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

ecoi.net featured topic on Afghanistan: Overview of recent developments and key players in Afghanistan

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[1. Recent Developments](#)

[2. The Taliban](#)

[2.1 Preliminary reports after the Taliban's seizure of power](#)

[2.2 Vulnerable Groups](#)

[3. Other actors](#)

[3.1 Taliban-associated groups](#)

[3.1.1 Haqqani Network](#)

[3.1.2 Al Qaeda](#)

[3.2 Islamic State – Khorasan Province](#)

[3.3 National Resistance Front \(NRF\)](#)

[4. Sources](#)

[5. Brief Source Descriptions](#)

Overview of recent developments and key players in Afghanistan

1. Recent Developments

2021

Information on recent humanitarian developments in Afghanistan can be found in a December 2021 ACCORD query response. ([ACCORD, 6 December 2021](#))

"On 14 April, United States President Joe Biden announced that 'U.S. troops, as well as forces deployed by our NATO Allies and operational partners, will be out of Afghanistan before we mark the 20th anniversary of that heinous attack on September 11th.'" ([AAN, 10 June 2021](#))

"On 15 August, the Taliban capped their drive for power in Afghanistan by taking Kabul, the country's capital, for the first time since they ruled most of the country from 1996 to 2001. With the previous government's collapse, the group is now the de facto power throughout the country." ([ICG, 26 August 2021, p. 1](#))

"The Taliban announced an 'interim' cabinet on 7 September, their first step since taking power on 15 August toward forming a government and signalling how they intend to rule. The cabinet is filled with long-time key Taliban figures from their days as a government and later an insurgency, and it bears a strong resemblance to their former regime of the 1990s." ([ICG, 9 September 2021](#))

"Fearing for their lives, rights and security, thousands of Afghan citizens rushed to Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport, attempting to leave the country, where the United States of America had increased its military presence to manage the evacuations of foreign nationals, including diplomats, and Afghans at risk, with all commercial flights having been suspended. Reports emerged from Taliban-held areas of the imposition of restrictions on personal and social freedoms and the erosion of women's rights and access to services, including education." ([UNGA, 2 September 2021, p. 1](#))

"High-profile attacks by anti-Government elements occurred countrywide prior to the Taliban takeover of major cities. Between 16 May and 31 July, 18 suicide attacks were documented, compared with 11 in the prior period, including 16 suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices primarily targeting Afghan National Defence and Security Forces positions. In addition, there were 68 attacks using magnetic improvised explosive devices, including 14 in Kabul." ([UNGA, 2 September 2021, p. 6](#))

"Unprecedented numbers of civilians were killed and injured in the early months of 2021 and at least 560,000 people were displaced, including nearly 120,000 fleeing to Kabul as they sought refuge from Taliban advances. Those numbers represent the worst-ever period in what for some years has been the world's deadliest conflict. The count of displaced people in Afghanistan over the last seven months was twice the monthly average in the last five years, and the figures are expected to grow as aid agencies' accounting catches up with the scale of the crisis. Some 80 per cent of those fleeing violence since the end of May have been women and children. Thousands of displaced people in Kabul have been sleeping in the open air, and only a minuscule portion of them escaped during the international airlift that ended on 30 August." ([ICG, 2 September 2021](#))

"Between 16 May and 31 July, the United Nations recorded 6,302 security-related incidents, a 25.6 per cent increase from the 5,016 incidents recorded during the same period in 2020. Armed clashes rose by 37.8 per cent, from 2,931 to 4,039 incidents; airstrikes increased by 236 per cent, from 136 to 457; and assassinations increased by 6 per cent, from 235 to 250. By contrast, detonations caused by improvised explosive devices decreased by 15 per cent, from 635 to 538. The southern, eastern and northern regions accounted for 60.4 per cent of all recorded incidents, with Helmand, Kandahar and Nangarhar Provinces consistently ranking as the most conflict-affected. As the Taliban progressively consolidated its territorial control since early August, conflict related types of security incidents, such as airstrikes, armed clashes and improvised explosive devices-related incidents, decreased significantly. ([UNGA, 2 September 2021, pp. 5-6](#))

"Attacks claimed by or attributed to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant Khorasan (ISIL-K) increased. Between 16 May and 18 August, the United Nations recorded 88 attacks, compared with 15 during the same period in 2020. The movement targeted civilians in urban areas using asymmetric tactics. It has claimed the launches of an estimated seven rockets targeting the presidential palace in Kabul during the official Eid celebration on 20 July, as well as a series of attacks using improvised explosive devices against religious minorities, including a Hazara gathering in Kunduz city on 13 May and a Sufi mosque in Kabul on 14 May, and several passenger vans either carrying Hazara Shias or traveling through predominantly Hazara Shia populated areas in Parwan Province and Kabul between 1 and 12 June. The group also claimed an attack on HALO Trust deminers in Baghlan Province on 8 June, in which 10 deminers were killed. Several claims concerned attacks on economic infrastructure and assets. Not all claims were verified amid controversy over the extent to which ISIL-K claimed attacks carried out by other groups or in coordination with it. The movement also issued an editorial on 17 June announcing plans to escalate attacks and in recent weeks had increasingly sought to challenge the Taliban as it asserted control across Afghanistan." ([UNGA, 2 September 2021, p. 6](#))

"On 26 August ISKP carried out two bomb attacks at the entrance to Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, killing as many as 170 civilians and 13 U.S. service members." ([DIS, September 2021, p. 14](#))

"The ISKP has claimed responsibility for many recent unlawful attacks on the Hazara Shia community, including suicide bombings that killed at least 72 people at the Sayed Abad mosque in Kunduz on October 8, and a bombing that killed at least 63 people at the Bibi Fatima mosque in Kandahar on October 15. After the Kandahar attack, ISIS issued a statement saying it would target Shia in their homes and centers 'in every way, from slaughtering their necks to scattering their limbs... and the news of [ISIS's] attacks...in the temples of the [Shia] and their gatherings is not hidden from anyone, from Baghdad to Khorasan.'" ([HRW, 25 October 2021](#))

On 2 November, another 25 people were killed and more than 50 wounded in an attack on Afghanistan's biggest military hospital in Kabul." ([UNHCR, 2 November 2021, p. 1](#))

"More than 20 people have been killed and at least 16 injured in a gun and bomb assault on a military hospital in the Afghan capital Kabul. Attackers targeted the 400-bed Sardar Daud Khan hospital starting with two massive explosions outside the building, officials said. Gunmen then broke into the hospital grounds, witnesses said. An affiliate of the Islamic State group, IS-K, later said it had carried out the attack." ([BBC, 2 November 2021](#))

"Between 19 August and 31 December, the United Nations recorded 985 security-related incidents, a 91 per cent decrease compared to the same period in 2020. The number of security incidents fell significantly after 15 August, from 600 to fewer than 100 incidents per week. Available data indicate that armed clashes decreased by 98 per cent, from 7,430 to 148 incidents; air strikes by 99 per cent, from 501 to 3; detonations of improvised explosive devices by 91 per cent, from 1,118 to 101; and assassinations by 51 per cent, from 424 to 207. There has been an increase in other types of security

incidents such as crime amid a rapid deterioration of the economic and humanitarian situation. The eastern, central, southern and western regions accounted for 75 per cent of all recorded incidents, with Nangarhar, Kabul, Kunar and Kandahar the most conflict-affected provinces. Despite the reduction in violence, the de facto authorities encountered several challenges, including an increase in attacks against their members. Some of the attacks are attributed to the National Resistance Front comprising some figures from the former Government and opposition. These groups have been operating primarily in Panjshir Province and the Andarab district of Baghlan Province but have not made significant territorial inroads.” (UNGA, 28 January 2022, p. 5)

„Meanwhile, attacks on civilians represent the majority of violent events in the country over the past month, as both the Taliban and unknown groups targeted civilians across 22 provinces. Similar to prior weeks, victims include former security officials. Taliban forces also reportedly beat up civilians for not joining congregational prayers or for playing music during weddings [...]. IS militants also continue to target civilians, killing several people across Kandahar and Kabul, including members of the Hazara ethnic group and Shiite Muslims. Additionally, IS militants killed a civilian in Farah city. This is the first report of an IS attack in Farah province in ACLED data.” (ACLED, 13 January 2022)

„The Taliban’s return to power raises major concerns as regards the respect of human rights in Afghanistan. These concerns are twofold: that the progress which has been achieved in the past twenty years, especially in areas such as women’s rights, is dismantled; and that the Taliban, even when holding de facto power, continue to pursue the same methods they used as an insurgent group, including summary and targeted killings, torture, and other human rights and humanitarian law violations.

These concerns are well-founded. While in their public discourse, the Taliban have pledged to respect human rights – within the framework of Sharia law – the reality on the ground contradicts these statements, as reported by the United Nations, NGOs and media sources.

Groups particularly at risk include: – people who have worked for foreign troops and diplomatic missions – as interpreters, drivers, security officers or other civilian occupations; – members of the Afghan security forces or Afghans who held political or administrative responsibilities; – women and girls – the main issues concerning the right to education, freedom of movement, access to work, to health care and the right to participate in public and political life; – children, some of whom are being recruited as child soldiers; – persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities; – journalists and human rights defenders.” (CoE-PACE, 28 September 2021, p. 12)

As of 1 December 2021, UNHCR estimated 3.4 Million people to be internally displaced by conflict within Afghanistan (UNHCR, 22 March 2022, p. 1).

2022

“Afghanistan is volatile but the country as a whole is (relatively) less dangerous than before August 2021 for many Afghans, due to the cessation of most armed conflict after the Taliban claimed victory. It nevertheless remains a dangerous country with ongoing threats of terrorism and kidnapping and other forms of violence. [...]

There have been multiple mass-casualty terrorist attacks since the Taliban takeover, with most claimed by Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP). [...] Terrorist attacks remain possible anywhere in the country, but major attacks are most likely in key cities given the increased profile ISKP gets from such attacks. [...] Kabul remains insecure and has been subject to multiple attacks. [...]

Local sources suggest parts of the country are returning to a ‘normality’ that has not been seen for many years; for example, bazaars that were closed due to war are reopening. This relative peace has meant travel by road across Afghanistan is generally safer than it has been for some time, albeit from a low base. It is likely to be less safe for women than for men. [...]

The security situation is still evolving. It is unclear how long the current relative peace will continue [...] It is likely the terrorist attacks will continue and potentially increase. In addition to ISKP, there are numerous other, smaller militant groups and local leaders, many of whom had pledged their support for the Taliban, perceiving it as the likely winner of a conflict with the Afghan government. According to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), such local groups may ‘hedge’ their support for different leaders in response to the uncertainty.” (DFAT, 14 January 2022, p. 10)

“While there has been a significant reduction in civilian casualties since the seizure of power by the Taliban on 15 August 2021, [...] the protection of civilians remains a cause for concern.” (HRC, 4 March 2022, p. 6)

“Since the collapse of the Republic and the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan has experienced a period, largely at peace. Conflict violence is however still existent, albeit at significantly lower levels than before. During Taliban rule, conflict violence is primarily connected to the ISKP (Islamic State

Khorasan Province) and the NRF (National Resistance Front) who challenge the new Taliban state. The violence associated with these actors is however mostly concentrated to certain provinces. Violent attacks by the ISKP have largely been staged in Nangarhar, Kabul and Kunar. However, the group has increased its activity as well as its geographic scope, and attacks are carried out sporadically also in other provinces. Furthermore, ISKP has in words as well as actions shown its continuous intention to target Afghanistan's Shia minority - the Hazaras. Since the takeover, large-scale attacks have been targeting Shia mosques in provinces not previously, in recent years, affected by such major sectarian assaults: in Kunduz, Kandahar and now recently in Mazar-e Sharif in the province of Balkh. Targeting of civilians by the ISKP has also continued in the Hazara dominated area in the west of Kabul. The targeting of ethnic and religious minorities in the country is however not limited to the targeting of Shia Muslims as evident by two recent attacks against Sufis in Kabul and Kunduz. Conflict activity connected to the NRF is primarily concentrated to Panjshir and Baghlan even though the NRF, as well as other smaller resistance groups, have some activity also in other parts of the country. At the country level, the security dynamics have changed since the takeover. While conflict violence between warring parties has significantly decreased, targeted violence against civilians largely persists, thus making up a larger proportion of the violence than before. Kandahar constitutes an example of a province where the pattern of violence is not primarily connected to conflict actors. Instead, violence is largely carried out by the Taliban authorities against civilians, primarily due to their connection with the former government. This kind of targeting is however not limited to Kandahar. Rather, it seems to occur on a country-wide scale." ([Migrationsverket, 29 April 2022, p. 6](#))

"Between 15 August 2021 and 15 June 2022, UNAMA HRS documented 2106 civilian casualties (700 killed, 1406 wounded) which predominantly occurred as a result of improvised explosive device (IED) attacks attributed to ISIL-KP and unexploded ordnance (UXO). Among these casualties were 88 women (27 killed, 51 wounded) and 441 children (159 killed, 282 wounded). With the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan on 15 August, armed hostilities between the Taliban and ANDSF forces ceased, leading to an immediate reduction in harm suffered by civilians." ([UNAMA, July 2022, p. 10](#))

"Despite the vastly improved security situation, UNAMA HRS continues to record unacceptable levels of harm as a result of indiscriminate attacks targeting civilians, often ethnic and religious minorities mostly claimed by ISIL-KP." ([UNAMA, July 2022, p. 9](#))

"15. The security situation in Afghanistan is becoming increasingly fragile, after an initial period of significantly reduced conflict-related security incidents following the Taliban takeover on 15 August 2021. ISIL-K and armed groups opposed to the Taliban intensified their attacks during the reporting period. The de facto security forces responded by stepping up preventive but intrusive security measures, such as widespread house searches. The findings of the 29th report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to resolutions 1526 (2004) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities indicated that 'there are no recent signs that the Taliban has taken steps to limit the activities of foreign terrorist fighters in the country. On the contrary, terrorist groups enjoy greater freedom there than at any time in recent history' (S/2022/83, para. 57). The de facto authorities rejected the report's findings. [16.] There has been a decrease in the overall number of conflict-related security incidents and civilian casualties compared with the same period in 2021. Between 1 January and 21 May 2022, the United Nations recorded 2,105 security-related incidents, a 467 per cent decrease from the 11,945 incidents recorded during the same period in 2021. Available data indicate that armed clashes decreased from 6,463 to 164 incidents; airstrikes fell from 508 to 5; detonations from improvised explosive devices decreased from 1,147 to 123; and assassinations decreased from 465 to 122. As a result of the deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation, crime-related security incidents remained consistently high, with 474 such incidents reported, compared with 525 crimes reported during the same period in 2021. The western, eastern, central and southern regions accounted for 66 per cent of all recorded incidents, with Herat, Nangarhar, Kabul and Kandahar being the provinces most affected." ([UNSC, 15 June 2022, p. 4](#))

"The presence of armed groups opposed to the Taliban expanded, although their membership and capabilities are difficult to assess." ([UNSC, 15 June 2022, p. 4](#))

"In addition to the [National Resistance Front] NRF, new anti-Taliban armed groups have emerged, though there is limited information about the size and operational capacity of such groups. Some groups have announced their formation and name publicly. As of 25 March 2022, ACLED records six such groups, with one reported solely by APW [Afghan Peace Watch]. These groups have carried out attacks on the Taliban, inflicting casualties." ([ACLED & APW, April 2022, p. 9](#))

"In Afghanistan, the National Resistance Front (NRF) increased attacks against the Taliban in the northern provinces over the past two weeks, especially in Baghlan, Panjshir, and Takhar. [...] Additionally, the Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF), the National Liberation Front of Afghanistan (NLFA), and IS targeted the Taliban across the country. The AFF claims to have attacked Taliban forces in Kabul, Laghman, and Parwan provinces, including an operation on the Taliban intelligence

headquarters in Badghis province. Meanwhile, the NLFA, an anti-Taliban group that declared its formation in February, has claimed several attacks against the Taliban in Kabul, Kandahar, Khost, and Paktia provinces. [...]

Meanwhile, armed groups continued to carry out attacks against civilians over the past two weeks, especially targeting minority Muslim communities ahead of the Muslim holiday of Eid Al Fitr on 30 April. IS militants carried out deadly explosive attacks targeting Shiite Muslims in Balkh province and Kabul, killing at least 11 people in Mazar-i Sharif city on 28 April. Meanwhile, in the deadliest attack thus far in 2022, unidentified militants detonated an explosive during Friday prayers at a mosque in Kabul city on 29 April, killing 50 Sufi Muslims." ([ACLED, 12 May 2022](#))

"IS killed at least three Taliban members and injured others in attacks in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces. In Ghazni province, the anti-Taliban Afghanistan Liberation Movement conducted a rocket attack in Waghaz district, claiming to have caused Taliban casualties. Also in Ghazni, the Watandost Front, or Patriotic Front, claimed to have seized control of a village in Ab Band district during an attack on a Taliban base – reportedly the group's first armed interaction with the Taliban" ([ACLED, 19 May 2022](#)).

"Within a few days, a series of large attacks was launched mainly in mosques, with many dead and injured. [...] On 22.04.22, at least 30 people were killed and about 43 others injured in a bomb attack at the Sunni Maulavi Sekandar Sufi mosque in the Imam Sahib district of Kunduz province. According to the news portal Tolonews, the ISKP has claimed responsibility for the attack. On 21.04.22, a bomb attack on a Shiite mosque in Mazar-e Sharif killed 30 people and injured about another 80. The mosque was mainly attended by ethnic Hazaras; the ISKP claimed responsibility for the attack. On the same day, ISKP launched an attack in Kunduz province, leaving four dead and 18 injured. On 19.04.22, two attacks were carried out on a boys' school and another educational institution in Kabul, in the Shiite Hazara neighbourhood of Dasht-e Barchi, with at least 22 dead and many injured. ISKP has carried out similar attacks, but has not claimed responsibility for these two assaults" ([BAMF, 25 April 2022, p. 1](#)).

"With the onset of favourable weather, fighting may escalate as both ISIL-K and resistance groups consisting of former government security elements undertake operations against Taliban forces. The emergence of resistance groups has led the Taliban to adopt aggressive measures against populations suspected of supporting anti-Taliban elements." ([UNSC, 26 May 2022, p. 12](#))

"A bombing in the heart of Kabul's Shiite minority community Saturday killed at least two people and wounded 22. It was the third terrorist attack in the area since Wednesday, and intensified fears of further violence during the final days of Muharram, the Shiite mourning period." ([The Washington Post, 6 August 2022](#))

"Bei Anschlägen in der afghanischen Hauptstadt Kabul sind nach Angaben der Vereinten Nationen am Wochenende mehr als 120 Menschen getötet oder verletzt worden. Die Afghanistan-Mission der UN (Unama) forderte angesichts dieser Zahl mehr Sicherheit für Minderheiten, damit diese religiöse Feierlichkeiten ohne weitere Angriffe begehen könnten. Am Sonntag traf Berichten zufolge ein dritter Anschlag binnen dreier Tage einen Bus in einem mehrheitlich von Schiiten bewohnten Teil Kabuls. Die Terrormiliz 'Islamischer Staat' (IS) hatte sich bereits zu zwei Bombenanschlägen am Wochenende in einem anderen schiitischen Viertel bekannt. Die Taliban-Regierung gab keine Stellungnahme ab." ([Die Zeit, 8 August 2022](#))

"The Taliban respond to the spring offensive and terrain gains made by the resistance movements in the north. On 10.05.22, fierce fighting was reportedly raging for about four days between the Taliban and the National Resistance Front (NRF) in Panjshir province. [...] in some cases, civilians have been detained (up to 200) and also been killed (about 40). Civilian deaths were also reported in the provinces of Takhar (Warsaj district) and Baghlan (Andarab district). The Taliban have denied the allegations." ([BAMF, 16 May 2022, p. 1](#))

"In Afghanistan, the Taliban intensified operations against the NRF in the northern Panjshir and Baghlan provinces last week. These clashes led civilians to flee their homes, while reportedly also being targeted and tortured by the Taliban (CBS News, 16 May 2022; RFE/RL, 13 May 2022). Further clashes between the NRF and Taliban forces were reported in Parwan, Kapisa, and Warsaj district, Takhar province, after the NRF claimed to have seized key points in Warsaj from the Taliban the week prior. At least 12 civilians were killed by Taliban forces in Warsaj district, as some civilians, including the former governor of Warsaj, were tortured for information on the NRF (Subhe Kabul, 11 May 2022). Taliban forces also carried out airstrikes in Warsaj, prompting civilians to flee." ([ACLED, 19 May 2022](#))

„Taliban forces have been locked for months in a shadowy on-again, off-again battle with opposition fighters based in the Panjshir Valley [...] the province has long been an anti-Taliban stronghold and remains the only significant pocket of resistance to the group since the fall of Kabul last August. [...] Taliban officials flatly deny there is any violence in the area, even though thousands of the group's

forces are visible across the valley. [...] Yet residents say assaults on Taliban positions are a regular occurrence, and dozens of people have been killed, with some civilians imprisoned in sweeping arrests. [...] The clashes in Panjshir are unlikely to pose an imminent threat to the Taliban's control of the province or the country" ([The Washington Post, 8 June 2022](#)).

"Pakistani military forces carried out airstrikes along the Durand Line – the Afghanistan-Pakistan border – last week for the first time since the Taliban took power in August 2021. Taking place overnight on 15 April, airstrikes in Kunar, Paktika, and Khost provinces killed at least 45 civilians. While the Pakistani government did not confirm the airstrikes, it stated that it had recently asked the Taliban to secure border regions from militant groups active in Afghanistan." ([ACLED, 20 April 2022](#))

"In the night to 16.04.22, Pakistani airstrikes targeted the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terrorist group in Afghanistan's Khost and Kunar provinces, killing at least 40 civilians (among them women and children). According to the Pakistani military, the operation was successful. Pakistan accuses the Afghan Taliban of not taking action against the TTP, who apparently operate from Afghanistan. For the first time, the TTP had announced a spring offensive against the Pakistani army and had carried out an attack against security forces in Pakistan the week before." ([BAMF, 25 April 2022, p. 1](#))

"The conflict [between Pakistan and the Taliban government] stems from disagreements over the legitimacy of the Durand Line, which is a boundary demarcation created when Afghanistan's King Abdul Rahman Kahn and British India's Foreign Secretary Sir Mortimer Durand signed an agreement in 1893. Since then, the 2,600-kilometer border has largely been a lawless, porous, mountainous border with largely unfrequented routes. However, the border is not without controversy. Like the previous Afghan government led by President Ashraf Ghani, the Afghan Taliban have also been against the fencing of the border along the Durand Line. If the fencing issue is not resolved diplomatically between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban government, then escalating tensions on border could eventually lead to a clash between the two sides." ([JF, 14 January 2022](#))

"The Taliban de facto authorities faced a growing number of governance and security challenges, including [...] border tensions with several of its neighbours." ([UNSC, 15 June 2022, p. 1](#))

"Since the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in August, information has trickled in about tensions building between the ethnic Uzbek, Turkmen, and Tajik communities in parts of northern Afghanistan and the mainly Pashtun Taliban fighters who have moved to the area in recent months. The growing animosity between those ethnic groups and the Taliban ignited briefly in Faryab's provincial capital of Maimana in mid-January when protests over the arrest of a local leader led to fighting." ([RFE/RL, 29 January 2022](#))

"In Samangan province, an Uzbek Taliban commander was arrested on 05.05.22 for allegedly helping the NRF. On 07.05.22, a total of 300 Pashtun Taliban were moved to nearby Badakhshan province to replace Tajik and Uzbek Taliban in the region." ([BAMF, 9 May 2022, p. 1](#))

"On 16.05.22, the Taliban engaged in skirmishes with Tajik border guards in the border town of Sher Khan in Kunduz province. On 19.05.22, the Tajik military launched operations on the border with Afghanistan after suspected armed groups from Afghanistan incited insurgency in Tajikistan's border provinces. On the same day, the Taliban reportedly closed the Sher Khan border crossing and confiscated Tajik trucks. Tajikistan [...] sees the Taliban's seizure of power as a threat to the region and is apparently sheltering and supporting the National Resistance Front (NRF, also Tajik)." ([BAMF, 23 May 2022, p. 1](#))

"The US has killed the leader of al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, in a drone strike in Afghanistan, President Joe Biden has confirmed. He was killed in a counter-terrorism operation carried out by the CIA in the Afghan capital Kabul on Sunday." ([BBC, 3 August 2022](#)) For more information on this incident and the Taliban's ties to al-Qaida, see section 3.1.2 of this document.

As of 15 May 2022, 789 590 persons have been internally displaced since January 2021 ([UNHCR, 15 May 2022, p. 1](#)). Between 10 April and 10 May 2022 alone, UNHCR documented 1,155 new conflict-induced IDPs ([UNHCR, 14 July 2022, p. 1](#)).

2. The Taliban

Detailed Information on the structures and different factions within the Taliban can be found in the report on the COI webinar with Katja Mielke and Emran Feroz. ([ACCORD, March 2022](#))

"The Taliban is an umbrella organization comprising loosely connected insurgent groups, including more or less autonomous groups with varying degrees of loyalty to the leadership and the idea of The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The Taliban's organisational structure is hierarchical, with an Amir ul – Muminin (Commander of the Faithful) on the top. He gives moral, religious and political statements, oversees judges, courts, and political commissions, assigns shadow governors and is in command of the military organization." ([Landinfo, 13 May 2016, p. 4](#))

"After first seizing power in the 1990s, the Taliban introduced and supported punishments according to their strict interpretation of Islamic law: they publicly executed murderers and adulterers and amputated thieves' limbs. Under the leadership of the reclusive Mullah Mohammed Omar (who is thought to have died in 2013), the Taliban also banned television, music, movies, make-up, and stopped girls aged 10 and over from attending school." ([BBC, 7 September 2021](#))

"The death in 2013 of its original leader, Mullah Umar, was revealed in a July 2015 Taliban announcement. In a disputed selection process, he was succeeded by Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, who in turn was killed by a U.S. unmanned aerial vehicle strike on May 21, 2016. Several days later, the Taliban confirmed his death and announced the selection of one of his deputies, Haibatullah Akhunnazadeh, as the new Taliban leader. The group announced two deputies: Mullah Yaqub (son of Mullah Umar) and Sirajuddin Haqqani (operational commander of the Haqqani Network)." ([CRS, 19 May 2017, p. 16](#))

"Hibatullah Akhunnazadeh became the supreme commander of the Taliban in May 2016, and is now leader of the so-called Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. In the 1980s, he participated in the Islamist resistance against the Soviet military campaign in Afghanistan, but his reputation is more that of a religious leader than a military commander. Akhunnazadeh worked as head of the Sharia Courts in the 1990s. ([BBC, 7 September 2021](#))

"Sirajuddin Haqqani, the acting interior minister, is head of the militant group known as the Haqqani network, who are affiliated with the Taliban and have been behind some of the deadliest attacks in the country's two-decade-long war - including a truck bomb explosion in Kabul in 2017 that killed more than 150 people. Unlike the wider Taliban, the Haqqani network has been designated a foreign terrorist organisation by the US. It also maintains close ties to al-Qaeda." ([BBC, 8 September 2021](#)) More detailed information on Taliban-associated groups can be retrieved in the chapter of the same name below.

"In the year following the US-Taliban peace deal of February 2020 - which was the culmination of a long spell of direct talks - the Taliban appeared to shift its tactics from complex attacks in cities and on military outposts to a wave of targeted assassinations that terrorised Afghan civilians.

The targets - journalists, judges, peace activists, women in positions of power - appeared to suggest that the Taliban had not changed their extremist ideology, only their strategy.[...] The group is thought to now be stronger in numbers than at any point since they were ousted in 2001 - with up to 85,000 full time fighters, according to recent Nato estimates." ([BBC, 3 July 2021](#))

A September 2021 policy brief by the research institute swisspeace outlines recent changes in the "new" Taliban's (media) appearance. ([Swisspeace, September 2021](#))

"[On 7 September 2021, the Taliban] announced their new interim administration. It is all-male, almost all-Pashtun, almost all clerical and all-Taliban. Set alongside their sustained military campaign in the Panjshir, the only province that held out against the Taliban takeover, and their violent response to protests across the country, it seems the movement's priorities have coalesced - internal cohesion, monopolisation of power, silencing of open dissent and dividing the 'spoils of war', in terms of government posts, between themselves." ([AAN, 15 September 2021](#))

„What do the new appointments signify?

On 22 September, the Taliban published several new appointments, including at ministerial levels. The announcement came a day after the Chinese, Russian and Pakistani envoys met with the head of the Taliban government, Mullah Hassan Akhund, calling for more inclusive governance. The list of new appointees very slightly broadens the new government's makeup, as the interim administration is no longer composed entirely of Taliban stalwarts. Most of the new appointees either have no prior affiliation with the group or are not prominent members of it. Key appointees such as the ministers for trade and public health, and their deputies, do not appear to have past affiliations with the Taliban. Others with no formal connection with the movement include Nazar Mohammad Mutmaeen, head of the National Olympic Committee, and Najeebullah, head of atomic energy. Still, many of these outsiders are considered sympathetic to the Taliban.

Has the interim government now become inclusive?

Yes, slightly. With these additions, the new government now counts four Tajiks, two Uzbeks, one Turkmen, one Hazara, one Nuristani (an ethnic group native to Nuristan province) and one Khwaja (claiming Arabic lineage, Khwajas generally speak Dari as their native tongue). With a total of 53 members, this expanded cabinet is a small gesture toward including ethnic minorities, though it is still dominated by Pashtuns. Several of the new names appear to have been selected, in part, because of their ethnic backgrounds or professional experience. Noorudin Azizi, the new trade minister, is from Panjshir province, where the Taliban have been fighting the remnants of the Northern Resistance Front (NRF). [...]

Do the appointments include women or former establishment figures?

Despite continued international pressure, the Taliban have so far failed to appoint any women in their cabinet. [...]

Similarly, the Taliban have resisted calls from regional and Western governments to include figures from the previous Western-backed political establishment. Taliban interlocutors claim to Crisis Group that despite an internal push by some members to include figures associated with the former system in the new government, most of the top Taliban leadership has so far opposed such a move due to the perception that former politicians were corrupt and discredited. Perhaps more importantly, there were also concerns among the Taliban that if they moved to bring in either women or former politicians, they could risk backlash from the rank and file, who might view the leadership as betraying their ideals." (ICG, 28 September 2021)

"Media have reported that internal tensions within the senior Taliban leadership team resulted in clashes between bodyguards on 11 September leading to deputy prime minister Abdul Ghani Baradar remaining out of the public eye until 15 September. The tensions were apparently between Baradar and Khalil ur-Rahman Haqqani, the current Taliban minister for refugees. Sources from a variety of different media sites have stated that tensions had been exacerbated over the structure of the interim government. There is a conflict between "moderates" and the more hardline element within the senior Taliban leadership team over the formation of the government." (Insecurity Insight, 12 October 2021, p. 1)

"The foremost internal division within the Taliban has been defined by opposing views between moderate and hardline blocs. The moderate bloc consists of senior Taliban [...], who believe the Taliban must engage in working relationships with foreign partners and be integrated into the international system, especially global finances. The moderate bloc has strategized to keep these relationships minimally functional, with the Taliban making as few concessions as possible. The hardline bloc [...] has taken a more ideological approach, with less emphasis on relations with the international community. It views any concessions as contrary to its reasons for jihad for the past 20 years and fundamentally in opposition to its interpretation of sharia. Independent, to a degree, from either bloc are Sirajuddin Haqqani and the Haqqani Network [...] who are seen to be more closely aligned with the hardliners but adopt a pragmatic approach to securing Taliban interests." (UNSC, 26 May 2022, p. 8)

"According to one Member State, in order to confront the threat from ISIL-K, the Taliban have created three battalions of special forces. These so-called "red units" are the Badri 313 Battalion [...] the Fateh Force, [...] and the Umari Force [...]. To bolster expertise, the Taliban have attempted to recruit former Afghan National Army personnel and senior security authorities from the previous Government. A separate recruitment campaign has focused on former Afghan National Army pilots." (UNSC, 26 May 2022, p. 11)

"Since taking power, however, there have been many factors creating internal tensions within the [Taliban] movement, leading to perceptions that the Taliban's governance has been chaotic, disjointed and prone to reversing policies and going back on promises. [...] Further stresses revolve around power, resources, and regional and ethnic divisions. Notwithstanding some tensions, the Taliban movement remains largely cohesive and unified for the time being." (UNSC, 26 May 2022, p. 6)

"On 30 October, the Taliban called on the United States and other countries to recognise their authority in Afghanistan. In a joint statement at the closure of the Tehran-hosted regional talks on Afghanistan on 27 October, the foreign ministers of Iran, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Russia highlighted that forming a broad-based political structure would be the only solution to the problems in the country. While urging for the protection of the fundamental rights of all Afghans, the foreign ministers also called for a non-interference approach, reiterating the need for support of 'national sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, and non-interference in its internal affairs'. While so far no country has formally recognised the Taliban government, senior officials from a number of countries, including Iran, have met with the de facto government's leadership both in Kabul and abroad. Reportedly, the Taliban's diplomats have started working in Afghanistan's mission in Pakistan and the European Union is planning to reopen its diplomatic mission in Afghanistan in the upcoming month." (UNHCR, 2 November 2021, pp. 1-2)

2.1 Preliminary reports after the Taliban's seizure of power

"The Taliban have attempted to portray to the world that they will respect human rights - however the ground reality is far from this. This briefing specifically documents the repression of the rights of women and girls, the intimidation of human rights defenders, the crackdown on freedom of expression, the reprisals on former government workers as well as the challenges faced by refugees

and those who wish to leave Afghanistan. These incidents form a litany of abuses that demonstrate the need for an independent monitoring mechanism in response to the human rights situation in Afghanistan.” (AI et al., [September 2021](#))

“After seizing Kabul, Taliban fighters erected checkpoints throughout the capital and increased patrols, without uniforms. Reports also suggested that some people had been shot after having crossed checkpoints without approval. While statements by the Taliban included instructions not to enter anyone’s house without permission and that ‘life, property and honour’ would be protected, numerous reports emerged of the Taliban conducting house-to-house searches for government personnel, weapons and property, and in some cases confiscation of the latter. Some reports indicated that the Taliban were allegedly searching for people who had ‘worked with foreigners’ and at times, beating them.” (UNGA, [2 September 2021](#))

“Taliban forces advancing in Ghazni, Kandahar, and other [Afghan](#) provinces have summarily executed detained soldiers, police, and civilians with alleged ties to the Afghan government, Human Rights Watch said today. Residents from various provinces told Human Rights Watch that Taliban forces have in areas they enter, apparently identify residents who worked for the Afghan National Security Forces. They require former police and military personnel to register with them and provide a document purportedly guaranteeing their safety. However, the Taliban have later detained some of these people incommunicado and, in cases reported to Human Rights Watch, summarily executed them.” (HRW, [3 August 2021](#))

“Following the fall of the Spin Boldak district of Kandahar province to the Taliban and the publication of reports of the killing of civilians by the group, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) despite serious challenges in the area investigated and documented the incident and, in order to obtain reliable and accurate information, while referring to reliable local sources, it also interviewed a number of victims’ families and eyewitnesses. The evidence indicates that the Taliban, in violation of international humanitarian law, committed retaliatory killings of civilians and looted the property of several local residents, including the properties related to former and current government officials.” (AIHRC, [31 July 2021](#))

“Some renowned Afghan figures and politicians [sic] in the past government had fled the country after the regime change. But the caretaker government approved in March the formation of a ‘Commission to Contact Afghan Figures in Foreign Countries for Reconciliation [sic]. Last week, this commission officially [sic] started functioning by announcing its operational strategy. The commission said it would pave the way for the return of all political and military Afghan personalities from foreign countries [sic]. After their return, nobody will have the right of their arrest or detention. Some political commentators welcomed the formation of the Reconciliation [sic] Commission. However, they said the strategy regarding the political future of these personalities [sic] lacked clarity and the government [sic] should provide more details in this regard.” (Pajhwok Afghan News, [28 May 2022](#))

“Khost saw a procession on 17 August waving the black-red-green republic’s flag, while on 18 August, Taliban fighters responded violently to a demonstration in Jalalabad in which the Taliban flag was replaced, killing at least three men and wounding several others. The Taliban spokesperson subsequently sought to defuse future protests responded by saying that people could raise whatever flag they wanted.” (AAN, [19 August 2021](#))

“From 15 to 19 August, people gathered in Nangarhar and Kunar provinces to mark national flag-raising ceremonies. According to credible reports, during these three days when protests took place, the Taliban reportedly killed a man and a boy, and injured eight others, when firing in an apparent attempt to disperse the crowds. On Tuesday this week (7 September), during a protest in Herat, the Taliban reportedly shot and killed two men and wounded seven more. That same day in Kabul, credible reports indicate that the Taliban beat and detained protesters, including several women and up to 15 journalists.” (OHCHR, [10 September 2021](#))

“Peaceful protesters across various provinces in Afghanistan over the past four weeks have faced an increasingly violent response by the Taliban, including the use of live ammunition, batons and whips. On Wednesday, 8 September, the Taliban issued an instruction prohibiting unauthorized assemblies. Yesterday, Thursday, they ordered telecommunications companies to switch off internet on mobile phones in specific areas of Kabul.” (OHCHR, [10 September 2021](#))

“In Jalalabad, the Taliban reportedly dispersed protests by firing into crowds, resulting in the death of at least one person. Reports indicated that Taliban members had physically assaulted two local journalists taking footage of the rally. Similar incidents were reported in Kunar and Khost Provinces.” (UNGA, [2 September 2021](#), p. 2)

“According to media reports, peaceful protests in Kabul, Badakhshan and Herat over the past two days have been dispersed by Taliban fighters firing rifles into the air, while some female protesters have reportedly been lashed with cables.

Amnesty International has independently verified videos of Taliban fighters firing guns into the air to disperse protests in Kabul, and also verified videos of violence against women protesters between 4 and 7 September in Kabul committed by the Taliban." ([AI, 8 September 2021](#))

"Additionally, there was a slight increase in the number of protest events last week [20 – 26 November 2021]. Small groups of women protested against Taliban policies violating women's rights in Kabul and Rukha districts. Most of the protests took place on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on 25 November. Meanwhile, hundreds of demonstrators gathered in Khost city, calling on the international community to lift economic sanctions on the Taliban government. The protesters also demand the Taliban government to resume development projects." ([ACLED, 2 December 2021](#))

"On 10.05. and 11.05.22 women protested in Kabul against the obligation to wear a full body covering (burqa) in public. They were stopped by the Taliban with weapons and the gatherings were dispersed. Journalists reporting on the protests were detained by the Taliban. The Taliban had issued a decree on 07.05.22 requiring all women nationwide to wear a burqa." ([BAMF, 16 May 2022, p. 1](#))

"The rule of law in Afghanistan has fully collapsed since the Taliban takeover, creating a situation in which lack of accountability for abuses prevails. National courts are no longer functioning, while Taliban customary courts around the country continue their work. Police and other law enforcement agencies are not carrying out their duties. Judges and prosecutors live in fear of revenge attacks by former Taliban detainees, and there is no [...] indication the Taliban intends to respect the existing legal framework and judicial processes." ([FIDH, 23 November 2021](#))

"The Taliban's notorious former head of religious police has said extreme punishments such as executions and amputations will resume in Afghanistan. Mullah Nooruddin Turabi, now in charge of prisons, told AP News amputations were 'necessary for security'. He said these punishments may not be meted out in public, as they were under previous Taliban rule in the 1990s. But he dismissed outrage over their past public executions: 'No-one will tell us what our laws should be.'" ([BBC, 25 September 2021](#))

"The Taliban say they have shot dead four alleged kidnappers and hung their bodies in public squares in the Afghan city of Herat. The gruesome display came a day after a notorious Taliban official warned that extreme punishments such as executions and amputations would resume. The men were killed in a gun battle after allegedly seizing a businessman and his son, a local official said. Local residents said a body was hung from a crane in the city centre." ([BBC, 25 September 2021](#))

"Afghanistan's Justice Ministry reiterated Monday [3 January 2022] that the country's independent lawyers will need to re-certify under a new qualification process set by the Ministry, signaling the intent of the Taliban authorities to plough ahead with plans to strip the country's legal profession of its independence.

According to the statement, the country's lawyers will be authorized to continue practicing with their previous licenses until the new certification process has been finalized.

This was the latest step in a series of efforts by the new regime to crack down on the activities of the Afghanistan Independent Bar Association (AIBA), an organization established in 2008 to oversee the licensing of new lawyers, and to champion the rule of law and social justice.

On November 14, the Taliban Cabinet decreed that the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) would gain jurisdiction over AIBA affairs. On November 23, the AIBA offices in Kabul were taken over by armed Taliban who threatened the staff and lawyers who were present with violence before ordering them to leave and installing a new president with questionable professional qualifications. 'The person appointed as the new AIBA head is said to be part of the Ministry of Justice but has no relevant experience,' according to a Kabul-based JURIST correspondent. These armed forces had apparently interpreted the Cabinet decree to indicate that the MOJ should have sole authority over licensing, as well as control of the AIBA's extensive member database and bank account." ([Jurist, 3 January 2022](#))

"The Ministry of Justice seized authority from the Afghanistan Independent Bar Association to issue licences to lawyers and appointed a caretaker for the Association on 24 November. The Ministry relayed to UNAMA that lawyers licensed by the Ministry would work independently and unimpeded and that women lawyers would be allowed to work in line with the necessary requirements." ([UNGA, 28 January 2022, p. 8](#))

„Bilal Karimi, deputy spokesman for Afghanistan's Taliban-run government, said the country's Independent Election Commission and Electoral Complaint Commission have been dissolved. He called them 'unnecessary institutes for the current situation in Afghanistan.' He said if there is a need for the commissions in the future, the Taliban government can revive them. [...] Both elections commissions were mandated to administer and supervise all types of elections in the country,

including presidential, parliamentary and provincial council elections. Karimi said the Taliban also dissolved the Ministry for Peace and the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs. He said they were unnecessary ministries in the government's current structure." ([AP, 26 December 2021](#))

"On 16.05.22, the Taliban by decree dissolved as "unnecessary" five important institutions of the former republic, among them the Afghan independent human rights commission, the secretariats of both the lower and upper houses of parliament, the national security council, the high council for national reconciliation and the independent commission for monitoring the implementation of the constitution." ([BAMF, 23 May 2022, p. 1](#))

„The abolition of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) during the expert's mission is a major setback for the country. Abolishing AIHRC appears to have left victims of human rights violations and abuses with few avenues for recourse." ([OHCHR, 26 May 2022, p. 4](#))

"The Taliban have banned hairdressers in Afghanistan's Helmand province from shaving or trimming beards, saying it breaches their interpretation of Islamic law. Anyone violating the rule will be punished, Taliban religious police say. Some barbers in the capital Kabul have said they also received similar orders. The instructions suggest a return to the strict rulings of the group's past tenure in power, despite promises of a milder form of government." ([BBC, 26 September 2021](#))

On 30 October, at least three persons were killed when gunmen presenting themselves as the Taliban attacked a wedding in Nangarhar province, in eastern Afghanistan. The Taliban spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid, denied they were acting on behalf of the de facto authorities." ([UNHCR, 2 November 2021, p. 1](#))

"The unnecessary or disproportionate use of force by the de facto authorities during protests, search operations and at checkpoints also resulted in deaths and injuries. On 13 January 2022, Taliban forces shot dead a young woman returning from a wedding party at a security checkpoint in Kabul. In late February 2022, the de facto ministry of interior reportedly issued a directive instructing de facto security personnel to refrain from firing at civilians at checkpoints. The directive reportedly also instructs de facto security forces to refrain from harassing, insulting, and beating suspects and states that de facto security forces have no right to conduct a house search without a court order or under the pretext of monitoring an accused person's residence. Further, it reportedly instructs the de facto security forces to perform their duties in the presence of lawyers and in broad daylight." ([HRC, 4 March 2022, p. 7](#))

"UNAMA HRS has recorded at least 118 instances of excessive use of force by the de facto authorities between 15 August 2021 and 15 June 2022. The majority of incidents involved the shooting of civilians at checkpoints, often because they allegedly failed to stop when signalling to do so by the de facto authorities. UNAMA HRS has also recorded instances where de facto authorities have fired indiscriminately in an attempt to control a crowd, wounding and killing people, or where they have accidentally shot people in the surrounding area when conducting law enforcement operations." ([UNAMA, July 2022, p. 18](#))

"One hundred days after the Taliban's violent and illegal seizing of power in Afghanistan, Afghan civil society is under siege. For women and girls, human rights defenders, journalists, and anyone daring to speak up for their rights, Afghanistan is not safe. In an attempt to forcefully suppress civil society and any form of dissent, the Taliban and its allies have carried out serious human rights violations and abuses, from arbitrary arrests and detentions, to torture, violent beatings, and house searches. In addition, over the past 100 days, the rule of law has collapsed. The absence of appropriate mechanisms to investigate abuses means that human rights violations remain largely unaddressed." ([FIDH, 23 November 2021](#))

"Under the Taliban rule, the rights to freedom of expression, liberty and assembly are increasingly being curtailed, and any form of dissent is met with enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and unlawful detention. Enforced disappearances of women, and arbitrary arrest of journalists and civil society activists seem to be the latest tactics adopted by the Taliban to silence voices that speak out. The nine cases that we have documented contribute to a growing pattern of arbitrary arrests, unlawful detentions and enforced disappearances by the Taliban against those who have tried to question the Taliban by way of peaceful protests or by exercising their right to freedom of expression." ([AI, 21 March 2022, p. 1](#))

"On February 22, Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid announced that the Taliban, which took over Afghanistan in August 2021, had started "clearance operations" in Kabul and nearby provinces ostensibly to search for criminals and weapons. The door-to-door searches have created an atmosphere of fear. 'Everyone is worried about Taliban's house-to-house search in Kabul,' New York Times reporter Sharif Hassan tweeted. 'Anyone I know has some sort of documents at home which link them to foreign NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] or former government. Some have books Taliban may not like or music instruments. Some destroying documents/books, others trying to hide them.'" ([HRW, 1 March 2022](#))

"The Taliban control systems holding sensitive biometric data that Western donor governments left behind in Afghanistan in August 2021, putting thousands of Afghans at risk, Human Rights Watch said today. [...] The Taliban's access to this data comes at a time when they are targeting individuals because of their past association with the former government, particularly members of the security forces, judges and prosecutors, and civil servants, including women working in these fields. The Taliban have also detained and abused people who have criticized their policies. Human Rights Watch in November documented the Taliban's killing or enforced disappearance of 47 former members of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) – military personnel, police, intelligence service members, and militia – between August 15 and October 31, with the UN reporting credible allegations of the killing of at least 130 security forces members or their relatives.

The Taliban have targeted journalists and threatened human rights activists, including women's rights activists, women working in roles the Taliban believes are unsuitable for them, and people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT).

Since the Taliban takeover on August 15, many people who believe themselves to be at risk have been in hiding and moving frequently. Taliban access to these systems may make it much harder, or impossible, for these people to remain hidden. The Taliban have also taken steps to block people from fleeing the country.

The Taliban have previously used biometric data to target people. In 2016 and 2017, journalists reported that Taliban fighters were using biometric scanners to identify and summarily execute bus passengers whom they determined were security force members, all the Afghans interviewed mentioned those incidents." ([HRW, 30 March 2022](#))

"According to reports of 15.05.22, the Taliban in Panjshir province are identifying and arresting former soldiers using biometric devices. In Ghazni province, male employees in the public administration are denied access to their office unless they wear a beard and turban. In Herat province, gender segregation has reportedly been officially introduced in parks and restaurants." ([BAMF, 16 May 2022, p. 1](#))

"UNHCR remains concerned about the risk of human rights violations against civilians in this evolving context, including women and girls, those perceived to have a current or past association with the former Afghan government, international organizations or with the international military forces." ([UNHCR, 19 November 2021](#))

"UNAMA's monitoring over the past 10 months has revealed specific concerns with regards to human rights violations carried out by de facto General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI, also called Istikhbarat) officials in a number of provinces. [...] Arrests and detentions by de facto GDI often appear to be arbitrary. In reports received by UNAMA, individuals were not informed of the specific charges against them, family members were often unaware of their whereabouts or denied visitation. In some instances, detentions were based on an individual's role as a media worker or civil society activist. The individuals interviewed had not been granted access to defense lawyers and the only mention of access to a physician was in cases where people were brought to see a doctor after having been tortured or ill-treated by the de facto GDI officials.

The cases documented to date indicate a range of forms of torture and ill-treatment by de facto GDI against detainees. Kicking, punching and slapping, beating with cables and pipes, and the use of mobile electric shock devices appear to be the most common methods." ([UNAMA, July 2022, pp. 18-19](#))

"As when they were first in power, in 1996-2001, 'promoting virtue and preventing vice' has emerged as a top priority for the new Taliban administration. In their view, it is one of the requirements of an Islamic system of government. The Taliban re-established the Ministry of Dawat wa Ershad Amr bil-Maruf wa Nahi al-Munkar or Invitation and Guidance on Promoting Virtue and Preventing Vice – often referred to by the shorthand 'Vice and Virtue' or 'Amr bil-Maruf' – when they announced the first appointments to their post-takeover cabinet on 12 September. In the same announcement, they abolished the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Its building was turned over to Vice and Virtue (see here). The move raised questions as to whether, despite the many changes in Afghan society since the 1990s, the Taliban intended to return to the unforgiving social policies of their first period in government when they banned women from leaving the house without a close male relative and without wearing a burqa, outlawed activities such as playing music and watching TV and imposed harsh punishments for those violating their code, including public beatings." ([AAN, 21 June 2022](#))

"A similar entity was active during the period of Taliban rule from 1996 to 2001. The current mandate of the de facto MPVPV and of its Departments at local level seems to include a mix of policy setting, advice, monitoring, complaints management, and enforcement authority on a range of issues connected with the de facto authorities' interpretation of what is needed to ensure the propagation of virtue and prevention of vice. While the interpretation of such broad mandate at local level may vary greatly from province to province, over the past 10 months, UNAMA has noted increasing

activity by this entity in instructing on prohibitions [...], obligations [...], and 'advice' on a seemingly open-ended set of other issues.[...] Many of the instructions issued by the de facto MPVPV involve curtailment of fundamental human rights such as freedom of movement, freedom of expression and right to privacy. In addition the uncertain legal nature of such instructions, which are often simply announced by a spokesperson in a media interview or via Twitter, leave the system open for interpretation and abuse." ([UNAMA, July 2022, pp. 22-23](#))

2.2 Vulnerable Groups

Detailed Information on the situation of vulnerable groups after the Taliban takeover can be found in the report on the COI webinar with Katja Mielke and Emran Feroz. ([ACCORD, March 2022](#))

Women and Girls

"Let me be clear: what we are witnessing today in Afghanistan is the institutionalised, systematic oppression of women. Limiting women's freedom of movement negatively impacts almost all aspects of their lives, including the ability of women and their children to access and to participate in health services, livelihood and humanitarian aid. Afghan women are rapidly facing the worst-case scenario many feared. While Afghanistan has ratified a number of international treaties including the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the de facto authorities remain far from complying with those international obligations, in both policy and practice, to respect and protect the rights of women and girls." ([OHCHR, 15 July 2022](#))

"However, the group never committed to respecting international human rights standards, as outlined in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Instead, they insisted that women's rights would be observed within the framework of their interpretation of Islam. Over the past 10 months, successive Taliban decrees have indicated that this interpretation entails excluding women from public life in Afghanistan, as in their 1996–2001 rule." ([SIGAR, 30 July 2022, p. 5](#))

"Since August 2021, the Taliban have carried out a full-on assault on the rights of women and girls, including their rights to freedom of movement, expression, work, and education. Peaceful protests by brave Afghan women demanding their rights have been violently repressed in some cases. Many reports have emerged of Taliban's threats, intimidation, restrictions, arrests, forced confessions, abductions, and enforced disappearances targeting women." ([FIDH, 1 July 2022](#))

"In less than a year, the Taliban have decimated the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan. Soon after they took control of the country's government, the Taliban said they were committed to upholding the rights of women and girls. Yet they have violated women's and girls' rights to education, work and free movement; demolished the system of protection and support for women and girls fleeing domestic violence; arbitrarily detained women and girls for infractions of the Taliban's discriminatory rules; and contributed to a surge in the rates of child, early and forced marriage in Afghanistan. Women who peacefully protested against these restrictions and policies have been harassed, threatened, arrested, forcibly disappeared, detained and tortured." ([AI, July 2022, p. 4](#))

"On 07.05.22, the Taliban passed their most restrictive decree since coming to power. All women in the country are now obliged to wear a full-body covering (burqa). If a woman is found in public without a burqa, her male guard is to be held accountable. Women who do not follow this dress code at work will be dismissed. A new department has reportedly been set up in the ministry of virtue to monitor the decree. According to reports of 02.05.22, the Taliban have also stopped issuing car driving licences to women." ([BAMF, 9 May 2022, p. 1](#))

"Taleban-Politik bleibt weiter höchst erratisch. Dafür spricht ein Fall, über den der britische Guardian am 18. Juli berichtete. Demzufolge hatte die Personalabteilung des Taleban-Finanzministeriums weibliche Angestellte aufgefordert, nicht mehr zur Arbeit zu erscheinen und stattdessen einen männlichen Familienangehörigen zu schicken, der ihre Arbeit übernehmen solle. [...] Dieser Schritt wurde offenbar wieder zurückgenommen, und zwar nach Protesten betroffener Frauen.[...] Selbst wenn die Taleban die Maßnahme wieder zurückgezogen haben, kann man sich nur an den Kopf greifen, wie jemand überhaupt auf eine solche Idee kommen kann. Immerhin handelte es sich – zumindest teilweise – um qualifiziertes Fachpersonal, darunter mindestens eine Abteilungsleiterin." ([Rüttig, 20 July 2022](#))

"[O]n 19.05.22, the Taliban's virtue ministry issued a binding order that all female TV presenters must cover their faces and thus wear a full-body veil (burqa) in their programmes. The same applies to female employees of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)." ([BAMF, 23 May 2022, p. 1](#))

"Since 15 August 2021, women have been excluded from political life, as well as the workforce more broadly. They are absent from the all-male de facto administration and occupy a limited number of civil service positions. On 18 September 2021, the de facto authorities disbanded the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), which was established in 2001 to lead government efforts to promote

gender equality. The premises of the ministry were taken over by the de facto ministry of propagation of virtue and prevention of vice. This triggered protests in Kabul from the female workers of the MoWA, who urged the Taliban to let them return to their work. [...] The de facto authorities have repeatedly asserted commitments to uphold women's rights within the framework of Islamic shari'a law [...] The de facto authorities have imposed restrictions limiting women's freedom of movement. [...] On 27 February 2022, de facto spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid told a press conference that the de facto authorities would ban Afghans from leaving the country without "an excuse" and that women would not be able to fly abroad unless accompanied by a mahram. On 2 March, Mujahid clarified these comments, saying that Afghans with "legal documents" would not be prohibited from travelling. No further clarification on the requirement for women travelling overseas to have a mahram has been issued.

38. Limitations on freedom of movement negatively impact other aspects of women's lives, such as access to health services and employment. In some provinces, women have reportedly been prevented from accessing medical care because they were not accompanied by a mahram. Women-headed households are also assessed as being at increased risk of poverty due to restrictions imposed on their freedom of movement and ability to work.

39. The change in effective authority has also had adverse impacts on access to justice, protection and support for women experiencing gender-based violence. The closure of various service providers working on gender-based violence, such as women's shelters, has left a huge institutional gap to assist and protect women and girls at risk." ([HRC, 4 March 2022, pp. 8-9](#))

"Während die aktuelle Gesetzeslage nur einzelne Bereiche abdeckt und viel Interpretationsspielraum lässt, zeichnet sich eine Steigerung von Gewalt gegen Frauen bei gleichzeitiger Verschlechterung der Schutzsituation ab." ([BAMF, 7 February 2022](#))

"Taliban leaders in Afghanistan are institutionalizing large scale and systematic gender-based discrimination and violence against women and girls, a group of UN human rights experts* said today. The experts reiterated their alarm expressed since August 2021 at a series of restrictive measures that have been introduced since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, particularly those concerning women and girls. [...] The experts also noted the increased risk of exploitation of women and girls including of trafficking for the purposes of child and forced marriage as well as sexual exploitation and forced labor.

These exclusionary and discriminatory policies are being enforced through a wave of measures such as barring women from returning to their jobs, requiring a male relative to accompany them in public spaces, prohibiting women from using public transport on their own, as well as imposing a strict dress code on women and girls. [...]

Of particular and grave concern is the continued denial of the fundamental right of women and girls to secondary and tertiary education, on the premise that women and men have to be segregated and that female students abide by a specific dress code. As such, the vast majority of girls' secondary schools remain closed and the majority of girls who should be attending grades 7-12 are being denied access to school, based solely on their gender. [...]

While these measures have affected women and girls of all spheres of life, the experts highlighted their particular concerns for women human rights defenders, women civil society activists and leaders, women judges and prosecutors, women in the security forces, women that were former government employees, and women journalists, all of whom have been considerably exposed to harassment, threats of violence and sometimes violence, and for whom civic space had been severely eroded." ([OHCHR, 17 January 2022](#))

"A rapid and steep deterioration in women's and girls' rights has left millions of Afghan women and girls deprived of access to justice, education, employment, and healthcare. These violations contravene Afghanistan's obligations under several human rights treaties to which it is a state party, including: the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

The Taliban is well aware the world is watching. As a result, the group has made numerous public statements to express their commitment to the respect of women's and girls' rights. [...] However, women's active participation and contribution to Afghan society is far from reality. Severe restrictions imposed by the Taliban's on women's rights to freedom of movement, education, health, and work are in stark contrast to the group's statements and have had a negative impact on large segments of Afghan's society." ([FIDH, 23 November 2021](#))

"The Taliban appear to have shut down the women's affairs ministry and replaced it with a department that once enforced strict religious doctrines.

On Friday, the sign at the ministry was removed, and a sign for the ministry of virtue and vice put in its place." ([BBC, 17 September 2021](#))

"The Ministry of Vice and Virtue was included in the interim government that the Taliban announced on September 7, with a cleric appointed minister. It took over the building of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, which was eliminated. During previous Taliban rule, from 1996 to 2001, the Vice and Virtue Ministry became a notorious symbol of abuse, particularly against women and girls." ([HRW, 29 October 2021](#))

"Their failure to [appoint women in government functions] exacerbates concerns about significant deterioration in women's rights under the new regime, especially after the new government announced that secondary school would resume for male students only, while claiming that female students will be able to return in the near future. No public explanation has been provided for why girls have been prevented from resuming their education. In addition, the majority of women in the public sector have not yet been allowed to return to work." ([ICG, 28 September 2021](#))

"The Taliban in Afghanistan's western city of Herat are committing widespread and serious human rights violations against women and girls, Human Rights Watch and the San Jose State University (SJSU) Human Rights Institute said today. Since taking over the city on August 12, 2021, the Taliban have instilled fear among women and girls by searching out high-profile women; denying women freedom of movement outside their homes; imposing compulsory dress codes; severely curtailing access to employment and education; and restricting the right to peaceful assembly." ([HRW, 23 September 2021](#))

"The new Taliban mayor of Afghanistan's capital Kabul has told female municipal employees to stay home unless their jobs cannot be filled by a man. Hamdullah Nomany said the Taliban 'found it necessary to stop women from working for a while.'" ([BBC, 19 September 2021](#))

"The situation for women and girls in Afghanistan remains precarious. UNICEF reported that, in the northern provinces of Afghanistan, girls were being allowed to attend schools in grades 7-12. However, the de facto Taliban head of public awareness for the Kabul municipality has said, according to local media, that female government city employees were told not to come to their jobs while officials prepare a new 'plan' to allow women to work in government offices." ([UNHCR, 26 October 2021, p. 1-2](#))

"Alam Gul Haqqani, the acting head of the passport office, said between 5,000 and 6,000 passports would be issued each day, with women being employed to process those meant for female citizens." ([Reuters, 5 October 2021](#))

"According to the interviewed journalist, in some public offices, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, women who are still officially employed show up once a month to register their attendance, even though they are still not receiving salaries due to lack of resources. The women who are still physically part of the daily workforce in Afghanistan are mainly healthcare workers and some teachers, and many of them have not been paid either. [...] According to the Afghan professor of law, women employed in the private sector have largely been allowed to continue their work." ([DIS, December 2021, p. 19](#))

"The policy of requiring a mahram, a male family member as chaperone, to accompany any woman leaving her home, is not in place according to a Kabul official but Taliban members on the street are still sometimes enforcing it, as well as harassing women about their clothing. The Taliban have systematically closed down shelters for women and girls fleeing domestic violence. Women's sports have been banned." ([IPS, 29 October 2021](#))

"The latest directive, issued by the Taliban's Ministry of Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, said women travelling for more than 45 miles (72km) should be accompanied by a close male family member.

The document calls on vehicle owners to refuse rides to women not wearing Islamic head or face coverings, although it does not say which type of covering to use. Most Afghan women already wear headscarves. It also bans the playing of music in vehicles." ([BBC, 27 December 2022](#))

"There are still about 230 Afghan female judges stranded in Afghanistan, all of them now in hiding. According to interviews with judges, and activists working on their behalf, former residences have been searched and ransacked and relatives threatened. Their careers are over, their bank accounts have been frozen, and their future as women in Afghanistan is grim,' said Judge Anisa Dhanji, a UK representative of the non-profit International Association of Women Judges, IAWJ. [...]

One Afghan judge hiding in Kabul told the IAWJ that a man she sentenced on terrorism charges had not only been released, and threatened her, but had now been appointed as a Taliban judge. Another judge said she was due to give birth imminently by planned Caesarean section, but she was

too afraid to go to a hospital and identify herself there." ([BBC, 6 October 2021](#))

"According to reports, women who have a public profile routinely face threats, detentions, abductions and little protection in place. Women associated with the previous administration are among those who have been allegedly hunted down by the Taliban. Among those are Banu Negar, a former female police officer who was killed in Ghor Province in early September 2021, and Alia Azizi, the head of Herat Women's Prison, who remains missing since 2 October 2021 after responding to a request by the Taliban to report for work." ([AI, 1 April 2022](#))

"On 22 January, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) called on the Taliban to provide information on the whereabouts and protect rights of two women rights activists, Tamana Zaryab Paryani and Parawana Ibrahimkhel, who disappeared on 19 January from Kabul [...]. The Taliban have denied any involvement in their disappearance. Paryani was among about 25 women who took part in an anti-Taliban protest on 16 January against the compulsory Islamic headscarf for women. Similar raids were reported across homes of female protesters in Kabul. Other reports claim that the Taliban's religious police have threatened to shoot women NGO workers in a north-western province of Afghanistan if they do not wear the all-covering burqa, two staff members told AFP. "The Taliban are intensifying their attacks on the civic space, and more specifically on women who are pioneers of the civic space," said Shaharзад Akbar, chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission." ([UNHCR, 23 January 2022, p. 2](#))

"The women's prison director in Herat, Afghanistan has been missing since October 2021 and is feared to have been forcibly disappeared, Human Rights Watch said today. Alia Azizi had worked under the former government but returned to her job after the Taliban took over Herat in August. [...] "It's been over six months since Alia Azizi went missing, and the Taliban authorities have yet to carry out a credible investigation," said Fereshta Abbasi, Afghanistan researcher at Human Rights Watch." ([HRW, 20 April 2022](#))

"A Taliban fighter has been arrested for shooting dead a Hazara woman at a checkpoint in the Afghan capital as she returned from a wedding, a spokesman for the group says.

The killing of Zainab Abdullahi, 25, has horrified women, who face increasing restrictions since the Taliban returned to power in August. [...] Abdullahi was 'killed by mistake', Taliban spokesman Mohammad Naeem said on Twitter, adding that the arrested fighter will be punished. Her family has been offered 600,000 Afghani (about \$5,700) for the January 13 shooting in the capital's Dasht-e-Barchi neighbourhood, the interior ministry said separately." ([Al Jazeera, 19 January 2022](#))

"The Taliban have excluded girls from Afghan secondary schools, with only boys and male teachers allowed back into classrooms. [...] Taliban officials who seized power last month said they were working to reach a decision on the matter. Many fear a return of the regime of the 1990s when the Taliban severely restricted girls' and women's rights. Under their new government, Taliban officials have said that women will be allowed to study and work in accordance with the group's interpretation of Islamic religious law." ([BBC, 18 September 2021](#))

"Secondary schools have reopened for boys but remain closed to the vast majority of girls. Women are banned from most employment; the Taliban government added insult to injury by saying women in their employ could keep their jobs only if they were in a role a man cannot fill—such as being an attendant in a women's toilet. Women are mostly out of university, and due to new restrictions it is unclear when and how they can return. Many female teachers have been dismissed." ([IPS, 29 October 2021](#))

"The late-night reversal of a decision by Taliban authorities in Afghanistan to allow girls from grades 7 to 12 to return to school has been met with distress from within the country and internationally – and fear that it could herald further restrictions. A Taliban spokesperson from the Ministry of Education on March 23 made the announcement reversing an earlier decision that all students would be expected to return to school, including girls." ([IPS, 28 March 2022](#))

"What's more, in a number of provinces local Taliban officials had already begun allowing girls' secondary schools to re-open last year, despite the lack of a central official policy. Privately, Taliban figures admit the issue of female education is a controversial one amongst their most hardline elements. The chaotic nature of this policy reversal, suggests the groups' central leadership decided at the last minute to overrule their own Ministry of Education, nervous about alienating their most ultra-conservative members." ([BBC, 23 March 2022](#))

"All girls' schools were expected to open at the beginning of 1401 solar year [mid-March 2022], but the Afghan caretaker government delayed the schools' opening until further notice. The Ministry of Education says it has worked on a plan to reopen the schools after approval from the leadership of the government." ([Pajhwok, 8 May 2022](#))

"The Taliban has issued a decree barring forced marriage in Afghanistan, saying women should not be considered 'property' and must consent to marriage, but questions remain about whether the group [...] would extend women's rights around work and education. The decree was announced on Friday by the reclusive Taliban chief, Hibatullah Akhunzada [...] 'Both (women and men) should be equal,' said the decree, adding that 'no one can force women to marry by coercion or pressure'. The decree did not mention a minimum age for marriage, which previously was set at 16 years old.

The group also said a widow will now be allowed to re-marry 17 weeks after her husband's death, choosing her new husband freely. [...] Longstanding tribal traditions have held it customary for a widow to marry one of her husband's brothers or relatives in the event of his death.

The Taliban leadership says it has ordered Afghan courts to treat women fairly, especially widows seeking inheritance as next of kin. The group [...] also said it had asked government ministers to spread awareness about women's rights across the population." (Al Jazeera, 3 December 2021)

"On 3 December, the Taliban leader issued a decree on the rights of women, which included upholding their right to consent to marriage and instructing the de facto Supreme Court to adjudicate cases involving women. While welcomed by some, the decree was criticized for failing to address the full spectrum of women's rights, including granting women the right to work and girls the right to education beyond grade six, or 11 to 12 years of age." (UNGA, 28 January 2022, p. 2)

The following recently published reports provide more detailed information on the situation of women in Afghanistan:

- OMCT – World Organisation Against Torture, PAHRA - Philippine Alliance for Human Rights Advocates: Women break the silence; Gender-based torture in Asia, 2022
<https://www.omct.org/site-resources/legacy/Gender-based-Torture-in-Asia.pdf>
- BAMF – Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Germany): Länderreport 48; Afghanistan: Die Situation von Frauen, 1996 - 2022 (Stand: 01/2022), 7 February 2022 (available at ecoi.net)
<https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2069072.html>
- UN Women – UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women / UNHCR – UN High Commissioner for Refugees : Afghanistan Crisis Update; Women and Girls in Displacement, 1 March 2022 (available at ecoi.net)
https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2068691/Afghanistan_factsheet.pdf
- AI – Amnesty International: Death in Slow Motion. Women and Girls under Taliban Rule, July 2022 (available at ecoi.net)
<https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2076021/ASA1156852022ENGLISH.pdf>

Members of the former government and national security forces

"Despite announcements of general amnesties for those who worked for or defended the former Government, we continue to receive credible allegations of killings, enforced disappearances, and other violations that are not being addressed by the judiciary." (UNAMA, 26 January 2022)

"Between 15 August 2021 and 15 June 2022, UNAMA HRS recorded 160 extrajudicial killings (including 10 women), 178 arbitrary arrests and detentions, 23 instances of incommunicado detention and 56 instances of torture and ill-treatment of former ANDSF and government officials carried out by the de facto authorities. These incidents occurred in almost all parts of the country and have affected a range of individuals with differing levels of affiliation to the former government: from senior officials to drivers, bodyguards and relatives of former government and ANDSF members." (UNAMA, July 2022, pp. 13-14)

"Taliban forces unlawfully killed 13 ethnic Hazaras, including a 17-year-old girl, in Afghanistan's Daykundi province after members of the security forces of the former government surrendered, a new investigation by Amnesty International has revealed. The killings happened in Kahor village of Khidir district on 30 August. Eleven of the victims were former members of the Afghan National Defence Security Forces (ANDSF), and two were civilians. According to eyewitness testimony gathered by Amnesty International, the Taliban extrajudicially executed nine of the ANDSF members after they had surrendered, killings that appear to be war crimes. Two civilians were killed as they attempted to flee, including a 17-year-old girl shot when the Taliban opened fire on a crowd of people." (AI, 5 October 2021)

"Afghan military pilots who fled to Tajikistan when the Taliban seized power in Kabul say the militant group is pressuring them to return to Afghanistan by threatening to kill their relatives. Trained by the United States, the Afghan pilots say their documents have been completed for traveling and they hope they will soon be able to go to the United States. But two Afghan pilots who are sheltering at sanatoriums on the outskirts of Dushanbe told RFE/RL's Tajik Service on October 23 that the Taliban is now trying to force them to return to Afghanistan. One Afghan pilot, speaking on condition of anonymity, told RFE/RL that his son back in Afghanistan was beaten by the Taliban and that the

militants threatened to kill the boy if the pilot did not return. Another pilot told RFE/RL that Taliban militants have gone to the homes of several of his family members to demand that the pilot return to Afghanistan. He told RFE/RL that the Taliban has a list of the names of all 143 Afghan pilots now in Tajikistan. He said Taliban authorities are increasing pressure on all of the pilots by threatening their relatives in Afghanistan. Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid denied that the Taliban is threatening the relatives of the pilots." ([RFE/RL, 23 October 2021](#))

"This report documents the summary execution or enforced disappearance of 47 former members of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)—military personnel, police, intelligence service members, and paramilitary militia—who had surrendered to or were apprehended by Taliban forces between August 15 and October 31, 2021. The report focuses on Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar, and Kunduz provinces, but the cases reflect a broader pattern of abuses reported in Khost, Paktiya, Paktika, and other provinces. [...]

Summary killings and enforced disappearances have taken place despite the Taliban's announced amnesty for former government civilian and military officials and reassurances from the Taliban leadership that they would hold their forces accountable for violations of the amnesty order. In the weeks before the Taliban overran Kabul, revenge killings, including the targeting of government officials, were already on the increase in major cities and along key highways. This was evident in July, when Taliban forces escalated their operations around Kandahar city and carried out summary executions of surrendered and captured members of the security forces. Similar patterns have emerged in many other provinces, including since August 15.

The Taliban, through their intelligence operations and access to employment records that the former government left behind, have identified new targets for arrest and execution. Baz Muhammad, originally from Paktika province, had been employed in Kandahar by the National Directorate of Security (NDS), the former state intelligence agency. Around September 30, Taliban forces came to his house in Kandahar city and arrested him; relatives later found his body. The murder, about 45 days after the Taliban had taken over the country, suggests that senior officials ordered or were at least aware of the killing. These continuing executions have generated fear among former government officials and others who might have believed that the Taliban takeover would bring an end to the violence characteristic of the armed conflict.

The Taliban leadership has directed members of surrendering ANSF units to register with them to receive a letter guaranteeing their safety. Under this amnesty program, individuals who have registered have been screened for ties to particular military, police, militia, and special forces units, or to commanders or former provincial authorities, in addition to being required to surrender weapons. However, the Taliban have used these screenings to detain and summarily execute or forcibly disappear individuals within days of their registration, leaving their bodies for their relatives or communities to find." ([HRW, November 2021, p. 1-2](#))

"However, according to the Afghan professor of law, the treatment of Afghans associated with the previous government by the Taliban has varied depending on their professions and previous tasks. As an example hereof, he explained that health workers and people employed in the health sector have largely not been targeted by the Taliban. The same is true for people employed in the education sector, although there have been restraints on the curricula in some parts of the country, because education has been regarded as somewhat controversial. The London-based journalist and the Kabul-based journalist shared this view that the treatment of Afghans associated with the previous government has varied depending on what job they previously held." ([DIS, December 2021, p. 24](#))

"Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan said they will investigate cases of former security personnel being kidnapped, tortured, and arrested by rank and file of IEA. A spokesperson of the IEA Ahmadullah Wasiq said that they are fully committed to the general amnesty announced by Supreme Leader Hebtullah Akhundzada and will not allow anyone to violate amnesty. Ahmadullah Wasiq said that all cases of the former commanders, security officials, and activists being mistreated by Taliban affiliates [sic].

It comes a day after the Supreme Leader himself in a meeting with the provincial officials of Kandahar asked the Taliban affiliates to respect his general amnesty and stop extrajudicial punishment.

'The cases are not to that extent that is shown on social media. Places, where mistreatment is seen, will be fully under our surveillance.' Said Wasiq.

The reactions from the IEA come after videos of a former Afghan commander being tortured by a Taliban affiliate went viral on social media." ([KP, 31 December 2021](#))

Shiite minority and Hazara

"Between August 2021 and June 2022, the most significant contributors to civilian harm were IED attacks on 'soft' (non-military) targets such as mosques, public parks, schools, and public transportation, with the majority of incidents claimed by, or attributed to, ISIL-KP. In many instances, the target was ethnic and/or religious minorities – namely Hazara Shias, Shia Muslims generally and Sufi Muslims." ([UNAMA, July 2022, pp. 10-11](#))

"The Hazara-Shia community in west Kabul city, particularly its sprawling neighbourhood Dasht-e Barchi, has been the target of some of the city's deadliest attacks, especially since 2016. The community has particularly been hit hard in west Kabul, but Hazaras and Shias have also been persistently targeted elsewhere in Afghanistan. [...] After the Taliban first took over in August 2021, the neighbourhood experienced a short-lived respite from attacks but has since become the scene of a new cycle of assassinations and bombings, leaving its ethnic Hazara and Shia Muslim residents particularly vulnerable to an unrelenting campaign of targeted killings." ([AAN, 17 January 2022](#))

"Taliban fighters massacred nine ethnic Hazara men after taking control of Afghanistan's Ghazni province last month, Amnesty International said today. On-the-ground researchers spoke to eyewitnesses who gave harrowing accounts of the killings, which took place between 4-6 July in the village of Mundarakht, Malistan district." ([AI, 19 August 2021](#))

"Despite repeated Taliban promises to honour minority rights, the ABC has confirmed reports of hundreds of Hazara families [...] being ordered out of their homes and off their farmlands since the Taliban took power on August 15. Many are now living in tents or sheltering under trees. Most evictions have happened in remote rural areas where population numbers are unclear and, without internet and phone services, information is difficult to confirm." ([ABC, 15 October 2021](#))

"In early October 2021, the Taliban and associated militias forcibly evicted hundreds of Hazara families from the southern Helmand province and the northern Balkh province. These followed earlier evictions from Daikundi, Uruzgan, and Kandahar provinces. Since the Taliban came to power in August, the Taliban have told many Hazaras and other residents in these five provinces to leave their homes and farms, in many cases with only a few days' notice and without any opportunity to present their legal claims to the land. A former United Nations political analyst said that he saw eviction notices telling residents that if they did not comply, they 'had no right to complain about the consequences.' [...] 'The Taliban are forcibly evicting Hazaras and others on the basis of ethnicity or political opinion to reward Taliban supporters,' said Patricia Gossman, associate Asia director at Human Rights Watch. These evictions, carried out with threats of force and without any legal process, are serious abuses that amount to collective punishment.' [...] The largest displacements have taken place in 15 villages in Daikundi and Uruzgan provinces, where the Taliban evicted at least 2,800 Hazara residents in September. The families relocated to other districts, leaving their belongings and crops behind. One former resident said that 'after the Taliban takeover, we received a letter from the Taliban informing us that we should leave our houses because the lands are in dispute. A few representatives went to the district officials to ask for an investigation but around five of them have been arrested.' Human Rights Watch was unable to determine if they have been released." ([HRW, 22 October 2021](#))

"Schon mit dem Abzug der ersten amerikanischen Soldat_innen Anfang Mai 2021 wuchs unter den Hazara die Angst, in Zukunft noch ungeschützt dem Terror ausgeliefert zu sein. Die Hazara-Abgeordnete Raihana Azad bezeichnete den Rückzug der US- und Nato-Truppen als Freibrief für die Terroristen des IS: „Er gibt ihnen Raum und Möglichkeiten, sich jetzt zu entfalten.“ ([AI, 15 November 2021](#))

"According to the London-based journalist and the Afghan professor of law, however, Hazaras in Afghanistan are regarded as inferior by many Taliban members as they are Shia Muslims [source: an Afghan professor of Law; a London-based journalist]. In this relation, two sources consulted for this report stated that Hazaras in Afghanistan have faced discrimination regarding access to the legal system as well as resources, since the Taliban takeover [source: a London-based journalist; an expert in Afghan security policy]". ([DIS, December 2021, p. 28](#))

Other religious minorities

"In November and December, Taliban intelligence personnel detained 28 Ahmadiyya Muslims, including minors. According to reports from international Ahmadiyya Muslim organizations, Taliban intelligence personnel physically abused the detainees and coerced some into "confessing" membership in ISIS-K. As of year's end, the Taliban had released 10 of the Ahmadis while 18 remained in detention. Some of the released minors reported that their release was conditioned upon "repenting" their Ahmadi beliefs and attending a Taliban-led madrassah every day." ([USDOS, 2 June 2022](#))

"In 2021, religious freedom conditions in Afghanistan worsened as the Taliban took control of the country on August 15. Despite initial statements from the Taliban that they had reformed some elements of their ideology, Afghans who do not adhere to the Taliban's harsh and strict

interpretation of Sunni Islam and adherents of other faiths or beliefs are at risk of grave danger. Reports indicate that the Taliban continue to persecute religious minorities and punish residents in areas under their control in accordance with their extreme interpretation of Islamic law. USCIRF has received credible reports that religious minorities, including nonbelievers and Muslims with differing beliefs from the Taliban, were harassed and their houses of worship desecrated. By year's end, the one known Jew and most Hindus and Sikhs had fled the country. Christian converts, Baha'is, and Ahmadiyya Muslims practiced their faith in hiding due to fear of reprisal and threats from the Taliban and separately from the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISIS-K)." ([USCIRF, April 2022, p. 1](#))

Journalists and media workers

"Taliban authorities have carried out far-reaching censorship and violence against Afghan media in district and provincial centers, drastically limiting critical reporting in Afghanistan, Human Rights Watch said today. The situation facing journalists outside Kabul appears much worse than inside the capital, particularly for women. Journalists in the provinces have described Taliban members threatening, detaining, and beating them and their colleagues who were trying to report the news. Many journalists have felt compelled to self-censor and report only Taliban statements and official events. Women journalists have faced the most intense repression. [...] Journalists throughout Afghanistan have said that the Taliban severely restrict their work in violation of the Afghan media law and international human rights standards on freedom of expression and the media. An estimated 80 percent of women journalists across Afghanistan have lost their jobs or left the profession since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, and hundreds of media outlets have closed." ([HRW, 7 March 2022](#))

"Journalists and cameramen from Afghan media outlets Ariana, Tolo and Etilaat-e- Roz have said that they were beaten up and detained by Taliban fighters while trying to cover protests, before having their equipment confiscated or their footage destroyed." ([AI, 8 September 2021](#))

"Afghan journalists have been harassed by the Taliban, arrested and beaten with cables. Some reporters have been subjected to mistreatment amounting to torture. Incidents involving media personnel have been on the rise in both Kabul and provincial cities since the start of the week." ([RSF, 10 September 2021](#))

"ACLED records over a dozen incidents where Taliban members have attacked journalists and have closed radio stations since mid-August." ([ACLED, 2 December 2021](#))

"Taliban intelligence officials have made death threats against journalists who have criticized Taliban officials and have required journalists to submit all reports for approval before publication. New guidelines from the Vice and Virtue Ministry dictate the dress of female journalists on television and prohibit soap operas and entertainment programs featuring female actors.

'The Taliban's new media regulations and threats against journalists reflect broader efforts to silence all criticism of Taliban rule,' said Patricia Gossman, associate Asia director at Human Rights Watch. 'The disappearance of any space for dissent and worsening restrictions for women in the media and arts is devastating.'

Several journalists said that they have been summoned by local officials immediately after publishing reports on Taliban abuses. One journalist who had reported complaints about Taliban searching houses and beating people said that the deputy governor called him into his office and told him that if he broadcast anything like that again, 'He would hang me in the town square.'

Other media staff have reported that heavily armed Taliban intelligence officials visited their offices and warned journalists not to use the word 'Taliban' in their reporting but to refer to the 'Islamic Emirate' in all publications. In one province, intelligence officials ordered local media to replace the word for suicide bomber with the word for martyr after a published report mentioned that Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani had honored the families of suicide bombers." ([HRW, 22 November 2021](#))

"Taliban authorities should immediately and unconditionally release journalists Faisal Modaris, Idris Rahimi, and Milad Azizi, and cease detaining members of the press for their work, the Committee to Protect Journalists said today.

On January 6, armed Taliban authorities detained the three journalists, all of whom work at the Kabul Lovers YouTube-based broadcaster, along with Azizi's brother Rashid Azizi, while they were at a restaurant in the Shari Naw area of Kabul's District Four, according to three people with knowledge of the situation who spoke to CPJ on the condition of anonymity, citing fear of retaliation by the Taliban, as well as posts on Twitter by local journalists and activists." ([CPJ, 11 January 2022](#))

“Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is very disturbed by the ‘11 journalism rules’ that the Taliban announced at a meeting with the media on 19 September. The rules that Afghan journalists will now have to implement are vaguely worded, dangerous and liable to be used to persecute them. [...] The first three rules, which forbid journalists to broadcast or publish stories that are ‘contrary to Islam,’ ‘insult national figures’ or violate ‘privacy,’ are loosely based on Afghanistan’s existing national media law, which also incorporated a requirement to comply with international norms, including article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The absence of this requirement in the new rules opens the door to censorship and repression, because there is no indication as to who determines, or on what basis it is determined, that a comment or a report is contrary to Islam or disrespectful to a national figure.” (RSF, 22 September 2021)

“The latest set of Taliban guidelines, which have been issued to Afghan television channels, features eight new rules. They include the banning of films considered against the principles of Sharia - or Islamic - law and Afghan values, while footage of men exposing intimate parts of the body is prohibited. Comedy and entertainment shows that insult religion or may be considered offensive to Afghans are also forbidden. The Taliban have insisted that foreign films promoting foreign cultural values should not be broadcast. Afghan television channels show mostly foreign dramas with lead female characters. A member of an organisation that represents journalists in Afghanistan, Hujjatullah Mujaddedi, said the announcement of new restrictions was unexpected. He told the BBC that some of the rules were not practical and that if implemented, broadcasters may be forced to close.” (BBC, 21 November 2021)

LGBTIQ people

“This is a really scary time to be in Afghanistan,’ Executive Director Kimahli Powell of Rainbow Railroad, the only international LGBT+ organisation on the ground in Afghanistan, told FRANCE 24 in a telephone interview.

‘We have received reports of names of suspected LGBTIQ people circulating,’ he said. In some cases, landing on one of these ad hoc lists could even prove fatal. ‘We now know for sure the Taliban has ‘kill lists’ circulating, identifying LGBTIQ+ persons.’

According to Powell, the Taliban most likely profited from the power vacuum that took place in the days and weeks leading up to the US withdrawal deadline to draw up these ‘kill lists’ by paying close attention to the names of people that foreign rights groups were trying to evacuate. [...] Powell also said the Taliban seem to have complemented these lists through active persecution, by means of ‘entrapment’ and data leaks.

‘[Some] individuals who have reached out to us have told us about how they’ve received a mystery email from someone claiming to be connected with Rainbow Railroad asking for their information and passport. That’s how we know the information has been leaked.’” (France 24, 2 November 2021)

“Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Afghans and people who do not conform to rigid gender norms in Afghanistan have faced an increasingly desperate situation and grave threats to their safety and lives under the Taliban, Human Rights Watch and OutRight Action International said in a report released today.

The 43-page report [...] is based on 60 interviews with LGBT Afghans. Many reported that Taliban members attacked or threatened them because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Others reported abuse from family members, neighbors, and romantic partners who now support the Taliban or believed they had to act against LGBT people close to them to ensure their own safety. Some fled their homes from attacks by Taliban members or supporters pursuing them. Others watched lives they had carefully built over the years disappear overnight and found themselves at risk of being targeted at any time because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. [...]

Afghanistan was a dangerous place for LGBT people well before the Taliban retook full control of the country on August 15, 2021. In 2018, the government of then-President Ashraf Ghani passed a law that explicitly criminalized same-sex sexual relations, and the previous penal code included vague language widely interpreted as making same-sex relations a criminal offense. LGBT people interviewed had experienced many abuses because of their sexual orientation or gender identity prior to the Taliban’s return to power [...] However, when the Taliban [...] regained control of the country, the situation dramatically worsened. The Taliban reaffirmed the previous government’s criminalization of same-sex relations, and some of its leaders vowed to take a hard line against the rights of LGBT people.” (HRW, 26 January 2022)

“The journalist [Lynne O’Donnell, an Australian writer who presently writes a column for Foreign Policy magazine] said that the [Taliban] disapproved of her reporting on LGBTQ persons and asserted that there were ‘no gays’ in the country.” (KP, 21 July 2022)

3. Other actors

"Although these rapid developments in the conflict have put the Taliban in control of all of Afghanistan but the Panjshir Valley and other small pockets of resistance, it should be noted that the Taliban does not constitute the only actor in the country." ([DIS, September 2021](#), p. 12)

3.1 Taliban-associated groups

3.1.1 Haqqani Network

Detailed Information on the different factions within the Taliban can be found in the report on the COI webinar with Katja Mielke and Emran Feroz. ([ACCORD, March 2022](#))

„[T]he Haqqani Network (HQN) was formed in the late 1980s, around the time of the then-Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. HQN's founder Jalaluddin Haqqani established a relationship with Usama bin Laden in the mid-1980s and joined the Taliban in 1995. After the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001, Haqqani retreated to Pakistan where, under the leadership of his son Sirajuddin, HQN continued to direct and conduct terrorist activity in Afghanistan. In 2015, Sirajuddin Haqqani was appointed Deputy Leader of the Taliban.“ ([USDOS, 16 December 2021](#))

"The 'Haqqani Network,' is often cited by U.S. officials as a potent threat to U.S. and allied forces and interests, and a 'critical enabler of Al Qaeda'. [...] Some see the Haqqani Network as on the decline. The Haqqani Network had about 3,000 fighters and supporters at its zenith during 2004-2010, but it is believed to have far fewer currently. However, the network is still capable of carrying out operations, particularly in Kabul city. [...] The group apparently has turned increasingly to kidnapping to perhaps earn funds and publicize its significance." ([CRS, 19 May 2017](#), p. 20)

"Strength: HQN [Haqqani Network] is estimated to have between 3,000 and 5,000 fighters.

Location/Area of Operation: Afghanistan and Pakistan

Funding and External Aid: HQN is funded primarily from taxing local commerce, extortion, smuggling, and other licit and illicit business ventures. In addition to the funding it receives as part of the broader Afghan Taliban, the group receives some funds from donors in Pakistan and the Gulf." ([USDOS, 16 December 2021](#))

"After the death of his father, Jalaluddin Haqqani, he [Sirajuddin Haqqani] became the new leader of the Haqqani network, which has been credited with some of the most violent attacks that have occurred in Afghanistan against Afghan forces and their Western allies in recent years. The Haqqani network is currently one of the region's most powerful and feared militant groups. Some say it is even more influential than the Islamic State group in Afghanistan." ([BBC, 7 September 2021](#))

Based on a Skype-interview with "Sune Engel Rasmussen (SER), a well-informed journalist with extensive and updated knowledge about the situation in Afghanistan" the Danish Immigration service (DIS) states that the Haqqani network constitutes the most anti-Western part of the Taliban and will likely outline the Taliban's policy in the future. They are further said to have a very close relationship to al-Qaeda and also have some form of connection to the Islamic State in Afghanistan (ISKP). Furthermore, they report that there is consensus between the (former) Afghan security services and Western intelligence that the Haqqani network has facilitated and contributed to the very bloody terrorist attacks carried out by the ISKP in Kabul, where the victims have primarily been Hazaras ([DIS, September 2021](#), p. 38).

"Following the Taliban takeover, the Haqqani Network moved quickly to secure control of certain key portfolios and ministries: interior, intelligence, passports and migration. Prominent de facto ministerial positions secured by the Haqqani Network include those occupied by de facto Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani [...] and de facto Minister for Refugees Khalil Ahmed Haqqani [...]. 11 Responsibilities associated with these roles appear carefully chosen, as the ministries encompass the issuing of identity cards, passports and the monitoring of persons entering and exiting the country. The Haqqani Network has also become the best militarily equipped faction and controls a number of armed formations, including the elite Badri 313 Battalion. The Haqqani Network now largely controls security in Afghanistan, including the security of the capital, Kabul." ([UNSC, 26 May 2022](#), p. 9)

"The Haqqani Network is still regarded as having the closest links to Al-Qaida [...] The Haqqani Network was not assessed to share any links, other than possibly at the local, lower levels, with ISIL-K members. [...] According to one Member State, control of the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations gives the Haqqani Network further points of contact with the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) [...]. Sirajuddin Haqqani has reportedly been relied upon more than anyone else in the de facto administration to act as an intermediary between TTP and Pakistan." ([UNSC, 26 May 2022](#), pp. 10-11)

3.1.2 Al Qaeda

"From 2001 until 2015, Al Qaeda was considered by U.S. officials to have only a minimal presence (fewer than 100) in Afghanistan itself, operating mostly as a facilitator for insurgent groups and mainly in the northeast. However, in late 2015 U.S. Special Operations forces and their ANDSF partners discovered and destroyed a large Al Qaeda training camp in Qandahar Province—a discovery that indicated that Al Qaeda had expanded its presence in Afghanistan. In April 2016, U.S. commanders publicly raised their estimates of Al Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan to 100-300, and said that relations between Al Qaeda and the Taliban are increasingly close. Afghan officials put the number of Al Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan at 300- 500." ([CRS, 19 May 2017, p. 17](#))

"Al Qaeda (AQ) is still assessed to have a presence in Afghanistan and its decades-long ties with the Taliban appear to have remained strong in recent years. In May 2021, U.N. sanctions monitors reported that Al Qaeda 'has minimized over communications with Taliban leadership in an effort to 'lay low' and not jeopardize the Taliban's diplomatic position.' In October 2020, Afghan forces killed a high-ranking AQ operative in Afghanistan's Ghazni province, where he reportedly was living and working with Taliban forces, further underscoring questions about AQ-Taliban links and Taliban intentions with regard to Al Qaeda. In general, U.S. government assessments indicate that the Taliban are not fulfilling their counterterrorism commitments concerning Al Qaeda. For example, in its report on the final quarter of 2020, the Office of the Inspector General for the Department of Defense relayed an assessment from the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) that the Taliban maintain ties to Al Qaeda and that some AQ members are 'integrated into the Taliban's forces and command structure.' In a semiannual report released in April 2021, the Department of Defense stated, 'The Taliban have maintained mutually beneficial relations with AQ-related organizations and are unlikely to take substantive action against these groups.'" ([CRS, 11 June 2021, pp. 1-2](#))

"The security situation in Afghanistan remains fragile, with uncertainty surrounding the peace process and a risk of further deterioration. As reported by the Monitoring Team in its twelfth report to the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) (see S/2021/486), Al-Qaida is present in at least 15 Afghan provinces, primarily in the eastern, southern and south-eastern regions. Its weekly Thabat newsletter reports on its operations inside Afghanistan. Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) operates under Taliban protection from Kandahar, Helmand and Nimruz Provinces." ([UNSC, 21 July 2021, p. 14](#))

"Al-Qaeda is bound to the Taliban by a pledge of allegiance - or 'bay'ah' - which was first offered in the 1990s by Osama Bin Laden to his Taliban counterpart Mullah Omar. The pledge has been renewed several times since, although it has not always been publicly acknowledged by the Taliban.

Under the 2020 peace deal with the US, the Taliban agreed not to allow al-Qaeda or any other extremist group to operate in areas under their control. They reiterated this vow days after the takeover of Kabul on 15 August. But they do not appear to have publicly rejected al-Qaeda either. [...]

And al-Qaeda reportedly maintains strong links with the Haqqani network, which is part of the Taliban." ([BBC, 7 September 2021](#))

According to DIS, the journalist and Afghanistan expert Sune Engel Rasmussen estimates that al-Qaeda will get even firmer in the future foothold in Afghanistan either directly facilitated by the Taliban or due to the emerging lawlessness in remote parts of the country. It is already known that al-Qaeda is in Afghanistan under the Taliban's protection, and it could have an impact on the situation of the Hazaras in the future ([DIS, September 2021, p. 38](#)).

"Kahl [US under-secretary of defence for policy] also suggested that al-Qaida in Afghanistan posed another and perhaps more complex problem, given its ties to the Taliban, adding that it could take al-Qaida 'a year or two' to regenerate the capability to carry out attacks outside of Afghanistan." ([UNHCR, 2 November 2021, p. 1](#))

"The makeup of the Taliban's first cabinet raises questions about the likelihood of Afghanistan becoming a base for Al-Qa'ida again. [...]

Indeed, the Taliban have proceeded to [negotiate new agreements with jihadist groups](#) after signing the deal [Doha Agreement]. According to Taliban sources, three jihadist groups (Lashkar-e Taiba, Lashkar-e Jhangvi and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) agreed to sign such deals which placed them under greater Taliban control, restricted their freedom of movement and banned them from carrying out activities against other countries. Other groups, which are more numerous, refused to sign or indulged in protracted negotiations, clearly trying to buy time. Among the latter, the most noteworthy were Al-Qa'ida and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). [...]

Still, the pro-jihadist lobby has fairly good hopes of prevailing in Kabul. The Haqqani network has a powerful presence in the cabinet, with four ministerial posts – including the minister of the interior – and has obvious influence on government activities due to its control over Kabul. In any case, Al-Qa'ida is not trusting its fate to the uncertain outcome of power struggles in Kabul and has been preparing back-up options in case its allies within the Taliban lose out. In recent months it has

encouraged the TTP to move to the Loya Paktia region, under the protection of the Haqqani network. Now old members of Al-Qa'ida are moving from Waziristan to the Afghan province of Paktia, local sources say, a further sign that it might be seeking to turn the area into its new safe haven." ([Giustozzi, 20 September 2021](#))

"The relationship between the Taliban and Al-Qaida remains close, with the latter celebrating the former's success and renewing its pledge of allegiance to Hibatullah. Member State assessments thus far suggest that Al-Qaida has a safe haven under the Taliban and increased freedom of action. Ayman al-Zawahiri has issued more frequent recorded messages since August, and there is now proof of life for him as recently as February 2022. [...] Al-Qaida has used the Taliban's takeover to attract new recruits and funding and inspire Al-Qaida affiliates globally. [...] The core Al-Qaida leadership under Aiman Muhammed Rabi al-Zawahiri [...] is reported to remain in Afghanistan: more specifically, the eastern region from Zabul Province north towards Kunar and along the border with Pakistan. [...] Al-Qaida is reported to remain in the south and east of Afghanistan, where it had a historical presence." ([UNSC, 26 May 2022, pp. 3, 12-13](#))

"The US has killed the leader of al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, in a drone strike in Afghanistan, President Joe Biden has confirmed. He was killed in a counter-terrorism operation carried out by the CIA in the Afghan capital Kabul on Sunday. [...] 'From hiding, he co-ordinated al-Qaeda's branches and all around the world, including setting priorities for providing operational guidance and calling for and inspired attacks against US targets,' the president said in a live television address from the White House. [...] The 71-year-old Egyptian doctor took over al-Qaeda after the death of Bin Laden in 2011. Mr Biden said he had given the final approval for the 'precision strike' after months of planning. Officials said Zawahiri was on the balcony of a safe house when the drone fired two missiles at him." ([BBC, 3 August 2022](#))

"The drone attack that killed al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri has plunged the Taliban into an internal crisis. The group has been humiliated by a unilateral US military action and its relentless claims that it has denied space to 'terrorists' have been exposed as lies. This imperils two core, and contradictory, Taliban goals: Maintaining the legitimacy of the group's rank and file, which includes hardened armed fighters and religious ideologues and securing badly needed financial assistance from an international community already reluctant to fund the Taliban because of concerns about its 'terrorist' ties." ([Al Jazeera, 5 August 2022](#))

3.2 Islamic State – Khorasan Province

"An Islamic State affiliate—Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP, often also referred to as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan, ISIL-K), named after an area that once included parts of what is now Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan—has been active in Afghanistan since mid-2014." ([CRS, 19 May 2017, p. 20](#))

"IS formally launched its Afghanistan operations on January 10, 2015, when Pakistani and Afghan militants pledged their allegiance to its so-called caliphate in Syria and Iraq[...]. Since then, IS-Khorasan has proved itself to be one of group's most brutal iterations, attacking soft targets, targeting Shia populations, killing Sufis and destroying shrines, as well as beheading its own dissidents, kidnapping their children and marrying off their widows. [...]

IS-Khorasan chose to base itself in Afghanistan's Nangarhar Province, a strategic location bordering Pakistan's tribal areas. Its recruits came from both sides of the porous border and could easily escape a surgical strike or military operation by fleeing to either side of the Durand line. [...]

From the very beginning, IS-Khorasan identified its targets—Shia communities, foreign troops, the security forces, the Afghan central government and the Taliban, who had not previously been challenged by an insurgent group." ([JF, 6 April 2018](#))

"At present, ISIL strongholds in Afghanistan are in the eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar, Nuristan and Laghman. The total strength of ISIL in Afghanistan is estimated at between 2,500 and 4,000 militants. ISIL is also reported to control some training camps in Afghanistan, and to have created a network of cells in various Afghan cities, including Kabul. The local ISIL leadership maintains close contacts with the group's core in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. Important personnel appointments are made through the central leadership, and the publication of propaganda videos is coordinated. Following the killing of ISIL leader Abu Sayed Bajauri on 14 July 2018, the leadership council of ISIL in Afghanistan appointed Mawlawi Ziya ul-Haq (aka Abu Omar Al-Khorasani) as the fourth 'emir' of the group since its establishment." ([UNSC, 1 February 2019, p. 7](#))

"Beyond the Taliban, a significant share of U.S. operations have been aimed at the local Islamic State affiliate, known as Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP, also known as ISIS-K). Estimates of ISKP strength generally ranged from 2,000 to 4,000 fighters until ISKP 'collapsed' in late 2019 due to offensives by U.S. and Afghan forces and, separately, the Taliban. ISKP and Taliban forces have sometimes fought over control of territory or because of political or other differences. A number of ISKP leaders have been killed in U.S. strikes since 2016, and Afghan forces arrested and captured two

successive ISKP leaders in the spring of 2020. U.S. officials caution that ISKP remains a threat, pointing to several high profile attacks attributed to the group in 2020. The United Nations reports that casualties from ISKP attacks in 2020 decreased 45% from 2019. Some suggest that the Taliban's participation in peace talks or a putative political settlement could prompt disaffected (or newly unemployed) fighters to join ISKP." (CRS, 11 June 2021, pp. 5-6)

"ISIL-K leader Sanaullah Ghafari remains alive and in control of the group, which has financial resources and has grown in strength through prison releases and new recruitments [...] While successful operations by Taliban forces may have continued to limit the ISIL-K operational tempo and territorial ambitions in the first quarter of 2022, ISIL-K recruitment has shown an upward trend [...] Member State estimates of ISIL-K strength range between 1,500 and 4,000 fighters, concentrated in remote areas of Kunar, Nangarhar and possibly Nuristan Province. Smaller covert cells are thought to be present in the northern provinces of Badakhshan, Faryab, Jowzjan, Kunduz and Takhar." (UNSC, 26 May 2022, pp. 3, 17-18)

"Despite territorial, leadership, manpower and financial losses during 2020 in Kunar and Nangarhar Provinces, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) (QDe.161) has moved into other provinces, including Nuristan, Badghis, Sari Pul, Baghlan, Badakhshan, Kunduz and Kabul, where fighters have formed sleeper cells. The group has strengthened its positions in and around Kabul, where it conducts most of its attacks, targeting minorities, activists, government employees and personnel of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces. [...] In its efforts to resurge, ISIL-K has prioritized the recruitment and training of new supporters; its leaders also hope to attract intransigent Taliban and other militants who reject the Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the United States of America and the Taliban and to recruit fighters from the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and other conflict zones." (UNSC, 21 July 2021, pp. 14-15)

According to a report of the Norwegian COI entity Landinfo, in the aftermath of the attack on August 26 2021 on the Kabul airport, it is speculated whether the ISKP is capable of challenging the Taliban's control, which could lead to the continuation of hostilities in the country. Basically, ISKP pr. August 2021 is said to be an actor with limited military force in Afghanistan. They are said to have no territorial control and the number of warriors is limited. But it can still not be excluded that they may play a role in the time to come as some Taliban fighters may disagree with the direction that the Taliban chooses, especially if they settle on a moderate and inclusive line. This can lead to some Taliban changing sides and switching to ISKP. The same could happen if divisions among the Taliban appear. Furthermore, Landinfo states that in connection with the Taliban's seizure of power, many prisoners were released, among whom some may have been affiliated with ISKP, which can increase the impact of the ISKP (Landinfo, 2 September 2021).

"According to Colin Kahl, US under-secretary of defence for policy, the Islamic State in Afghanistan could have the capability of conducting 'external operations', including attacking the US, in as little as six months." (UNHCR, 2 November 2021, p. 1)

"For the moment, IS does not control any territory in Afghanistan. The group had previously managed to establish bases in both Nangarhar and Kunar provinces, before being driven out by assaults from the Taliban, as well as Afghan army units backed by American airstrikes. The group has just a few thousand fighters compared to around 70,000 Taliban members, who are now equipped with American weapons.

But there are fears IS could end up recruiting some of the other Central Asian and Pakistani foreign fighters believed to be based in the country, as well as disillusioned Taliban members if rival factions develop within the group in the future. The US is hoping to continue using so-called 'over the horizon' strikes, launched from outside Afghanistan, to target IS. The Taliban however, are bullish about being able to take on the insurgents alone." (BBC, 29 October 2021)

"The ISKP armed group has repeatedly carried out devastating attacks that appear designed to spread terror and inflict maximum suffering particularly on Afghanistan's Hazara community," said Patricia Gossman, associate Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "The numerous attacks targeting Hazaras amount to crimes against humanity, and those responsible should be brought to justice."

The ISKP has posed a serious threat to Hazaras and other Afghan civilians since at least 2015, when the Islamist armed group began attacks on mosques, hospitals, schools, and other civilian facilities, especially in predominantly Shia neighborhoods. These attacks have killed at least 1,500 civilians and injured thousands more, mostly religious minorities.

ISKP attacks have taken place in Kabul, Jalalabad, Herat, and other cities. Some have targeted Hindu and Sikh religious minorities, as well as Hazara. The ISKP has also killed journalists, civil society activists, and health workers, and targeted schools, particularly girls' schools in Nangarhar in 2018. Their attacks first surged in 2016-2018 and then ebbed after the group suffered military setbacks in 2019. Since 2020, attacks have again increased." (HRW, 25 October 2021)

"Attacks claimed by or attributed to ISIL-KP increased and expanded beyond the movement's previous areas of focus in Kabul and eastern Afghanistan. Between 19 August and 31 December, the United Nations recorded 152 attacks by the group in 16 provinces, compared to 20 attacks in 5 provinces during the same period in 2020." ([UNGA, 28 January 2022, p. 5](#))

"A suicide bombing at a Shia Mosque in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar killed over 50 people and injured more than 80 on 15 October. A series of three explosions took place at the mosque, with one bomb detonated at the door of the mosque, and two more inside the building. [...] On 8 October a suicide attack on a Shia Mosque in the northern city of Kunduz killed at least 50 people and injured over 100, again during Friday prayers. According to CSW sources, Islamic State – Khorasan Province (IS-K), a local branch of the Islamic State group who claimed responsibility for the attack on 8 October". ([CSW, 18 October 2021](#))

"There has been surge in IS-K attacks against the Taliban and Afghan civilians in the past two months. Experts say the extremist group has been bolstered by the diminished U.S. counterterrorism presence in Afghanistan and the Taliban's inadvertent release of hundreds of IS-K inmates from prisons during its sweep of the country. [...] The Taliban has tried to downplay the threat posed by IS-K, vowing to eliminate the group. But communities caught in the middle of the intensifying war between the Taliban and IS-K said they fear more violence." ([RFE/RL, 13 October 2021](#))

"IS has been conducting an intense media warfare campaign against the Taliban to delegitimize it as a governing body and discredit them as a religious authority (Terrorism Monitor, December 16, 2021). The focus of this effort is the telling of a new history of the Taliban. According to this narrative, a once pious and honourable movement has deviated from Islam, become morally corrupted, and ultimately betrayed its founding principles." ([JF, 11 March 2022](#))

"Since August 2021, UNAMA/OHCHR received credible allegations of the killing of more than 50 persons suspected of ISIL-KP affiliation, of which around 35 were extrajudicial killings attributed to de facto authorities. While the vast majority of these incidents occurred in Nangarhar Province in October and November 2021, with a period of no incidents in January 2022, in the second week of February 2022 there were three extrajudicial killings of persons suspected of ISIL-KP affiliation recorded in the province. Many of those killed were also subjected to enforced disappearance, torture, and ill-treatment by the de facto authorities. In a number of cases, dismembered bodies were found by the roadside." ([HRC, 4 March 2022, p. 6](#))

"In 2022, ISKP has ramped up its outreach efforts to target potential supporters in Tajik communities throughout Afghanistan and the broader region ([Caravanserai, May 9](#)). IS and its supporters have accordingly expanded propaganda production in the Tajik language and have framed the Taliban as Pashtun-centric and hostile toward Afghanistan's other ethnic groups. This involves specifically noting the Taliban's oppression of and violence against Tajiks, while presenting ISKP as the vehicle for smashing Central Asia's arbitrarily drawn borders, destroying the Tajik government, and forming an IS province in Transoxiana, or 'Khorasan' ([Jihadology, June 22, 2020](#))." ([JF, 15 July 2022](#))

"Between August 2021 and June 2022, the most significant contributors to civilians harm were IED attacks on 'soft' (non-military) targets such as mosques, public parks, schools, and public transportation, with the majority of incidents claimed by, or attributed to, ISIL-KP. In many instances, the target was ethnic and/or religious minorities – namely Hazara Shias, Shia Muslims generally and Sufi Muslims." ([UNAMA, July 2022, pp. 10-11](#))

"IS accuses the Taliban of being 'apostates' for not being sufficiently hardline; the Taliban dismiss IS as heretical extremists." ([BBC, 29 October 2021](#))

3.3 National Resistance Front (NRF)

"In the Panjshir Valley, the remnants of the former Afghan government and local militias had formed the National Resistance Front (NRF) led by former Vice President of the Republic, Amrullah Saleh and Ahmad Massoud. The NRF was said to consist of several thousand men with equipment from the Afghan army prior to the Taliban capture of Panjshir. In the days following the Taliban capture of Panjshir, Massoud vowed that the NRF would continue to resist the Taliban." ([DIS, September 2021, p. 12](#))

"In the prevailing atmosphere of insecurity, several political opposition figures announced the establishment of 'resistance forces' and councils to coordinate local defence efforts, often supported by members of parliament and provincial councils, community elders and religious leaders. Following the takeover of Kabul on 15 August, First Vice President Amrullah Saleh posted on social media an invitation for Afghans to join the resistance to the Taliban, announcing himself as caretaker under the constitution." (UNGA, 2 September 2021, pp. 2-3)

"The Taliban said on Tuesday they had taken the valley [Panjshir] - the last region of Afghanistan holding out against their rule - from the Afghanistan National Resistance Front. The NRF, led by Ahmed Shah Massoud's son, said they would continue to fight." ([BBC, 10 September 2021](#))

"FRANCE 24 spoke to Ali Maisam Nazary, head of foreign relations for the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRF) [...]. Nazary claimed that the country's new rulers 'are not victorious' in Afghanistan's north-eastern Panjshir region, that the 'resistance is continuing' and that the NRF actually controls 'more than half' of Panjshir, despite Taliban 'propaganda' to the contrary." ([France24, 5 October 2021](#))

"U.S. officials have confirmed that a newly formed armed group resisting Taliban rule in Afghanistan has registered with the Justice Department to carry out political lobbying in the United States. The confirmation came in response to claims by the anti-Taliban National Resistance Front (NRF) that its international office has 'received authorization to officially open' in America. [...]"

The NRF claims it has set up bases in crucial mountainous parts Panjshir Valley, a predominantly ethnic Tajik province, about 100 kilometers northeast of the Afghan capital, Kabul. Taliban officials reject those claims and say leaders of the so-called resistance have long left Afghanistan." ([VOA, 1 November 2021](#))

On 05.05.22, National Resistance Front (NRF) leader Ahmad Massoud proposed the formation of a NRF high council, apparently designed to unite all the fragmented resistance groups. On 08.05.22, the NRF and the National Liberation Front (NLF) fought together for the first time against the Taliban in Baghlan province. On 05.05.22, the NRF reportedly captured up to ten villages (including Band Barq) in Warsaj district, Takhar province. In response, the Taliban deployed their Badri suicide bomber brigade to the area on 07.05.22. [...] On 08.05.22, Taliban intelligence chief Malik Dara defected to the NRF in Panjshir province. On the same day, about 20 Taliban were killed in fierce fighting between the NRF and the Taliban in Panjshir. The Taliban have denied all the above reports on their official Twitter page." ([BAMF, 9 May 2022, p. 1](#))

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5. Brief Source Descriptions

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ABC News is Australia's public service broadcaster.

The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) was a national human rights organisation in Afghanistan, dedicated to promoting, protecting and monitoring human rights and the investigation of human rights abuses.

Afghan Peace Watch (APW) is a non-profit organization focused on the production of information and research on security, political violence, civic activism, human rights violations, humanitarian efforts and strategic developments in Afghanistan.

Al Jazeera is a Qatar-based TV news network.

Amnesty International (AI) is an international non-governmental human rights organisation. It based on London (UK).

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) collects, analyses and maps information on crisis and conflict in Africa, South & Southeast Asia and the Middle East and provides datasets on conflict-related incidents.

Associated Press News (AP) is a New York based news agency.

The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF) is the German authority responsible for conducting asylum procedures and protecting refugees. Furthermore, BAMF coordinates the promotion of integration and carries out research in the area of migration.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is a British public service broadcaster headquartered in London.

The Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly (CoE-PACE) is an interparliamentary body consisting of 318 deputies from the parliaments of its 47 member states dealing with democracy, human rights and political, economic and social issues.

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) is a US-based NGO Committee to Protect Journalists.

The US Congressional Research Service (CRS) is a public policy research arm of the US Congress.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is a Christian advocacy organisation with the aim of promoting religious freedom worldwide, seeking to influence governments on religious freedom issues.

Die Zeit is a German weekly newspaper.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Australian Government.

The Danish Immigration Service (DIS) is an agency within the Danish Ministry of Immigration and Integration that deals with cases concerning foreigners' right to visit and stay in Denmark.

France 24 is an international news channel in the Maghreb and in the French-speaking African countries.

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The International Federation for Human Rights (Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme, FIDH) is an umbrella organisation of human rights NGOs.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) is an international non-governmental organisation, headquartered in New York City, which seeks to protect human rights worldwide.

Insecurity Insight examines threats facing people living and working in dangerous environments. The organisation's data collection and analysis methods generate insights relevant for aid workers, aid agencies and those concerned with the protection of health workers, educators, IDPs and refugees.

The International Crisis Group (ICG) is a Brussels-based transnational non-profit, non-governmental organization that carries out field research on violent conflict and advances policies to prevent, mitigate or resolve conflict.

The Inter Press Service – News Agency (IPS) is a global non-profit, non-governmental news agency, emphasising on issues of development, globalisation, human rights and the environment.

The Jamestown Foundation (JF) is a Washington, D.C.-based information platform providing media and monitoring reports aimed at informing and educating policy makers and the broader policy community about events and trends in societies that are strategically or tactically important to the United States and in which public access to such information is often restricted.

Jurist is a legal news and commentary service of a team of around 50 law student reporters, editors, commentators, designers and developers from 12 law schools in the US, the UK and India in collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh School of Law in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA.

The Khaama Press News Agency (KP) is an online Afghan news agency.

The Norwegian Country of Origin Information Center Landinfo is an independent body within the Norwegian immigration authorities that provides COI services to various actors within Norway's immigration authorities.

The Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket) is a government body responsible for decision-making and the provision of services in matters relating to asylum, migration and citizenship. The Migration Agency runs Lifos, a database on country of origin information (COI).

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is a department of the Secretariat of the United Nations, mandated to promote and protect human rights and to prevent human rights violations.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) is a broadcasting organisation created by the American anti-communist organisation National Committee for a Free Europe in 1949 and is funded by the U.S. Congress. It provides news to countries in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East.

Reuters is a London-based international news agency.

Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) (English: Reporters Without Borders) is a Paris-based international non-governmental organization devoted to protecting freedom of expression by reporting on violations of press freedom.

The Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) is a US government body that provides oversight on reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan.

swisspeace is an independent peace research institute based in Basel.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is a political UN mission established on 28 March 2002 by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1401.

The UN General Assembly (UNGA) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations and the only one in which all member nations have equal representation.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is a United Nations agency with the mandate to protect and support refugees and assist in their voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement to a third country.

The UN Human Rights Council (HRC), formerly known as the UN Commission on Human Rights, is an inter-governmental body within the United Nations system working to promote and protect human rights across the world.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC), one of the six main organs of the UN, is primarily responsible for maintaining international peace and security. The UNSC regularly publishes reports about their international missions and worldwide developments concerning politics, security, human rights etc.

The US Department of State (USDOS) is the US federal executive department mainly responsible for international affairs and foreign policy issues.

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) as a bipartisan institution of the government of the United States of America monitoring the freedom of religion abroad.

Voice of America (VOA) is a U.S. international broadcaster, providing news and information in more than 40 languages. VOA produces content for digital, television, and radio platforms.

The Washington Post (WP) is a US-American daily newspaper.

This featured topic was prepared after researching solely on ecoi.net and within time constraints. It is meant to offer an overview on an issue and is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status, asylum or other form of international protection. Chronologies are not intended to be exhaustive. Every quotation is referred to with a hyperlink to the respective document.

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