties in the last quarter of 2020 – 2,883 (932 killed and 1,951 injured) compared to the same period in 2019 – 1,878 (627 killed and 1,251 injured)[50]. The AIHRC did not provide a breakdown of quarterly figures.

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5.2 Perpetrators of civilian casualties

5.2.1 Attribution of civilian casualties to parties to the conflict should be viewed in the context of the varying number of overall civilian casualties recorded by different sources.

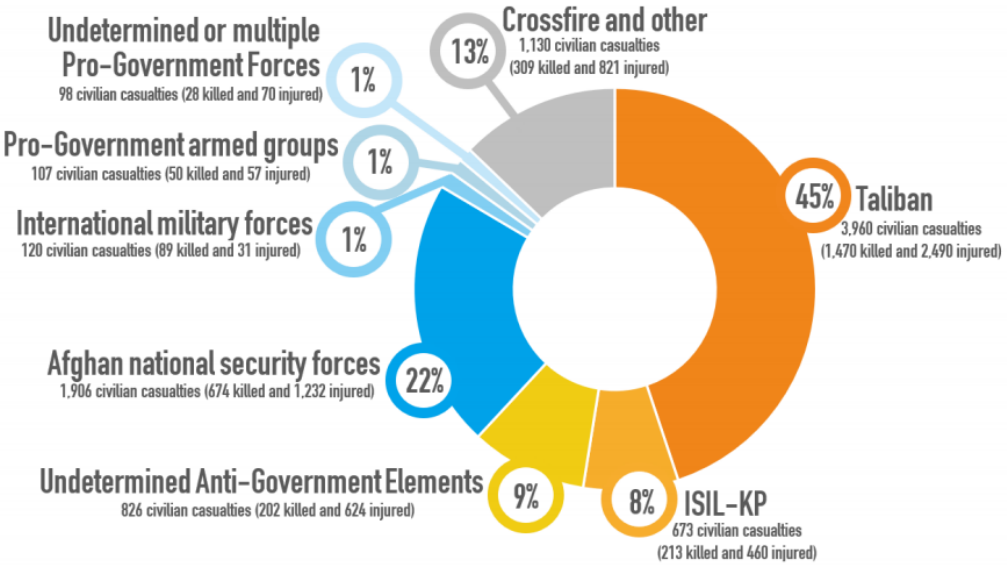
5.2.2 The 2020 UNAMA report indicated that Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) were responsible for 62% of civilian casualties in 2020 – 5,459 (1,885 killed and 3,574 injured), 15% fewer than 2019[51]. RS attributed 83% (7,714) of civilian casualties to AGEs[52], and the AIHRC attributed 58% (4,970) of

[47] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 13, footnote 16), February 2021
[48] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 11), February 2021
[49] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 11), February 2021
[50] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (page 59), 30 July 2021
[51] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 40), February 2021
[52] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (page 63), 30 April 2021

civilian casualties to AGEs[53]. UNAMA and the AIHRC attributed 45% and 53% of civilian casualties to the Taliban, respectively[54] [55], whilst RS did not provide a breakdown.

5.2.3 UNAMA attributed 2,231 civilian casualties (841 killed and 1,390 injured) to Pro-Government Forces, which included the Afghan national security forces, international military forces and pro-government armed groups, 24% fewer than 2019[56], whereas RS attributed 11% of civilian casualties to Pro-Government Forces[57]. It was noted by SIGAR that RS and UNAMA 'do not use identical categories for party attribution.'[58] The AIHRC attributed 15% of civilian casualties to pro-government forces[59].

5.2.4 UNAMA graph showing civilian casualties attributed to all parties to the conflict from 1 January to 31 December 2020[60].



5.2.5 UNAMA table showing civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements in 2020[61].

[53] AIHRC, 'Report Summary: Civilian Casualties in 2020', 28 January 2021
[54] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 41), February 2021
[55] AIHRC, 'Report Summary: Civilian Casualties in 2020', 28 January 2021
[56] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 61), February 2021
[57] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (page 63), 30 April 2021
[58] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (page 63), 30 April 2021
[59] AIHRC, 'Report Summary: Civilian Casualties in 2020', 28 January 2021
[60] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 17), February 2021
[61] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 41), February 2021

Civilian Casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements in 2020		
Anti-Government Element Group	**Civilian Casualties in 2020**	**Percentage change in comparison to 2019**
The Taliban	3,960 civilian casualties (1,470 killed and 2,490 injured)	-19 per cent
Civilian Casualties from incidents that were claimed by the Taliban	260 civilian casualties (44 killed and 216 injured)	-85 per cent
Civilian Casualties attributed to the Taliban from incidents that were not claimed	3,700 civilian casualties (1,426 killed and 2,274 injured)	+ 16 per cent
ISIL-KP	673 civilian casualties (213 killed and 460 injured)	-45 per cent
Civilian Casualties from incidents that were claimed by ISIL-KP	582 civilian casualties (184 killed and 398 injured)	- 26 per cent
Civilian Casualties attributed to ISIL-KP from incidents that were not claimed	91 civilian casualties (29 killed and 62 injured)	- 79 per cent
Civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements where there was no public claim of responsibility and attribution to a specific group could not be determined.	826 civilian casualties (202 killed and 624 injured)	+158 per cent

5.2.6 The UNAMA 2020 report noted in regard to civilian casualties attributed to pro-government forces that:

'Trends related to causes of civilian casualties between the different branches of the Afghanistan national security forces varied. In 2020, the Afghan National Army caused 42 per cent more civilian casualties than in the year prior, amounting to the most civilian casualties attributed to the Afghan National Army in a single year since UNAMA started its systematic documentation in 2009. In contrast, UNAMA attributed fewer civilian casualties to the Afghan Local Police, Afghan National Police and the National Directorate of Security, including the National Directorate of Security Special Forces, than in the previous year.'[62]

5.2.7 UNAMA table showing civilian casualties attributed to Pro-Government Elements in 2020[63].

Branch of Afghan national security forces	Civilian casualties in 2020	Percentage change in comparison to 2019
Afghan National Army (with Afghan Air Force)	1,547 civilian casualties (547 killed and 1,000 injured)	+ 42 per cent
Afghan National Army (without Afghan Air Force)	1,021 civilian casualties (313 killed and 708 injured)	+ 19 per cent
Afghan Air Force	526 civilian casualties (234 killed and 292 injured)	+ 126 per cent
National Directorate of Security (including NDS Special Forces)	47 civilian casualties (27 killed and 20 injured)	- 80 per cent
Afghan National Police	75 civilian casualties (31 killed and 44 injured)	- 17 per cent
Afghan Local Police[174]	24 civilian casualties (seven killed and 17 injured)	- 33 per cent
Other Afghan national security forces and joint attributions	213 civilian casualties (62 killed and 151 injured)	- 9 per cent

5.2.8 In 2020, UNAMA also referred to the intentional harm of civilians by pro-government forces, and noted it:

'… continued to document incidents in which Afghan national security forces and pro-government armed groups intentionally harmed civilians, including incidents which amounted to summary executions. From 1 January to 31 December, UNAMA documented 49 such incidents, resulting in 80 civilian casualties (46 killed and 34 injured). UNAMA attributed 29 incidents resulting in 42 civilian casualties (23 killed and 19 injured) to Afghanistan national

[62] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 63), February 2021
[63] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 64), February 2021

security forces and 20 incidents causing 38 civilian casualties (23 killed and 15 injured) to pro-government armed groups.'[64]

5.2.9 The same source noted that UNAMA '… documented cases in which pro-government armed groups and the Afghan Local Police attacked civilians because they were related to members of the Taliban or a rival pro-government armed group, or because of the belief that they had supported the Taliban.'[65]

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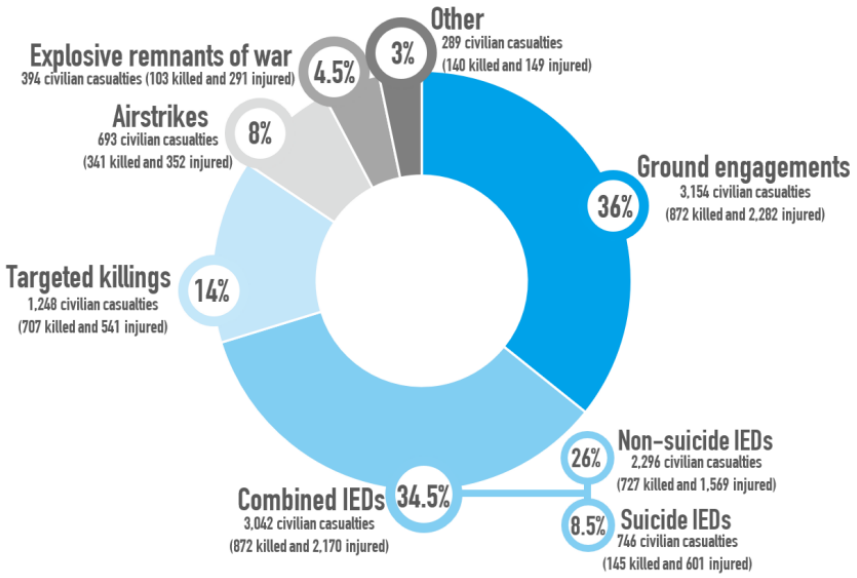
5.3 Nature of attacks

5.3.1 The data on civilian casualties caused by types of incident should be viewed in the context of the varying number of overall civilian casualties recorded by different sources.

5.3.2 Regarding incident types that caused most harm to civilians, the 2020 UNAMA report noted:

'The 15 per cent decrease in the total number of civilian casualties in 2020 was primarily driven by fewer civilian casualties from Anti-Government Element suicide attacks (including complex attacks), international military airstrikes, and search operations by Pro-Government Forces. At the same time, UNAMA documented an increased number of civilian casualties attributed to Anti-Government Elements from non-suicide IEDs and targeted killings, including so-called "assassinations" of civilians. UNAMA also documented a rise in civilian casualties attributed to the Afghan National Army from ground engagements and from Afghan Air Force airstrikes.'[66]

5.3.3 UNAMA graph showing civilian casualties by incident type from 1 January to 31 December 2020[67].



[64] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 69), February 2021
[65] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 70), February 2021
[66] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 15), February 2021
[67] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 15), February 2021

For more information on targeted killings see Targeted attacks and abductions in 2020.

5.3.4 The 2020 UNAMA report noted:

'Both suicide attacks and non-suicide vehicle-borne IEDs (often referred to as "truck bombs" or "car bombs") caused many civilian casualties in populated areas, often due to the wide-area effects of their powerful explosions. These devices were also directed against civilians and civilian objects, which is prohibited under international law. Even when directed at legitimate military objectives in populated areas, these methods can have an indiscriminate effect, making such use a serious violation of international humanitarian law which may amount to war crimes.'[68]

5.3.5 UNAMA noted a 30% decrease in civilian casualties by combined IEDs (suicide and non-suicide) in 2020 (3,042 civilian casualties – 872 killed and 2,170 injured) compared to 2019 (4,336 civilian casualties – 885 killed and 3,451 injured), the lowest figures since it started systematic documentation of civilian casualties in 2009[69].

5.3.6 According to its findings, the AIHRC noted, '… the use of IEDs and mine blasts have caused the highest number of civilian casualties in 2020 leaving 923 killed and 1,649 injured (totally 2,572). The aforementioned figure accounts for 30 percent of all civilian casualties in the country in 2020. However, it shows 17 percent reduction compared to 2019. In total, there were 3,316 civilian casualties caused by IEDs and mine blasts in 2019.'[70]

5.3.7 Breaking down the figures, the UNAMA 2020 report noted a 64% decrease in suicide attacks (suicide IEDs) in 2020 compared to 2019[71], stating 'In 2020, UNAMA documented 746 civilian casualties (145 killed and 601 injured) from suicide attacks, in comparison to 2,078 civilian casualties (378 killed and 1,700 injured) in 2019.'[72] Suicide attacks attributed to the Taliban caused 43% (321) of civilian casualties in 2020, a 79% decrease compared to 2019[73].

5.3.8 In 2020, UNAMA documented 2,296 civilian casualties (727 killed and 1,569 injured) from non-suicide IEDs, in comparison to 2,258 civilian casualties (507 killed and 1,751 injured) in 2019.'[74] According to UNAMA, the Taliban's use of non-suicide IEDs caused 1,730 (75%) civilian casualties in 2020, the highest attribution to the Taliban since UNAMA began systematic documentation in 2009 and a 9% increase compared to 2019[75].

5.3.9 According to UNAMA, 769 civilian casualties (182 killed and 587 injured) were caused by IED attacks that '… targeted civilians or civilian objects, especially civilians who worked for the Government.'[76]

[68] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 16), February 2021
[69] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 44), February 2021
[70] AIHRC, 'Report Summary: Civilian Casualties in 2020', 28 January 2021
[71] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 46), February 2021
[72] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 44, footnote 105), February 2021
[73] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 46 and footnote 108), February 2021
[74] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 44, footnote 105), February 2021
[75] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 47), February 2021
[76] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 44), February 2021

5.3.10 UNAMA documented the increase in civilian casualties in 2020 (448 casualties), compared to 2019 (130 casualties), due to the use of non-suicide vehicle-borne IEDs[77]. UNAMA noted 'Vehicle borne IEDs were often loaded with explosives causing powerful detonations with wide area affects, causing many civilian casualties beyond the intended target, especially when used in populated areas.'[78]

5.3.11 Civilian casualties caused by pressure-plate IEDs also increased in 2020 by 35% (878 casualties) compared to 2019 (650 casualties)[79]. Pressure-plate IED were used almost exclusively by the Taliban, according to UNAMA, and 43% of casualties in 2020 were women and children[80]. UNAMA noted the indiscriminate nature of pressure-plate IEDs, which are victim-activated and therefore cannot be directed at specific targets:

'Most civilian casualties from pressure-plate IEDs occurred when they were placed on public roads, where civilian vehicles triggered them as they travelled along a regularly travelled stretch of road… UNAMA also continued to document incidents in which pressure-plate IEDs were triggered by the weight of a person, including the by weight of a small child, confirming that pressure-plate IEDs are used as improvised anti-personnel landmines.'[81]

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5.4 Targeted attacks and abductions

5.4.1 For the purposes of its Annual Report 2020, UNAMA defined a targeted killing as the '… intentional use of lethal force by Pro-Government Forces or Anti-Government Elements against a specific individual who is not in the perpetrator's physical custody. These incidents often involve a degree of pre-meditation. UNAMA documents civilian casualties arising directly and incidentally from such attacks.'[82]

5.4.2 UNAMA noted that in 2020 it:

'… continued to document attacks by Anti-Government Elements that deliberately targeted civilians and civilian objects, especially through targeted shootings and IED attacks against civilians, including personnel of the civilian government administration of Afghanistan, the judiciary, the media, non-governmental organisations and health and education institutions. UNAMA also documented a continuation of attacks by Anti-Government Elements on civil society activists, religious leaders, tribal elders, civilian relatives of Afghan national security forces personnel and persons supportive of the Government of Afghanistan. Attacks on religious minorities that were claimed as such by ISIL-KP persisted in 2020, especially attacks targeting the Shi'a Muslim population, most of whom also belong to the Hazara ethnic group, and the Sikh religious minority.'[83]

[77] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 47, footnote 115), February 2021
[78] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 47), February 2021
[79] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 48 and footnote 116), February 2021
[80] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 48), February 2021
[81] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (pages 48 and 49), February 2021
[82] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (pages 107 to 108), February 2021
[83] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 51), February 2021

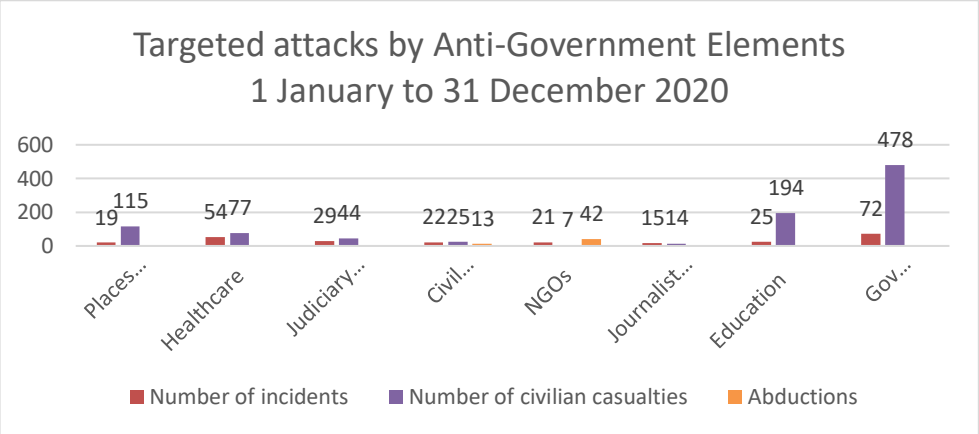
5.4.3 Referring to targeted killings in 2020, the AIHRC indicated that '… civil servants, journalists, civil society activists, religious scholars, influential figures, members of National Assembly, and human rights defender[s] have been the most common target…'[84]

5.4.4 In 2020, approximately a third of all civilian casualties caused by Anti-Government Elements came from attacks specifically targeting civilians or civilian objects, according to UNAMA. Targeted attacks in 2020 caused 1,906 civilian casualties (764 killed and 1,142 injured)*[85], a 33% decrease compared to 2019, when there were 2,833 civilian casualties (818 killed and 2,015 injured)[86]. UNAMA noted 'The main drivers for the reduction in casualties from attacks deliberately targeting civilians were the following: the absence in 2020 of Taliban election-related violence that plagued the 2019 Presidential Election; a drop in attacks causing civilian casualties by ISIL-KP (as these mainly targeted civilians and civilian objects); and fewer suicide attacks by the Taliban which deliberately target civilians or civilian objects.'[87]

5.4.5 The AIHRC reported that targeted attacks caused 2,250 civilian casualties (1,078 killed and 1,172 injured), accounting for 26% percent of all civilian casualties in 2020[88].

5.4.6 Although the Taliban regularly stated in 2020 that it did not target civilians, UNAMA reported that nearly half of civilian casualties caused by targeted attacks were attributed to the Taliban, causing 938 civilian casualties (445 killed and 493 injured), and 554 civilian casualties (182 killed and 372 injured) were attributed to ISIL-KP targeted attacks[89].

5.4.7 Graph recreated from UNAMA figures on targeted attacks on specific areas and personnel, including abductions of civil society and NGO workers[90].



5.4.8 UNAMA also noted with concern a continuing pattern of attacks on religious minorities (not included in the above graph) by ISIL-KP since 2016, noting, 'In 2020, UNAMA documented ten incidents resulting in 308 civilian

[84] AIHRC, 'Report Summary: Civilian Casualties in 2020', 28 January 2021
[85] *Discrepancy noted on the data shown on page 15 of the UNAMA 2020 Annual Report, which indicates there were 1,248 civilian casualties (707 killed, 541 injured) due to targeted killings
[86] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 52 and footnote 127), February 2021
[87] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 52), February 2021
[88] AIHRC, 'Report Summary: Civilian Casualties in 2020', 28 January 2021
[89] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (pages 52 to 53 and footnote 128), February 2021
[90] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (pages 53 to 55), February 2021

casualties (112 killed and 196 injured), targeting mainly the Shi'a Muslim religious minority population, most of whom also belong to the Hazara ethnic group. UNAMA also documented attacks targeting the Sikh religious minority and Sufi Muslim religious minority.'[91]

5.4.9 The 2020 UNAMA report noted that abductions of civilians by Anti-Government Elements continued in 2020 at the same rate as in 2019. UNAMA documented 1,086 conflict-related abductions and attributed 1,077 (99%) of those to the Taliban[92]. Resulting civilian casualties included the killing of 77 and 36 injured, twice as many casualties as in 2019[93]. UNAMA noted that '… abducted civilians included personnel from non-governmental organisations, humanitarian deminers, healthcare workers and civilians working for the Government of Afghanistan, often when they were travelling on public roads and stopped at Taliban checkpoints.'[94]

5.4.10 Although UNAMA did not systematically record abductions that were not carried out by parties to the conflict, in 2020 it received regular reports of '… abductions by armed groups/elements and criminal gangs, particularly in large cities such as Kabul… including those targeting non-governmental organisations workers and United Nations staff members.' UNAMA noted that such incidents were underreported[95].

5.4.11 In February 2021, UNAMA published a Special Report on the killing of human rights defenders, journalists and media workers between 1 January 2018 to 31 January 2021. UNAMA noted a shift from human rights defenders, journalists and media workers being casualties of indirect attacks in 2018, to the deliberate targeting of individuals following the start of the peace negotiations in September 2020[96]. The report noted that between 12 September 2020 and 31 January 2021, a 5 human rights defenders and 6 journalists and media workers were deliberately targeted and killed, both by small arms fire and IEDs attached to cars[97].

5.4.12 For information on groups that may be targeted by the Taliban, see the Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Fear of the Taliban.

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5.5 Women and children

5.5.1 UNAMA noted in its Annual Report 2020 that, although the number of women civilian casualties decreased overall in 2020 compared to 2019, the number of women killed increased. The report stated:

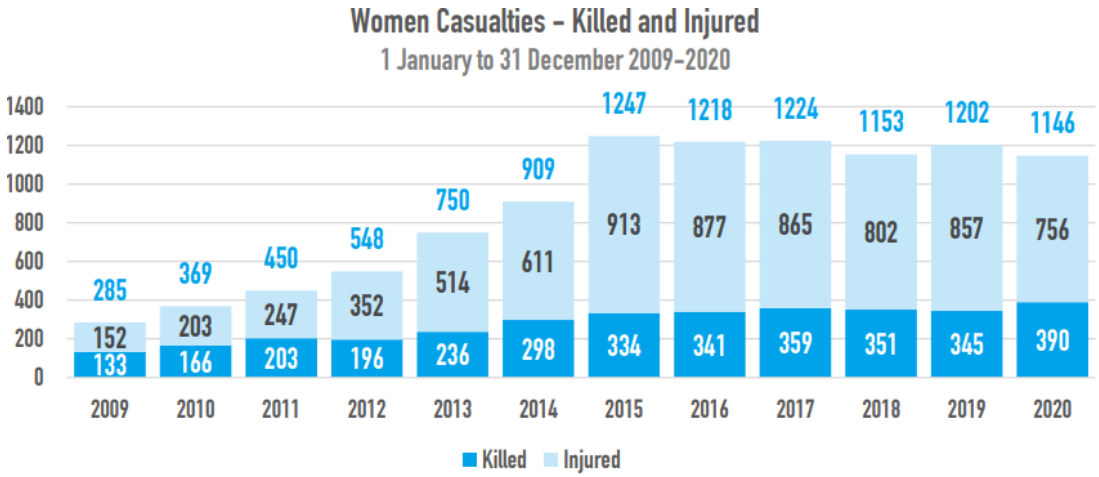
'Women continued to be gravely harmed by the armed conflict in a multitude of ways in 2020, including through death, injury, and sexual violence. Women also bore the brunt of the broader effects of the armed conflict which negatively impacted their enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, including freedom of movement and access to education, healthcare, and

[91] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 53), February 2021
[92] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 58 and footnote 148), February 2021
[93] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 58), February 2021
[94] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 58), February 2021
[95] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 58), February 2021
[96] UNAMA, 'Special Report: Killing of Human Rights Defenders…' (page 8), 14 February 2021
[97] UNAMA, 'Special Report: Killing of Human Rights Defenders…' (page 10), 14 February 2021

justice, and the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of sex or gender.

'In 2020, women casualties represented 13 per cent of all civilian casualties, amounting to 1,146 women casualties (390 killed and 756 injured), an overall decrease of five per cent in comparison to 2019. Of concern, 2020 marked the highest number of women killed recorded in a single year since UNAMA began systematic documentation in 2009, as the number of women killed increased by 13 per cent in 2020, mainly from targeted killings and non-suicide IEDs, while the number of women injured decreased by 12 per cent in comparison to 2019.'[98]

5.5.2 UNAMA graph showing women casualties killed and injured from 1 January to 31 December 2009 to 2020[99].



5.5.3 AIHRC also reported a decrease in women casualties in 2020, though recorded fewer overall than UNAMA – 847 women casualties in total (330 killed and 517 injured), compared to 974 (282 killed and 692 injured) in 2019[100].

5.5.4 UNAMA indicated that nearly half (569) of women casualties were caused by Anti-Government Elements (AGEs), 14% fewer than 2019 due to a decrease in suicide attacks[101]. The 4 leading causes of women casualties were due to ground engagements (48%), suicide and non-suicide IEDs (23%), targeted killings (15%) and airstrikes (11%)[102].

5.5.5 UNAMA noted that the number of women casualties due to targeted attacks more than trebled in 2020 compared to 2019, causing 85 deaths and 85 injured. These figures included the mass shooting by unknown AGEs at a maternity ward in Kabul on 12 May 2020, which killed 19 women and injured 12 others, as well as the ISIL-KP-claimed attack on Kabul University on 2 November 2020, which killed 10 women and injured 20[103]. UNAMA added '… women were killed by Anti-Government Elements, mostly the Taliban, for supporting or working for the Government of Afghanistan, including female

[98] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 26), February 2021
[99] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 26), February 2021
[100] AIHRC, 'Report Summary: Civilian Casualties in 2020', 28 January 2021
[101] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 26), February 2021
[102] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 27), February 2021
[103] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 28), February 2021

police officers with civilian status, or for being related to a member of the Afghan national security forces.'[104]

5.5.6 UNAMA also noted that women were subjected to conflict-related sexual violence and verified 4 cases of rape, which it attributed to the Taliban. UNAMA received other reports sexual violence, which it was unable to verify due to insecurity and protection concerns for the survivors, but added 'These numbers are unlikely to reflect the true scale of conflict-related sexual violence in Afghanistan. Deeply conservative gender norms, stigma, and a lack of survivor-centred services contribute to likely underreporting.'[105]

For more information on the situation for women post-Taliban takeover see the Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Fear of the Taliban,

5.5.7 UNAMA reported that of all civilian casualties in 2020, 30% were children, the same percentage as in 2019. UNAMA documented a 17% decrease in child casualties in 2020 – 2,619 (760 killed, 1,859 injured) – compared to 2019. 32% of all child casualties were girls and 68% were boys[106]. AIHRC recorded 2,019 child civilian casualties in 2020 (565 killed and 1,454 injured), a 25% decrease on its 2019 figures[107]. The leading causes of child casualties were due to ground engagements (46%), suicide and non-suicide IEDs (25%), explosive remnants of war (12%) and airstrikes (11%)[108]. Also in 2020, 'UNAMA also verified 19 incidents of abduction of children involving 55 children, 18 of which were attributed to the Taliban and one to a pro-government armed group.'[109]

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Section 6 updated: 3 September 2021

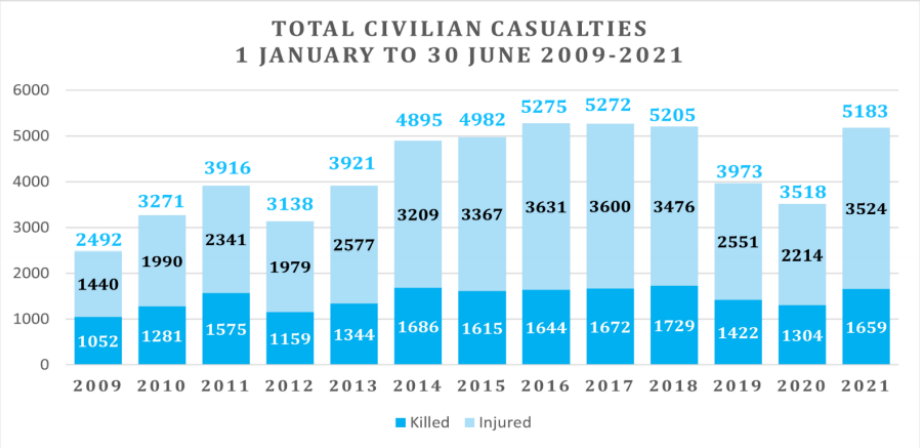
6. Violence between January and September 2021

6.1 Data on civilian casualties

6.1.1 UNAMA's midyear report for the period between 1 January and 30 June 2021 documented 5,183 civilian casualties (1,659 killed and 3,524 injured), a 47% increase compared to the same period in 2020, '…reversing the trend of the past four years of decreasing civilian casualties in the first six months of the year, with civilian casualties rising again to the record levels seen in the first six months of 2014 to 2018.'[110]

6.1.2 UNAMA graph showing total civilian casualties in the first 6 months of the year from 2009 to 2021[111].

[104] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 28), February 2021
[105] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 29), February 2021
[106] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 30), February 2021
[107] AIHRC, 'Report Summary: Civilian Casualties in 2020', 28 January 2021
[108] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 31), February 2021
[109] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 32), February 2021
[110] UNAMA, 'Midyear Update: 1 January to 30 June 2021' (page 1), 26 July 2021
[111] UNAMA, 'Midyear Update: 1 January to 30 June 2021' (page 1), 26 July 2021



6.1.3 The SIGAR quarterly report of July 2021 noted, 'Civilian casualties hit a record high in May and June [2021], according to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. The overall trend is clearly unfavorable to the Afghan government, which could face an existential crisis if it isn't addressed and reversed.'[112]

6.1.4 UNAMA noted with concern an increase in civilian casualties since the April 2021 announcement of the withdrawal of international troops and its commencement in May 2021, stating 'Between 1 May and 30 June 2021, UNAMA recorded 2,392 civilian casualties, nearly as many as were documented in the entire four preceding months [between 1 January – 30 April 2021 UNAMA documented 2,791 civilian casualties]. The number of civilian casualties in May-June 2021 was the highest on record for those two months since UNAMA began systematic documentation in 2009.'[113]

6.1.5 RS civilian casualties figures for the first and second quarters of 2021 were recorded as 4,184 (1,378 killed and 2,806 injured), but data was only up to 31 May 2021[114]. Although RS figures did not include June 2021, the number of civilian casualties in the first 6 months of 2021 were still higher than the same period in 2020 when RS recorded 3,394 civilian casualties (1,221 killed and 2,173 injured)[115].

6.1.6 Reporting on the first 6 months of 2021, the AIHRC recorded 5,321 civilian casualties (1,677 killed and 3,644 injured)[116]. The AIHRC noted that it divided the country into 7 work zones:

- The Central Zone: Kabul, Wardak, Kapisa, Parwan, Panjsher, Ghazni, Bamiyan, Daikundi
- The Southern Zone: Balkh, Samangan, Jawzjan, Sar-i-Pul, Faryab
- Northern Zone: Paktia, Paktika, Khost, Logar
- Eastern Zone: Nangarhar, Kunar, Laghman, Nuristan
- Western Zone: Herat, Farah, Nimruz, Badghis, Ghor

[112] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (page 64), 30 July 2021
[113] UNAMA, 'Midyear Update: 1 January to 30 June 2021' (page 2), 26 July 2021
[114] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (page 59), 30 July 2021
[115] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (page 59), 30 July 2021
[116] AIHRC, 'Summary Report on Civilian Casualties in the First Six Months of 2021', 1 August 2021

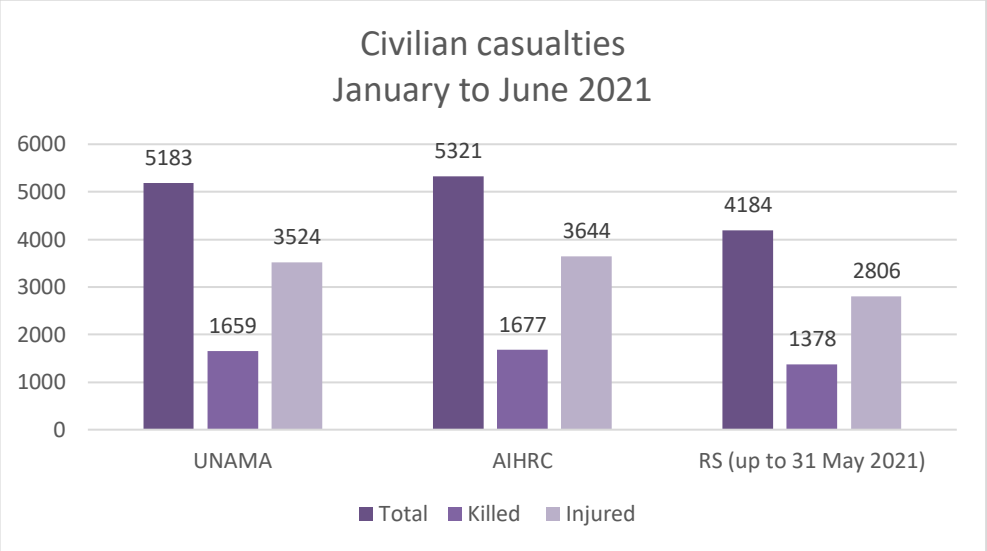
- Northwestern Zone: Kunduz, Baghlan, Takhar, Badakhshan
- Southwestern Zone: Kandahar, Helmand, Uruzgan, Zabul.

6.1.7 According to AIHRC findings:

'… the Southwestern Zone has suffered the highest number of civilian casualties in the first six months of 2021. The number of civilian casualties in this Zone in this period is 2,131 in total which includes 681 civilians killed, and 1,450 others injured.

'The above figure accounts for 40 percent of total civilian casualties in this period. Following to that, the Central Zone with 958 civilian casualties (312 killed, 646 injured) which accounts for 18 percent of total civilian casualties in this period, stands second in line. The following are the other zones with the highest number of civilian casualties in respective order: the Eastern Zone, 831 civilian casualties (203 killed, 628 injured); Western Zone, 440 civilian casualties; the Northeastern Zone, 350 civilian casualties; the Northern Zone, 310 civilian casualties; and the Southern Zone, 301 civilian casualties.'[117]

6.1.8 Graph showing a comparison of civilian casualties by source, 1 January to 30 June 2021 (Resolute Support (RS) data up to 31 May 2021 only, due to the end of the RS Mission).



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6.2 Nature and perpetrators of attacks

6.2.1 Both UNAMA and RS reported that the highest number of civilian casualties were caused by IEDs and ground engagements (direct fire)[118] [119]. The AIHRC also recorded IEDs caused the highest number of civilian casualties, but indicated that casualties caused by targeted killings were higher than those caused by ground engagements[120].

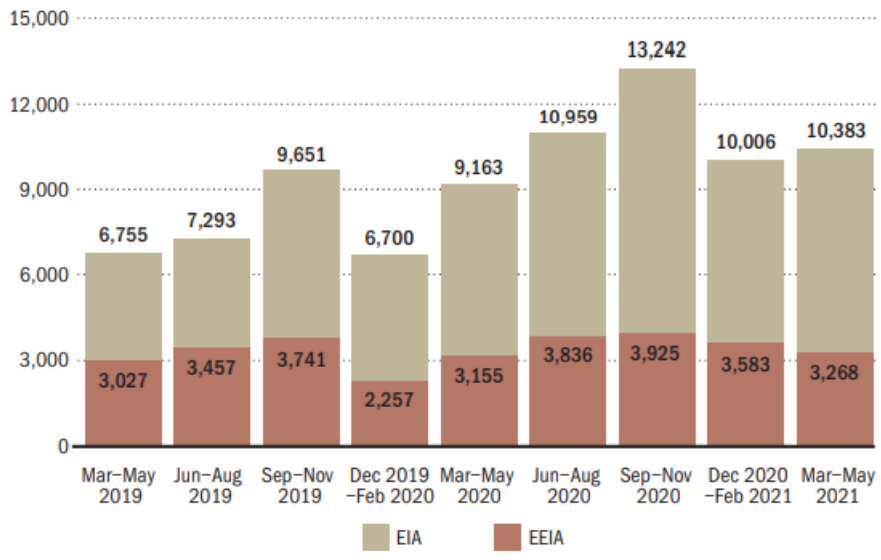
[117] AIHRC, 'Summary Report on Civilian Casualties in the First Six Months of 2021', 1 August 2021
[118] UNAMA, 'Midyear Update: 1 January to 30 June 2021' (page 3), 26 July 2021
[119] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (page 58), 30 July 2021
[120] AIHRC, 'Summary Report on Civilian Casualties in the First Six Months of 2021', 1 August 2021

6.2.2 UNAMA noted that in the first half of 2021, 'Nearly half of the civilian casualties from non-suicide IEDs directed against civilians came from a single attack – the 8 May attack on the Sayed ul-Shuhada high school in Kabul.'[121] UNAMA noted that the attack, which occurred in a predominantly Hazara neighbourhood, killed 85 civilians (42 girls, 28 women, 9 men, 3 boys, and 3 adults of unidentified sex) and injured at least 216 civilians (106 girls, 66 women, 24 men, and 20 boys)[122]. Referring to the same incident, RS also recorded 85 deaths, but noted 275 students were injured[123].

6.2.3 UNAMA attributed 64% of civilian casualties to Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) in the first 6 months of 2021, whereas RS indicated, both in the first and second quarters of 2021 respectively, that 93% of civilian casualties were caused by AGEs[124] [125]. The AIHRC noted that 63% of civilian casualties were caused by AGEs (56% to the Taliban, 7% to ISIS (Daesh)), adding that the number of civilian casualties caused by the Taliban in the first 6 months of 2021 had doubled compared to the same period in 2020[126].

6.2.4 In its July 2021 quarterly report to Congress, SIGAR produced a graph, up to 31 May 2021, based on data provided by RS Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) on enemy-initiated attacks (EIAs) and effective enemy-initiated attacks (EEIAs), adding that 'CSTC-A cautioned that they cannot confirm the accuracy and completeness of the data for it is based on Afghan operational reporting and there is often a time lag from the event to the report.'[127]

ENEMY-INITIATED ATTACKS BY QUARTER FROM MARCH 2019–MAY 2021



Note: EIA = Enemy-Initiated Attacks. EEIA = Effective Enemy-Initiated Attacks, referring to a subset of enemy-initiated attacks that produced casualties.

Source: RS, response to SIGAR data call 4/1/2021 and 6/12/2021; SIGAR, analysis of RS-provided data, 7/2021.

[121] UNAMA, 'Midyear Update: 1 January to 30 June 2021' (page 5), 26 July 2021
[122] UNAMA, 'Midyear Update: 1 January to 30 June 2021' (page 5), 26 July 2021
[123] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (page 58), 30 July 2021
[124] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (page 61), 30 April 2021
[125] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (page 58), 30 July 2021
[126] AIHRC, 'Summary Report on Civilian Casualties in the First Six Months of 2021', 1 August 2021
[127] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (page 57), 30 July 2021

Definitions: 'Enemy-initiated attacks (EIA): All attacks (direct fire, surface to air fire, IED, and mine explosions, etc.) initiated by insurgents that the ANDSF and RC [sic] consider to be [significant activities] (SIGACTs). Effective enemy-initiated attacks (EEIA): A subset of enemy-initiated attacks that result in ANDSF, Coalition, or civilian casualties.'[128]

6.2.5 UNAMA's midyear report stated in regard to targeted attacks:

'UNAMA remains deeply concerned about the continuation of attacks deliberately targeting civilians by Anti-Government Elements, particularly through the use of IEDs and shootings, including targeting of human rights defenders, media workers, religious elders, civilian government workers, and humanitarian workers, and sectarian attacks targeting members of the Hazara ethnicity and Shi'a Muslim religious minority.'[129]

6.2.6 The US Department of Defense (USDOD) Lead Inspector General (Lead IG) report to the US Congress on Operation Freedom's Sentinel, for the period 1 January 2021 to 31 March 2021, noted in regard to targeted attacks:

'This quarter, there were at least 40 incidents in which one or more prominent Afghan civilians were targeted and, in most cases, killed. The victims included civilian government officials, educators, religious scholars, tribal leaders, medical workers, journalists, and activists. Most of these killings were hit-and-run shooting incidents. Others employed explosive devices, especially so-called "sticky bombs," magnetic explosives that are attached to the target's vehicle by a passing pedestrian or cyclist, often while the vehicle is sitting in traffic. The targeted killings of civil servants, members of the media, and human rights workers this quarter follows a trend that began in October and November 2020, as peace talks between the Afghan government and Taliban were taking place in Doha. USFOR-A reported 104 targeted killings or attempted killings in Afghanistan this quarter, 97 of which resulted in casualties. Of the 104 attacks, 67 targeted military, government, or pro-government individuals, and 37 targeted private citizens. USFOR-A attributed fewer than 40 of these events to a specific responsible party.'[130]

6.2.7 The Taliban denied targeting civilians and said in a statement in January 2021 'Civil employees of government, civil institutions, civil organizations and civil society activists and independent people were never in our target list. Our mujahedeen are not involved in their killing. We have condemned these killings and we reject any involvement in these killings.' However, the Taliban were quick to claim responsibility for its targeted killings of military and security personnel[131].

6.2.8 AAN noted that since 30 June 2021 (the cut-off date for UNAMA's mid-year report):

'The tempo of the conflict in Afghanistan has not tailed off. There is no basis for hoping the harm done to civilians as documented by UNAMA in the first six months of 2021, and especially in May and June, has in any way lessened. Indeed, there have also been continuing reports of abuses in July,

[128] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (page 57), 30 July 2021
[129] UNAMA, 'Midyear Update: 1 January to 30 June 2021' (page 5), 26 July 2021
[130] USDOD, 'Lead IG Report to US Congress' (page 17), 18 May 2021
[131] USDOD, 'Lead IG Report to US Congress' (page 17), 18 May 2021

including from Kandahar where Human Rights Watch has said, "growing evidence of expulsions, arbitrary detentions, and killings in areas under [Taleban] control are raising fears among the population".'[132]

6.2.9 Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported on 23 July 2021 that the Taliban, who control Spin Boldak district in Kandahar, '… have detained hundreds of residents whom they accuse of association with the government' and also '… reportedly killed some detainees, including relatives of provincial government officials and members of the police and army.'[133] According to Tolo News, over 100 civilians were killed in Spin Boldak district, although the Taliban denied any involvement[134].

6.2.10 Following investigations, on 31 July 2021 the AIHRC reported on the events in Spin Boldak, which was taken by the Taliban on 14 July 2021. The AIHRC noted that ANSF attempted to retake the district a few days later but were unable to recapture it, after which:

'The Taliban then began sweeping in many villages adjacent to the district market, looking for former and current civil servants and identifying government supporters. The Taliban expelled them from their homes and killed them; as some of those bodies have been identified so far.

'Findings by the Commission show that the Taliban has retaliated against the past and present government officials and residents who welcomed security forces during the recapture of Spin Boldak district. They looted property belonging to a number of locals, including the homes of former and current government officials. However, the Commission has not yet obtained credible information confirming a purely ethnic motive in the killings.'[135]

6.2.11 For information on groups that may be targeted by the Taliban, see the Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Fear of the Taliban.

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6.3 ANSF resistance during Taliban advance

6.3.1 In its quarterly report to Congress, dated July 2021, SIGAR noted:

'In some districts ANDSF forces put up some level of resistance and conducted a tactical (fighting) retreat, while in others they surrendered or fled in disorder. According to news reports, about 1,600 ANDSF personnel fled into neighboring Tajikistan in July to avoid Taliban advances in Badakhshan Province. In other instances, local elders reportedly mediated truces that allowed the ANDSF defenders to leave, abandoning their U.S.-supplied equipment, which the Taliban then displayed on social media as propaganda to tout its victories. The Taliban have not yet taken any of Afghanistan's 34 provincial capitals, but several were reportedly surrounded.

'Particularly concerning was the speed and ease with which the Taliban seemingly wrested control of districts in Afghanistan's northern provinces, once a bastion of anti-Taliban sentiment. The deteriorating situation caused the commander of the NATO Resolute Support Mission, General Miller, to

[132] AAN, 'New UNAMA Civilian Casualties report…', 26 July 2021
[133] HRW, 'Afghanistan: Threats of Taliban Atrocities in Kandahar', 23 July 2021
[134] Tolo News, 'Sources Allege 100 Civilians Killed After Fall of Spin Boldak', 22 July 2021
[135] AIHRC, 'Violations of International Humanitarian Law in Spin Boldak…', 31 July 2021

tell reporters on June 29 that "a civil war path is visualizable." Miller added in a later interview, "We should be concerned. The loss of terrain and the rapidity of that loss of terrain has to be concerning.'[136]

6.3.2 BBC News reported on 5 August 2021 that:

'The government says it has sent reinforcements to all major cities that are threatened by the Taliban and has imposed a month-long night curfew across almost all of the country in a bid to stop the Taliban from invading cities.

'Although they are battling for control of Lashkar Gah and closing in on centres such as Herat and Kandahar, the Taliban have not yet been able to capture one. The territorial gains they do make, however, strengthen their position in negotiations, and also generate revenue in the form of taxes and war booty.'[137]

6.3.3 On 15 August 2021, the AAN reported on the speed at which provincial district centres were captured by the Taliban since the first provincial capital – Zaranj in Nimruz – fell on 6 August 2021. The report noted:

'… in practice, the fall of a provincial or district capital means that the civilian administration and the government troops have abandoned key government buildings… In some districts, the centre had long been the only part still in the government's hands, while in other cases, such as, for instance, Malestan, the centre's fall meant that the rest of the district could also no longer be defended. In some provinces, government forces abandoned the centre but managed to retreat to the nearby army garrison or airport, where they continued to hold out. Nevertheless, in most cases, even this ended in surrender or a negotiated retreat (as was the case in, for instance, Kunduz, Herat, Kandahar, and Helmand).'[138]

6.3.4 On tactics, the AAN reported that in some areas, '… the Taleban have had almost no need to test the ANSF: where district centres have fallen, it was typically after a quick ANSF withdrawal, often after an agreement mediated by tribal elders. Taleban pressure applied through elders, mosques and even mothers… succeeded in many places, without there having to be much fighting at all.'[139]

6.3.5 Referring to the Taliban's advance across the country, a House of Commons Library Research Briefing, dated 17 August 2021, noted:

'Although the Taliban had been steadily gaining territory in rural Afghanistan, the speed at which it has regained control of the country has surprised many observers.

'In less than a month, Taliban forces have captured several strategic supply roads and several border crossings with Iran, Tajikistan, Pakistan and Turkmenistan and taken control of all the country's provincial capitals.

[136] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (page 51), 30 July 2021
[137] BBC News, 'Mapping the advance of the Taliban in Afghanistan', 5 August 2021
[138] AAN, 'Is This How It Ends? With the Taleban closing in on Kabul…', 15 August 2021
[139] AAN, 'Menace, Negotiation, Attack: The Taleban take more District Centres…', 16 July 2021

'The Taliban offensive was often met with little or no resistance from the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) whose credibility has been under increasing scrutiny. US air strikes supporting the ANSF had little impact.

'Despite intelligence assessments in mid-August 2021 suggesting that Kabul could fall within a month to 90 days, on 15 August Taliban forces entered Kabul unopposed.'[140]

6.3.6 On 16 August, BBC News reported on the relative calm in the city following the previous days panic[141], whilst Al Jazeera noted that the city had come to a near standstill[142].

6.3.7 According to Al Jazeera reporting on 22 August 2021, 'In the only confirmed fighting since the fall of Kabul on August 15, anti-Taliban forces took back three districts in the northern province of Baghlan, bordering Panjshir, last week.'[143] On 31 August 2021, Reuters reported 'Since the fall of Kabul on Aug. 15, the Panjshir has been the only province to hold out against [t]he Taliban, although there has also been fighting in neighbouring Baghlan province between Taliban and local militia forces.'[144] According to a spokesperson for the Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRF), on 30 August 'fighting occurred on the western entrance to the valley where the Taliban attacked NRF positions.' A member of the NRF said in a tweet that during the attack, 7 Taliban were killed and many were injured, adding '"They [the Taliban] retreated with heavy casualties"'.[145]

See also General security situation post-Taliban takeover.

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6.4 Situation in Kabul

6.4.1 For information on Kabul City, pre-Taliban takeover, including general background, actors in the conflict, security incidents and the state's reaction, see the EASO 'COI Report Afghanistan – Security Situation', which primarily covers the period 1 January 2020 to 5 March 2021, published June 2021[146].

6.4.2 The EASO report noted that 'According to estimates for 2019-20 by Afghanistan's NSIA [National Statistic and Information Authority], Kabul City has a population of 4,273,156. However, exact population figures are disputed and estimates range from 3.5 million up to a possible 6.5 million inhabitants in 2020…'[147]

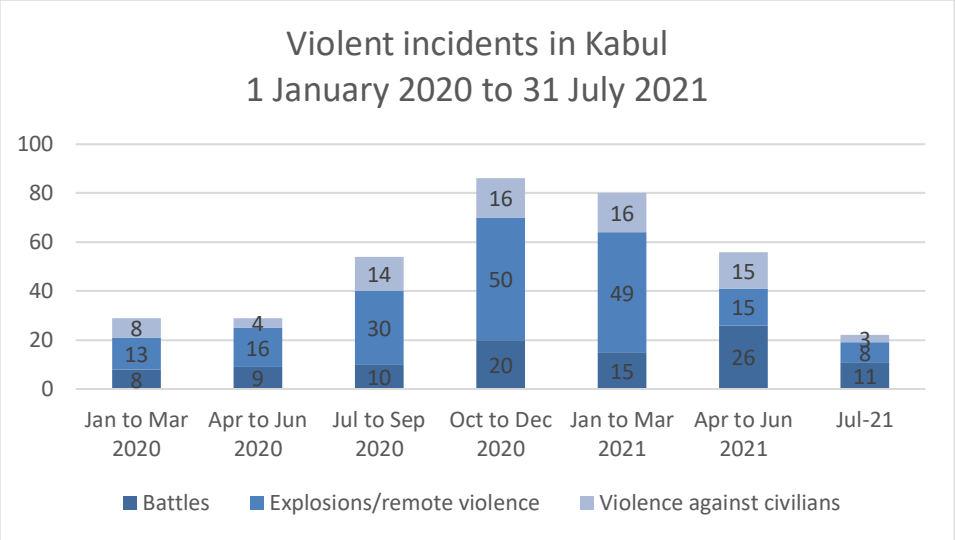
6.4.3 In 2020, UNAMA recorded 817 civilian casualties (255 killed and 562 injured) in Kabul, predominantly caused by targeted attacks, a decrease of 48% compared to 2019. (see Annex A for a provincial breakdown of casualties).

6.4.4 The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) collected data on 356 violent events and subsequent fatalities (both civilian and non-

[140] House of Commons Library, 'Afghanistan: Fall of the Government…' (page 1), 17 August 2021
[141] BBC News, 'Afghanistan: Life in Kabul after the Taliban victory', 16 August 2021
[142] Al Jazeera, 'Kabul near standstill on day one of the Taliban's "Emirate"', 16 August 2021
[143] Al Jazeera, 'Taliban says hundreds of fighters heading to take Panjshir Valley', 22 August 2021
[144] Reuters, 'At least seven Taliban reported killed in Panjshir fighting', 31 August 2021
[145] Reuters, 'At least seven Taliban reported killed in Panjshir fighting', 31 August 2021
[146] EASO, 'COI Report Afghanistan, Security Situation' (page 83, section 2.1), June 2021
[147] EASO, 'COI Report Afghanistan, Security Situation' (page 83), June 2021

civilian) in Kabul district from 1 January 2020 to 31 July 2021 from reports in open sources, of which 99 were coded as 'battles' (375 fatalities), 181 as 'explosions/remote violence' (372 fatalities) and 76 as 'violence against civilians' (120 fatalities)[148].

6.4.5 Graph showing Kabul district security events from 1 January 2020 to 31 July 2021, based on ACLED data[149]. ACLED data does not differentiate between Kabul City and Kabul district.



6.4.6 In its Annual Report for 2020, UNAMA noted the mass shooting by unknown AGEs at a maternity ward in Kabul on 12 May 2020, which killed 19 women and injured 12 others, as well as the ISIL-KP-claimed attack on Kabul University on 2 November 2020, which killed 10 women and injured 20[150].

See also Women and children.

6.4.7 On 8 May 2021, a car-bomb exploded along with two other blasts, killing 85 and wounding up to 275 students at Sayed–ul-Shuhada High School, a predominantly Hazara Shia girls school in Kabul[151] [152]. (See also Violence between January and September 2021 – Data on civilian casualties).

6.4.8 On 3 August 2021 a suspected car bomb exploded outside the Defence Minister's home in Kabul's heavily fortified "Green Zone", an area home to government buildings and foreign embassies, according to reports. Shortly after the first blast, a second was heard, followed by gunfire in the same area of the city, killing at least 13, including 5 attackers, and injuring 20 others[153] [154] [155]. The Taliban later claimed responsibility for the attack[156] [157].

[148] CPIT analysis based on ACLED data on Kabul District, 1 January 2020 to 31 July 2021
[149] CPIT analysis based on ACLED data on Kabul District, 1 January 2020 to 31 July 2021
[150] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 28), February 2021
[151] UNAMA, 'Midyear Update: 1 January to 30 June 2021' (page 5), 26 July 2021
[152] SIGAR, 'Quarterly Report to the United States Congress' (page 58), 30 July 2021
[153] Al Jazeera, 'Powerful blasts and gunfire rock Afghanistan capital Kabul', 4 August 2021
[154] Reuters, 'Blast in Afghan capital as Taliban claim attack on minister's compound', 4 August 2021
[155] Independent, 'Taliban attack in Kabul kills 13 and shows deadly switch in tactics', 4 August 2021
[156] Reuters, 'Blast in Afghan capital as Taliban claim attack on minister's compound', 4 August 2021
[157] Independent, 'Taliban attack in Kabul kills 13 and shows deadly switch in tactics', 4 August 2021

6.4.9 On 4 August 2021, another blast occurred near a facility of the National Directorate of Security in Kabul, wounding 3 civilians and a security official[158] [159].

6.4.10 On 6 August 2021, the Taliban claimed responsibility for killing Dawa Khan Menapal, head of the Government Media and Information Centre (GMIC)[160]. Menapal was shot as he left a mosque in the west of Kabul[161].

6.4.11 On 26 August 2021, as reported by BBC News, 'A powerful bomb blast struck the perimeter of Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport on Thursday, as civilians continued to seek to escape on flights from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. At least 95 people were killed and 150 others wounded.'[162] ISIS-K, the Islamic State group, claimed responsibility for the attack[163]. On 29 August 2021, a US drone strike conducted to eliminate 'an imminent ISIS-K threat', killed 10 Afghans, aged between 2 and 40 years old, reported Al Jazeera[164].

6.4.12 For more information on the situation in Kabul post-Taliban takeover see the Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Fear of the Taliban.

6.4.13 See also the EASO report on Afghanistan Security situation, dated September 2021, covering the period 1 March to 31 August 2021.

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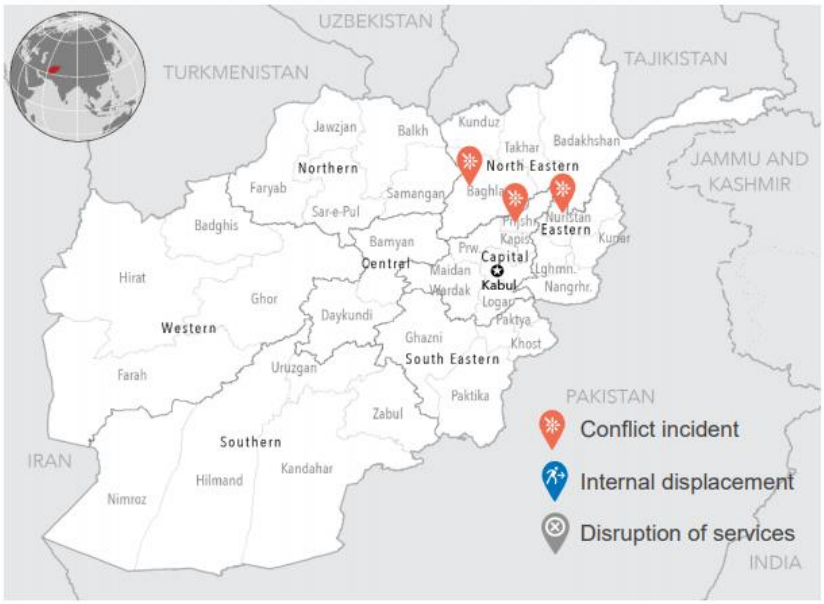
6.5 General security situation post-Taliban takeover

6.5.1 The UNOCHA's Weekly Humanitarian Update for 16 to 22 August 2021 provided updates on Afghanistan's regions, as shown in this map[165]:



[158] Reuters, 'Blast in Afghan capital as Taliban claim attack on minister's compound', 4 August 2021
[159] Gandhara, 'Afghan Civilians Urged To Flee Besieged Southern City As Kabul…', 4 August 2021
[160] Reuters, 'Taliban kills Afghan gov't top media officer, US condemns', 6 August 2021
[161] Tolo News, 'Head of Govt's Media, Information Center Assassinated', 6 August 2021
[162] BBC News, 'Kabul airport attack: What do we know?', 27 August 2021
[163] AP News, 'Kabul airport attack kills 60 Afghans, 13 US troops', 27 August 2021
[164] Al Jazeera, 'Kabul families say children killed in US drone attack', 30 August 2021
[165] UNOCHA, 'Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 August 2021)', 25 August 2021

6.5.2 The UNOCHA noted for the South that, 'In the reporting period, the overall security situation in the south remained relatively calm, but uncertain. Reportedly, civilians are still affected by roadside Improvised Explosive Device(IED) detonations and stray celebratory bullets in provincial capitals.'[166]

6.5.3 For the North-East, 'The security situation was reportedly calm in Kunduz, Takhar and Badakhshan provinces. However, fighting was reported in Pul-e-Hisar, Deh Salah and Bano districts in Baglan province.'[167] All provinces in the North were reported to be relatively calm, similarly so in the West and Centre although some security incidents were reported, notably in in Kabul and Panjsher provinces[168].

6.5.4 In the East, UNOCHA reported 'On 19 August, seven civilians were reportedly injured in Asad Abad city in Kunar province. In addition, two civilians were reportedly killed and six others injured in Jalalabad city in Nangarhar province following a protest on the country's Independence Day. On 21 August, armed clashes were reported between the Taliban and Islamic State of Khorasan (IS-K) in Nuralam Sahib Valley, Alingar district, Laghman province.'[169]

6.5.5 On 1 September 2021, AAN reported on incidents of violence that occurred after the Taliban takeover:

'Panjshir province and neighbouring Andarab district in Baghlan remain the main focal point of possible armed resistance against the Taleban. Those holding out are led by the Republic's First Vice President Amrullah Saleh and Ahmad Massud, son of the late Jamiat-e Islami commander, Ahmad Shah Massud. Hostilities between the two sides were briefly halted for two rounds of formal talks, but they broke down; the demands of the two sides for the moment remain too far apart to come to an agreement. Taleban forces have been massing around the entrance to the valley but have been hit in ambushes and have sustained casualties. Whereas both sides mainly seemed to be trying to hurt each other in order to strengthen their hand in negotiations, without starting an all-out battle, according to the latest reports, the Taleban are now summoning forces from other provinces.

'Other flashpoints include Behsud district in Maidan Wardak province and, most recently, Khedir in Daikundi, with skirmishes breaking out around Taleban efforts to disarm local or former government forces. These cases, which are both in Hazara areas, are more complex than they may seem at first glance, as they both involve tense relationships between the new Taleban rulers, the Hazara commanders who aided the Taleban offensive, and the local Hazara population.'[170]

6.5.6 The same report continued:

'In Khedir the initial refusal to hand over weapons was said to have been inspired by a suspicion that local Hazara commander Muhammad Ali

[166] UNOCHA, 'Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 August 2021)', 25 August 2021
[167] UNOCHA, 'Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 August 2021)', 25 August 2021
[168] UNOCHA, 'Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 August 2021)', 25 August 2021
[169] UNOCHA, 'Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 August 2021)', 25 August 2021
[170] AAN, 'The Moment in Between: After the Americans, before the new regime', 1 September 2021

Sedaqat, who had sided with the Taleban and had been dispatched to collect the weapons, would not provide people with the necessary receipts; that would leave local people open to future harassment and accusations of still being armed. When the Taleban provincial governor went to the district to collect the weapons, people were reportedly ready to welcome him when his convoy was shot at (according to some reports, from the back). A firefight ensued. At least two teenage civilians were killed, a number of Taleban, and 12 former pro-Republic fighters. Several of the latter were said to have been summarily executed and some of the men's faces were difficult to recognise (see also this detailed Twitter thread).

'Finally, on 26 August, just as the Taleban had started removing blast walls all over the country, and after repeated threat warnings, a suicide bomb ripped through the crowd clamouring to enter the airport's Abbey Gate. The blast, which was claimed by ISKP (the Islamic State Khorasan Province), killed at least 170 Afghans, many of whom had been told they were eligible for a seat on a plane. The US reaction to the attack focused almost solely on the death of thirteen US service members. In response, two drone attacks were launched in Jalalabad and Kabul, which, according to the US military, killed an ISKP "planner" and a car full of new suicide bombers, respectively. However, on-the-ground reporting showed that the second drone had hit a house and killed ten civilians (see reporting here and pictures of the funeral here). This was particularly bitter since many Afghans had hoped that, if nothing else, the Taleban takeover and withdrawal of foreign troops would at least mean an end to large-scale violence. Now they fear that ISKP may start a campaign of terror against the new regime in an ironic inversion, and the US may continue its deadly over-the-horizon targeting.'[171]

6.5.7 For updates on the security situation, see UNOCHA's Flash Updates and Weekly Humanitarian Updates.

6.5.8 See also the EASO report on Afghanistan Security situation, dated September 2021, covering the period 1 March to 31 August 2021.

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Section 7 updated: 3 September 2021

7. Effect on the civilian population

7.1 Life under the Taliban

7.1.1 For information on living under Taliban control, see the Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Fear of the Taliban.

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7.2 Conflict-related displacement

7.2.1 The AIHRC reported in July 2021 that, according to the State Ministry for Disaster Management and Humanitarian Affairs, nearly 5 million people across the country were displaced in the past 2 years due to insecurity and violence by opposition groups. Following a field study to investigate the human rights situation of IDPs, the AIHRC reported that between 20 March

[171] AAN, 'The Moment in Between: After the Americans, before the new regime', 1 September 2021

and 21 June 2021, 158,392 families (an estimated 950,352 people) from 26 provinces were displaced due to increased conflict and insecurity[172].

7.2.2 On 13 July 2021, UNHCR warned of a humanitarian crisis as it noted 'An estimated 270,000 Afghans have been newly displaced inside the country since January 2021 – primarily due to insecurity and violence – bringing the total uprooted population to over 3.5 million.'[173]

7.2.3 The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated that nearly 300,000 Afghans were newly displaced between 9 June and 9 August 2021 by the current crisis and noted the continuing deterioration in the humanitarian situation[174].

See also Internally displaced persons and access to shelter.

7.2.4 For updates on displacement due to the internal conflict, see UNOCHA's Flash Updates and Weekly Humanitarian Updates.

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Section 8 updated: 3 September 2021

8. Humanitarian situation

8.1 Humanitarian assistance and needs

8.1.1 The Report of UN Secretary General on the situation in Afghanistan since 9 December 2020, dated 12 March 2021, indicated 'Humanitarian needs continued to rise owing to ongoing violence, natural disasters and heightened levels of food insecurity, further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some 18.4 million people, or almost half the population, a record number, need humanitarian assistance in 2021, up from 9.4 million at the beginning of 2020.'[175]

8.1.2 The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) noted in its Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), dated January 2021, that the 18.4 million people needing humanitarian assistance in 2021 was 6 times higher compared to 4 years ago. The report noted:

'The health and socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have seen the number of people in need almost double in the past year alone, with food insecurity soaring as people's livelihoods were lost and their limited financial reserves were depleted. Afghanistan now has the second highest number of people in emergency food insecurity in the world, while nearly one in two children under-five will face acute malnutrition in 2021. While enduringly resilient, people are increasingly desperate, resorting to debt and other more dangerous coping mechanisms to survive including marrying off their young daughters and sending their children to work. Against this backdrop of acute poverty, there are now 30.5 million people who require social assistance from the Government and development actors to help them cope and prevent them slipping into worse humanitarian need.'[176]

[172] AIHRC, 'The Human Rights Situation of Internally Displaced People – July 2021', 4 August 2021
[173] UNHCR, 'UNHCR warns of imminent humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan', 13 July 2021
[174] WHO, 'Afghanistan Emergency Situation Report Issue 1 (18 August 2021)', 19 August 2021
[175] UN General Assembly, 'The situation in Afghanistan…' (paragraph 51), 1 June 2021
[176] UNOCHA, 'Humanitarian Response Plan Afghanistan 2018-2020' (page 5), January 2021

8.1.3 On 26 August 2021, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) stated

'Following the takeover of power by the Taliban, humanitarian access is opening in some areas allowing limited delivery of assistance to resume but remains extremely challenging. Gaps and delays in assistance may lead to further deterioration of the dire humanitarian situation.

'In Kabul, the situation at the Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA) remains tense and volatile as thousands of Afghans attempt to leave the country; evacuations by some foreign governments are ongoing. Uncertain access conditions and an unpredictable security environment, violence against humanitarians, and limitations on the availability of cash are hampering humanitarian operations.'[177]

8.1.4 Al Jazeera stated on 27 August 2021 that 'The Taliban has assured the UN that it can pursue humanitarian work…'[178]

8.1.5 On 2 September 2021, the International Crisis Group (ICG) reported 'Kabul's airport – crucial for bringing in humanitarian supplies and for enabling post-airlift departures for Afghans vulnerable to Taliban reprisals – was seriously damaged during the chaotic evacuation and has not yet begun operating again in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal.'[179]

8.1.6 For updates on the humanitarian situation see Afghanistan | ReliefWeb.

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8.2 COVID-19

8.2.1 The UNOCHA noted in its situation report on COVID-19, dated 15 July 2021, that:

'As of 14 July, MoPH (Ministry of Public Health) data shows that 136,643 people across all 34 provinces in Afghanistan are confirmed to have had COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic. An additional 16,427 people have tested positive since the last update two weeks ago. Of the total cases since the start of the pandemic, some 83,849 people have recovered, and 5,923 people have died – at least 93 of the fatalities have been healthcare workers. Since the start of the pandemic, only 664,045 tests have been conducted for a population of 40.4 million… Due to limited public health resources, lack of people coming forward for testing, as well as the absence of a national death register, confirmed cases of and deaths from COVID-19 are likely to be underreported overall in Afghanistan…

'WHO warns that despite the new surge, widespread complacency and failure to follow public health advice in Afghanistan is creating grave risks in the community with people generally not observing physical distancing or mask-wearing protocols. There is particular concern about the upcoming Eid al-Adha period and the need to promote personal protection measures during this holiday.'[180]

[177] IOM, 'Afghanistan Situation - Situation Report # 2', 26 August 2021
[178] Al Jazeera, 'Hundreds of displaced Afghan families seeking food and shelter', 27 August 2021
[179] ICG, 'Afghanistan's Growing Humanitarian Crisis', 2 September 2021
[180] UNOCHA, 'Afghanistan Flash Update | COVID-19…', 15 July 2021

8.2.2 For updates on the COVID-19 pandemic see UNOCHA Updates and COVID-19 News and Information | UNAMA.

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8.3 Drought

8.3.1 On 22 June 2021, the Government of Afghanistan officially declared a drought in the country, reported the UNOCHA, who noted:

'Little snow pack accumulation over the winter months and low rainfall in recent weeks resulted in drought conditions, low crop yields and rising food prices in the southern, eastern and western parts of the country. In the South, farmers in Kandahar Province are reporting water shortages which are threatening agricultural outputs. In the East, reduced food production is expected to contribute to an already dire food security situation exacerbated by the effects of La Niña and a continued dry spell. In the West, the provinces of Hirat, Badghis and Ghor are facing either extreme or severe drought conditions and humanitarian partners are assisting vulnerable people with food, water, sanitation and hygiene, cash and the rehabilitation of water sources. In the North-East region, drought does not pose an immediate threat at present, but forecasted water shortages may affect 60 per cent of farmers (about 586,000 people) in 12 districts during the upcoming agricultural seasons beginning in September 2021.'[181]

8.3.2 BBC News reported on 5 August 2021 that:

'... Around 80% of the country is facing severe or serious drought, which is expected to have a dramatic effect on wheat crops and put millions of livestock at risk of death.

'"Climate disasters, Covid-19 and conflict are converging in a living nightmare for the people of Afghanistan," said Necephor Mghendi, of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). "Millions are going without meals every day and in some parts water is running dry. This is one of the most severe droughts ever in Afghanistan".'[182]

8.3.3 For regular updates see Updates | ReliefWeb.

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8.4 Economy and food security

8.4.1 The UNOCHA noted on 15 July 2021 that:

'In addition to pre-existing challenges, the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and drought have translated into a food insecurity crisis. The recently released IPC [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification] analysis estimates that 12.2 million people – almost one third of the population – are in crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity. Food prices are already higher than normal due to COVID-19 may increase further in some places due to conflict, disruptions at the border, and water scarcity.

[181] UNOCHA, 'Weekly Regional Humanitarian Snapshot (22 - 28 June 2021)', 29 June2021
[182] BBC News, 'Mapping the advance of the Taliban in Afghanistan', 5 August 2021

Water scarcity is already being seen in a number of areas and a significantly reduced wheat harvest is expected.'[183]

8.4.2 The UNOCHA noted in its Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 August 2021), referring to provinces in the South, 'Currently, most major markets, money exchange dealers, banks and business areas are not fully functional, which is exerting additional strain on civilians and contributing to increased prices of food, medicine and other essential supplies in local markets.'[184]

8.4.3 In the North-East, UNOCHA noted that 'According to the WFP [World Food Programme], most food items are not available in the market due to the closure of the main border crossings into the north-east which is hindering the movement of goods. Subsequently, the price of food rose significantly in Badakhshan over the past weeks.'[185] Reporting on the situation in the North, 'Business and markets have reportedly reopened in provincial capitals', and for the East, 'Food and other basic commodities in urban areas are available, but prices are increasing dramatically in some areas. Torkham border crossing remains open for trade.'[186]

8.4.4 BBC News reported on 25 August that, after the Taliban took control on 15 August, foreign aid and reserves were frozen, and:

'… Afghanistan's internal banking system froze up. Long queues have formed outside banks, many of which are closed, and ATMs that aren't dispensing money. With limited access to cash, people are becoming increasingly desperate.

'The economy was already extremely fragile, heavily dependent on aid. A nation is considered aid-dependent when 10% or more of its gross domestic product (GDP) comes from foreign aid; in Afghanistan's case, about 40% of its GDP was international aid, according to the World Bank.'[187]

8.4.5 On 1 September 2021 Reuters reported on the new Taliban-appointed head of Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB), Afghanistan's central bank, adding that 'Banks have mainly re-opened this week, but are operating with limited services, including $200 weekly limits on withdrawals and few wire transfers amid liquidity worries and correspondent banks cutting ties, say bankers.'[188]

8.4.6 The ICG gave an overview of the humanitarian situation on 2 September 2021, citing a range of sources:

'Essential food supplies in many cities are running short. Pressures are especially acute in Kabul, where job losses and spiralling inflation have made it even more challenging for people to purchase food and other staples. The largest employer in the country, the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces, has dissolved. Salaries for other state employees cannot be paid because of international asset freezes. Banks are running out of cash. City parks are filled with makeshift encampments. The prices of

[183] UNOCHA, 'Afghanistan Flash Update | COVID-19…', 15 July 2021
[184] UNOCHA, 'Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 August 2021)', 25 August 2021
[185] UNOCHA, 'Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 August 2021)', 25 August 2021
[186] UNOCHA, 'Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 August 2021)', 25 August 2021
[187] BBC News, 'Afghanistan's economy in crisis after Taliban take-over', 25 August 2021
[188] Reuters, 'EXCLUSIVE Taliban launch charm offensive with Afghan banks…', 1 September 2021

vegetables in Kabul's bazaars have climbed 50 per cent in recent weeks, and fuel prices are up 75 per cent and rising.'[189]

8.4.7 For regular updates from UNOCHA see Updates | ReliefWeb.

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8.5 Internally displaced persons and access to shelter

8.5.1 AP News reported on 11 August 2021, 'Tens of thousands of people have fled their homes in northern Afghanistan to escape battles that have overwhelmed their towns and villages as government forces try to fend off rapidly advancing Taliban forces. Families have flowed into the capital, Kabul, living in parks and streets with little food or water.'[190]

8.5.2 On 15 August 2021, UNOCHA noted the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) arriving in Kabul:

'Due to an escalation of conflict across the country, many people are arriving in Kabul and other large cities, seeking safety from the conflict and other threats. Between 1 July and 15 August 2021, the humanitarian community verified 17,600 IDPs who had arrived in Kabul… IDPs are either renting or being hosted by friends, family and other kinship ties. A growing number are also staying in the open in different parts of the city.'[191]

8.5.3 Al Jazeera reported on 27 August 2021 that:

'Hundreds of Afghan families who have been camping in searing heat at a Kabul park after the Taliban overran their provinces are begging for food and shelter, as a humanitarian crisis unfolds in the war-torn country… While thousands of people have crowded the airport to try to flee, many others, like the families in the park, are stuck in limbo, unsure whether it is safer to try to go home or stay where they are.'[192]

8.5.4 For further information and updates see Updates | ReliefWeb.

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8.6 Access to health care

8.6.1 UNAMA reported in its Annual Report for 2020 that the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated:

'… up to three million people were deprived of essential health services in 2020 from the closure of health facilities by parties to the conflict, often in the most vulnerable, conflicted affected locations. This also occurred in the context of the escalating COVID-19 pandemic in Afghanistan where the populations living in conflict affected areas were less likely to receive testing and critical life-saving medical treatment. The loss of healthcare workers and damaged medical infrastructure will have long-lasting consequences on the healthcare system.'[193]

[189] ICG, 'Afghanistan's Growing Humanitarian Crisis', 2 September 2021
[190] AP News, 'Fleeing fighting in north, Afghans crowd into Kabul's parks', 11 August 2021
[191] UNOCHA, 'Afghanistan: Internal Displacement in Kabul - Flash Update No. 4', 15 August 2021
[192] Al Jazeera, 'Hundreds of displaced Afghan families seeking food and shelter', 27 August 2021
[193] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 35), February 2021

8.6.2 In June 2020, UNAMA released a Special Report on Attacks on Healthcare During the COVID-19 Pandemic, which documented deliberate acts of violence or interference with healthcare workers or facilities (12 in total) between 11 March to 23 May 2020[194].

8.6.3 Reuters reported on 9 July 2021 that, according to a WHO official, 'Health workers are struggling to get medicines and supplies into Afghanistan where facilities have come under attack and some staff have fled escalating violence…', adding there had been 30 attacks on health facilities in 2021 so far[195]. On 13 August 2021, a UN press release stated 'Hospitals are overflowing. Food and medical supplies are dwindling. Roads, bridges, schools, clinics and other critical infrastructure are being destroyed.'[196]

8.6.4 Aid agencies said the Afghan healthcare system was at risk of collapse due to lack of support, reported Reuters on 30 August 2021. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) said that '… while their ground operations were broadly unaffected, they had seen a significant increase in demand as other facilities are unable to fully function… closures of Afghan banks had meant almost all humanitarian agencies have been unable to access funds, leaving vendors and staff unpaid. Compounding the issue, medical supplies will now need to be restocked earlier than expected.'[197]

8.6.5 A plane carrying 12.5 tonnes of medical supplies arrived in Mazar-i-Sharif on 30 August 2021, said the WHO, reported by Reuters, with the aim that supplies would be distributed across 40 health facilities in 29 provinces[198].

8.6.6 The Taliban '… said it welcomes foreign donors, and will protect the rights of foreign and local staff – a commitment that has so far been upheld,' Reuters were told by a spokesperson for MSF[199].

8.6.7 The UNOCHA noted in its Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 August 2021), referring to the southern provinces, 'Provincial hospitals have reported admitting a large number of civilians and Taliban fighters wounded during fighting who previously did not have access to hospitals due to ongoing clashes and road closures mainly in Kandahar province. The increased number of casualties are putting additional strains on already limited health services in the region.'[200]

8.6.8 The same source noted 'In Nuristan Province, only a few health facilities with medical supplies remain functional, while the rest of the health facilities and district hospitals are lacking medical supplies and health personnel. Health services are continuing in Kunar, Laghman and Nangarhar for the time being. However, WHO has signaled a dire shortage of heath supplies as they are relying on existing stocks to provide aid to hospitals.'[201]

[194] UNAMA, 'Special Report on Attacks on Healthcare During the COVID-19…' (page 9), June 2020
[195] Reuters, 'Concerns mount over Afghan healthcare as violence spreads', 9 July 2021
[196] UNAMA, 'Secretary-General's Press Encounter on Afghanistan', 13 August 2021
[197] Reuters, 'Afghanistan's healthcare system near collapse, aid agencies warn', 30 August 2021
[198] Reuters, 'WHO opens air bridge to Afghanistan with medical supplies', 30 August 2021
[199] Reuters, 'Afghanistan's healthcare system near collapse, aid agencies warn', 30 August 2021
[200] UNOCHA, 'Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 August 2021)', 25 August 2021
[201] UNOCHA, 'Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 August 2021)', 25 August 2021

8.6.9 In Kabul, 'Mobile health teams provided health services to internally displaced people who settled in new IDP sites in the Dasht-t-Badola area of Police District 7 in Kabul province.'[202]

8.6.10 See also WHO EMRO | Afghanistan and Updates | ReliefWeb for updates on health-related issues.

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[202] UNOCHA, 'Afghanistan: Weekly Humanitarian Update (16 - 22 August 2021)', 25 August 2021

Annex A

Provincial breakdown of civilian casualties in 2020

Table reproduced from UNAMA figures[203].

Province	Leading cause	Total civilian casualties	Compared to 2019
Kabul	Targeted killings	817 (255 killed and 562 injured)	-48%
Balkh	Ground engagements	712 (263 killed and 449 injured)	+157%
Faryab	Ground engagements	576 (146 killed and 430 injured)	-13%
Nangarhar	Suicide attacks	576 (190 killed and 386 injured)	-46%
Kandahar	Non-suicide IEDs	540 (189 killed and 351 injured)	+16%
Kunduz	Ground engagements	444 (194 killed and 250 injured)	-11%
Ghazni	Ground engagements	418 (183 killed and 235 injured)	-38%
Helmand	Ground engagements	410 (214 killed and 196 injured)	-39%
Herat	Ground engagements	339 (124 killed and 215 injured)	-15%
Zabul	Non-suicide IEDs	303 (120 killed and 183 injured)	-39%
Khost	Non-suicide IEDs	281 (56 killed and 225 injured)	+43%
Ghor	Non-suicide IEDs	270 (59 killed and 211 injured)	+251%
Laghman	Ground engagements	267 (62 killed and 205 injured)	-5%
Baghlan	Ground engagements	253 (81 killed and 172 injured)	-28%
Takhar	Ground engagements	240 (88 killed and 152 injured)	+25%
Badghis	Ground engagements	221 (108 killed and 113 injured)	+37%
Paktya	Non-suicide IEDs	206 (62 killed and 144 injured)	-6%
Badakhshan	Ground engagements	186 (59 killed and 127 injured)	+75%
Uruzgan	Ground engagements	182 (61 killed and 121 injured)	+26%
Logar	Suicide attacks	171 (47 killed and 124 injured)	-22%
Kunar	Ground engagements	170 (28 killed and 142 injured)	-34%
Sari Pul	Ground engagements	161 (56 killed and 105 injured)	-26%
Kapsia	Ground engagements	148 (42 killed and 106 injured)	+19%
Wardak	Ground engagements	145 (55 killed and 90 injured)	-21%
Samangan	Complex attacks	133 (12 killed and 121 injured)	+196%
Jawzjan	Ground engagements	120 (47 killed and 73 injured)	-2%
Paktika	Non-suicide IEDs	119 (39 killed and 80 injured)	-29%
Farah	Ground engagements	114 (59 killed and 55 injured)	-22%
Bamyan	Non-suicide IEDs	96 (22 killed and 74 injured)	+1,820%
Parwan	Targeted killings	76 (47 killed and 29 injured)	-69%
Daikundi	Non-suicide IEDs	72 (42 killed and 30 injured)	+3%
Nimroz	Ground engagements	51 (24 killed and 27 injured)	-18%
Nuristan	Ground engagements	3 (1 killed and 2 injured)	-86%
Panjshir	N/A	no civilian casualties	0%

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[203] UNAMA, 'Annual Report 2020' (page 110), February 2021

Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the country information section. The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToR, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Conflict background
    - Overview of recent conflicts in Afghanistan
    - Peace talks
    - International troop withdrawal
- Humanitarian situation
    - Humanitarian aid and needs
    - COVID-19 impact/numbers
    - Drought
    - Food security
    - IDPs and shelter in Kabul
    - Access to healthcare
- Security situation
    - Overview
    - District control, Government vs Taliban
    - Situation in Kabul city
- Impact on the civilian population
    - Living under the Taliban
    - Civilian casualties 2020 and 2021, incident types, attribution to parties
    - Conflict-related displacement
    - Effect on women and children

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Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **8.0**
- valid from **6 October 2021**

Official – sensitive: Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: End of section

Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and assessment following Taliban takeover

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